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**“Il Momento è
Delicato”:**

a translation and commentary of four short stories by
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 “Il Momento è delicato”

The main focus of this master’s dissertation is translation, and the collection of short stories “Il Momento è Delicato” by Italian author Niccolò Ammaniti was chosen. The reason for this choice, the need to find a collection of short stories rather than using one whole narration stemmed from the fact that multiple narrations not only presented different styles but were also ideal in order to be compared and analysed among one another. Before studying the stories themselves, it is appropriate to analyse one of the few elements which do not need to be translated at all: the title. This collection consists of a number of different stories, all written during different stages of Ammaniti’s life, with a title referring to the short story as a dying genre, and the author himself writes about the reason behind it: every time he tried to publish some short stories, his publisher would stop him by saying “il momento è delicato” (the moment is delicate, or maybe even “now is not the moment”) referring to how short stories do not sell as much as novels or other types of narration. Another reason for choosing this work was that it seemed interesting to base the dissertation on a book which deals with the problematic nature of the genre itself, starting my work not only with a translation, but also with a reflection which can accompany the reader throughout this work.

Regardless of the intentions which led Ammaniti to write this book, there have been personal and professional reasons behind my own choice. First and foremost, I wanted to test myself with a literary translation, both because I am personally interested in the field, and also because I enjoy working with the English language in a practical way. Second, the short stories chosen and the book in general is written in a colloquial manner using an informal register, making it ideal both for a master’s translator, that is me, and for a master’s dissertation. Third, and lastly, the stories themselves have had an impact on me, touching me on different psychological levels: I have been moved by some crude moments, as well as more intimate and reflective ones, all accompanied and linked by a common thread which can be identified in a comical and ironical undertone proper to Ammaniti’s narrative style.

1.2 The process of translation

The greatest challenge posed by this type of work is, quite obviously, the need to transfer the meaning of the original text onto the translated text, trying at the same time to avoid copying the Italian grammatical structure too much and also avoiding straying from the original structure. What is probably the most subtle factor to take into consideration is that, as a native Italian speaker, I think and speak using the structures of the Italian language. Whenever I translated, I always had to be careful not to fall into this trap; a common example, which appears multiple times during the analysis of the process of translation, is the use of the passive form in Italian, which is an uncommon structure in English: in these cases, the most important thing was to make the sentence fluid and by keeping the passive form it would sound somewhat more complex and convoluted than the original, and so I converted the structure into an active one.

As far as bibliographical sources are concerned, I also used some texts to help me in better understanding how to carry out the translation and the process of analysis. The most important and useful source I have used was “Language to Language” by Christopher Taylor: this book helped me in understanding what to be careful about when translating from Italian to English, thanks to some practical examples, and also what to analyse in detail regarding the translation itself. Even though the book is never directly quoted in the notes, I did focus on some aspects which were explained in the text: for example I always kept in mind the concepts of divergence and convergence, where the former indicates how a target language may have more than one possibility to translate a term which is defined only by one word in the original text, whereas the latter is the exact opposite. As far as divergence is concerned, the second story gives us an example: the word “nero”, used to indicate the rage of the father is a one of a kind term in Italian, which can be translated as rage, sadness or disappointment in English. On the other hand, regarding convergence, the second story shows us another clear example: the terms “Andiamo”, “su”, “dai”, “muoviti” are all Italian synonyms of the English term “c’mon”, which does not have a synonym in English, and because of this all these terms were translated with “c’mon”.

Moreover, I did not only consult an English source, but also some Italian ones, and the most notable was written by Umberto Eco, titled “Dire quasi la stessa cosa”. Unlike Taylor’s text, which is practical and looks at translation from an academic point of view, here Eco reflects on translation, discussing its importance not only through examples, but by looking at how

meaning changes, and how two languages can present many similarities, but will never be the same.

The importance of having sources from writers of both languages derived from the fact that this translation was done in an active way, which means that the source text was written in my native tongue, that is Italian, and that it was translated into my second language, which is English, thus making it fundamental to look at the texts from both points of view. Since the passive translation requires a translator to work on a foreign text and to transpose it into their native tongue, it obviously has its advantages, but I realized that the active one, even though it may be considered more challenging, can have its own pros. For example, while in the passive English to Italian translation there is a greater knowledge of the final text compared to the source one, in the active one the importance of knowing the original text more becomes fundamental. It helps in better understanding how the narrator sees the events described, the undertone present in certain phrases and narrative passages, it allows one to define the characters better and to understand the dialect forms of a language, which in this specific case are present in abundance. The problem would then be to render the same ideas in a language with which there is not much familiarity, and this is where mono and bilingual dictionaries come into play: knowing the complex shades of meaning of the original text helps the translator in figuring out what to search for in these dictionaries, thus making the process slightly longer, but also more precise and accurate.

These are only a few of the multitude of thought-processes that occurred to me during the translation. In order to better describe and analyse how I dealt with every stories in detail, in this dissertation there will also be a chapter dedicated exclusively to notes in a sort of word-by-word study of what happens in the mind of translators whenever they face a text and all its linguistic and cultural aspects.

1.3 The stories

Before moving on to the translation and the analysis, here it seemed appropriate to briefly summarise and study the most important aspects of each story, to introduce the readers to the themes and characters which they will encounter in this work.

The first one is called “Fa un po’ male”, translated “It hurts a bit”. This is the crudest story of the group, and it stands out compared to the others for the themes and the events described.

Moreover, it is the one that had the greatest impact on me.

“It hurts a bit”

This story follows the adventures of a young Roman boy named Robbi Cafagna whose misfortunes begin when he is denied a blowjob. Following the advice of some friends Robbi took out a girl named Angela to dinner, only because he knew she always rewarded her suitors with a blowjob. However, following a discussion with her flatmate, Angela changes her mind, and this is the trigger for the whole story. After having been denied the long-awaited prize, Robbi’s pride is hurt and he wanders through the city of Rome to find himself in three different and brutal scenarios: first, his car stops in the Olympic Village, where he is surrounded by prostitutes and transgender people. After he manages to get out from that area of the city, as he is almost about to give up on his quest for a blowjob, he finds a girl on the side of the street near his home, who, after some bargaining, decides to take him to her house. However, we soon realize that she is a gypsy and that she wanted to take revenge on her lover, who now wants to fight Robbi to the death. Even in this dramatic situation the protagonist manages to flee and get to safety, running for his life until a car stops to help him get away from the raging gypsies. Unfortunately, this third and last stage of the story is the last one for Robbi’s life as well, because the passengers are three mobsters that care only about abusing and killing the boy. The story ends with the three mafia guys and Robbi getting shot by a killer roaming Rome.

From this brief overview of the story it is possible to see why it is the most vulgar and the one which made use of a cruder and non-family-friendly language. These are reasons why this story was chosen: it is starkly in contrast with the main themes of the other three, and the type of language which was used is present only here.

As far as the technical aspect of the translation is concerned, a more thorough analysis will be carried out in the notes section following the translation chapter, while here I would like to look a little more in depth into the literary aspects of each story. In the case of “It hurts a bit”, it is interesting to notice how the author makes use of comedy, and how it is intertwined with the grim events narrated. Throughout Robbi’s adventure, it feels as if the reader is always torn between feeling astonished and laughing: the situations with which the readers are faced are absurd and ridiculous, certainly scenes that are not part of a middle-class young boy’s life such as Robbi. However, this absurdity and exaggeration is always sweetened by comedy, making the pill easier to swallow. As an example, when Robbi is being chased by the gypsies in the forest surrounding the camp, he is naked, and when he finds a woman’s dress to cover himself with, we have a comical moment: we readers are brought to imagine Robbi dressing as a transgender, who are a type of people despised by him, and running away in such ridiculous attire. Thus, we can laugh about his situation, but it works as a kind of defence mechanism that allows us not to feel too sorry for the boy, in that he is literally running towards his death.

Another aspect, which this time is also analysed in the notes, is the use of animal metaphors to describe people overcome by sexual desire. In many instances, the characters in this story are compared to all sorts of beasts: we have baboons, hornets, an axolotl, an ogre and a few more. All these metaphors are not used freely and without purpose, in fact, they seem to relate to the more instinctive parts of the characters, and they are present whenever the topic of conversation becomes more sexual. For example, as Robbi is trying to ingratiate Angela in order to get the blowjob, he gets very aroused, and he himself says that he is as horny as a baboon. Similarly, when he is denied the blowjob and Angela has definitely gone to her house, Robbi circles around her house like a hornet, unsure about what to do next, and still aroused.

Together with the comical undertone of the story then, this use of the animal metaphors all contribute to making the story a little more enjoyable, while remaining grim and absurd.

“Frogs and tadpoles”

This is a collection inside a collection. “Frogs and tadpoles”, “Rane e girini” in Italian, contains some stories with a common thread, which is that of a young protagonist dealing with day to day struggles and situations. Compared to “It hurts a bit”, it can be defined as family-friendly, and here what changes is not only the general tone of the narration, but mainly the language used, and the themes present. For what concerns the latter, even though the stories may share some common topics and messages, they still vary from one to other, and because of this, each story will have its own analysis and summary.

1.

The first of the three stories features the youngest protagonist with which we are going to deal. This young boy, named Filippo, is 12 years old and he has a brother named Michele, who is 10. Michele is a budding inventor, and at the beginning of the story he shows his brother a stick he has found which can be used a remote control for their tv. Since their device is quite old and apparently does not have its own remote control, the stick can be used to press the buttons while comfortably sitting on a chair. Enthusiastic about this new discovery, the two boys decide to give it to their dad as a gift during dinner. Their father, who is always extremely tired because of his new job, does not understand the gift and thanks his sons half-heartedly. Here Michele decides to show how the stick works, but since he is not tall enough to reach the tv, he smashes the dinner table and the bowl of pasta with the stick, triggering all sorts of different reactions, the worst one being his father’s. Filippo tries to defend Michele, but his dad blames him for his brother’s action, sparking a sense of unfair guilt inside of the young boy. After this, Filippo decides that he will not take part in the family trip organized for the next day and wants to stay at home alone in a sort of protest. One by one his family members try to persuade him, but the unjust scolding he has received had hurt him too deeply to let go of his pride. Because of this, at the end of the story his family leaves without him, and he spends his first Sunday home alone.

The main events of this story are nothing exceptional, and they may seem normal family issues, probably experienced by everyone. However, I believe that the fact that everybody can relate to these situations is the most important aspect of “Frogs and tadpoles”. In this small collection the actual events that take place are not as important as the feelings and thoughts of

the protagonists living those moments. A father scolding his son is something which happens quite often, but as we are brought to see things through Filippo's eyes, we can understand the importance of the situation and also better relate to how the boy may feel.

Therefore, the impact which this story has on readers does not come from the events taking place, but from the emotional reaction of Filippo. The whole story is built on hyperboles, which help us understand the point of view of a young child, and it is then unsurprising to see how deeply Filippo has been hurt by his father's reaction and unfair accusations. While staying at home might seem more of a prize rather than a punishment for his family, we realize at the end of the story that Filippo had never stayed home alone for a whole day, and this goes to show how important and brave his decision is and how he views the situation, even though his parents could think of it as a mere isolated case or a childish complaint.

In the second story of "Frogs and tadpoles" we will deal with a teenager named Francesco and we will live his story through his eyes, feeling as we were going through his same emotions and experiences.

2.

Francesco is a teenager whose only wish is for his parents to buy him a motocross bike, namely an Aprilia GSW. One day, after having insisted on the matter plenty of times, his mom tells him to stop thinking about it and bothering her too much. After this discussion, Francesco goes out to look for his friends on his bicycle, which he now hates, simply because it is not a motorbike. He proceeds to perform a few jumps in a motocross track, but still unsatisfied he goes to the garage where his beloved bike is on sale. He exchanges a few words with the mechanics and finally musters up enough courage to ask to go see the bike, which looks more beautiful with every passing day. However, he soon learns that there is another guy who would like to buy the bike and because of this he lies, saying that his parents will buy it after they have seen it, and so he manages to take the vehicle with him. Even though he had no experience on an actual bike, he finally manages to control it, and inebriated by the feeling of riding it, he decides to take it to his friends rather than go straight home. His group of friends are all amazed and compliment him, when suddenly some older guys on their own motorbikes show up. They circle around Francesco, looking at the bike, and after a while their leader persuades him into doing a very difficult jump on his bike to make fun of him.

Francesco finds himself in a very spiky situation, but he swallows his fears and goes for it, managing to jump from the hill, but crashing miserably on the ground. Unfortunately, the

scene was also attended by the other boy who wanted the bike, and after he has seen its conditions, he starts beating Francesco. The bikers' leader stops him and helps the young boy, who is hurt both physically and in his pride. The leader then leaves and the story ends with a crestfallen Francesco and his best friend, who compliments him because he looked awesome while riding the bike uphill, sparking a sense of achievement in the boy.

Similarly to the previous story, here the focus does not lie with the actual events narrated, but with the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist. My summary cannot possibly allow to properly comprehend the role that this psychological side of the boy plays in the story, but here I will briefly analyse why it is so central.

Throughout the narration, we feel one with Francesco. We yearn for the bike as much as he does, we despise the bicycle we have to use everyday, we are ecstatic when we finally learn how to drive our beloved vehicle and we are scared when we have to face the jump. This aspect is where the depth of the story lies: we are not moved by the events themselves, but here again the point of view is that of a young protagonist, with whom we can relate because we all have been young too. When Francesco realizes that he has to face his parents and tell them about the crashed bike, the feelings of disappointment, failure and fear are all very present, and they do not seem to be mere immature reactions to such an event. Another element which helps us identify with the boy is how he freely uses the mechanics' jargon; he describes everything, especially the bike, with meticulousness, analysing all the details and thus making us part of his mind and part of him.

The last story taken from this small collection deals with a university student who cannot accomplish much in his life and seems to be living in a limbo.

3.

The main protagonist of this story is Carlo. He is a law student in the University of Rome, and the story begins with him getting ready to go and take an important exam for which he has not studied. Carlo knows that going to the exam is pointless, but he will still try and go there mainly to make his parents believe he is doing something. He pumps himself up by playing a song from the movie *Hair*, dresses elegantly and goes out after lying to his parents about how he will nail the exam. As soon as he gets close to the university building with his scooter

however, he is scared and decides to go to a bar. After that he wanders in the streets around the university building, to then make up his mind and go at least to see the exam. As he approaches the class, he hears his name being called out for the exam, and again he panics, running away from that place. Undecided about his next move, he goes to visit a girl whom he is dating, and spends the rest of the morning there, sleeping. After having slept he keeps on wandering through the city, trying to delay the moment when he will have to face his parents and tell them the truth. At one point he finds an elegant man fishing on the Tiber, and together they catch a lot of fish. After this strange encounter Carlo now has two bags of fish with him which he decides to take to the girl's house, to leave them in the tub, but as she sees him holding the fish they get into a discussion, which ends up in the two of them deciding not to see each other again for a while.

Carlo is miserable, and calls the girl from a cabin, to apologize. She does not answer, and to clear his mind, the boy decides to take the fish to the sea in order to free them. He gets to the closest shore, but he realizes that they might be freshwater fish, and so instead he leaves them in a fountain. The story ends with Carlo watching the fish swimming away in the fountain water.

This fourth and final story is probably the one with most introspection. What makes this story different compared to the others is the use of "you" throughout the entire narration, as if the author wanted the readers to become Carlo, and fully identify with him. While with Robbi we distance ourselves from his life thanks to comedy, with Filippo and Francesco we get closer and closer to their point of view until here we become one with Carlo's. The events that take place are quite simple and linear: Carlo does not take the exam, takes shelter at the girl's house and then wanders around Rome because he does not want to confront his parents. Like the previous stories, the real message and also entertainment comes from the messy mind of the protagonist. The process of identification with the main character transforms a series of simple events in a much more twisty road, where we keep bouncing between Carlo's indecisions and bad choices, making every different situation a result of this indecision, therefore making them rich in psychological introspection.

One of the most pregnant examples can be found in the scene where Carlo starts fishing with a manager from the RAI tv station. Here Carlo is not only trying to delay the moment in which he will have to go home in any possible way, but he is also confronted with a more successful person, who starkly contrasts with him. The nameless manager is dressed in a suit and even though he is fishing, he is not dirty. Carlo on the other hand soon realizes that his

trousers and shoes are soaked through. This may seem like a detail, but by looking a little more in depth we can see how the manager embodies what Carlo clearly is not at the moment: he seems successful, he is well-dressed, he has enough peace of mind to fish and he also catches a lot of them. On the outside, the scene is funny because Carlo finds himself in an odd situation, but by taking his thoughts and condition into account, it is clear to see how the events are not random at all.

The next chapter will present the stories both in the Italian original and in my translated version, after which the analysis of the process of translation will be developed.

2. IL MOMENTO È DELICATO

2.1 Fa un po' male/ It hurts a bit

Se Angela Milano, studentessa al terzo anno di odontoiatria, avesse fatto un pompino a Robbi Cafagna tutta questa triste vicenda non sarebbe mai avvenuta e io non starei qui a raccontarvela. Ma una sorte amara volle che proprio quel pomeriggio Angela, dopo una lunga discussione con l'amica del cuore Verdiana Ceccherini, decise di cessare, almeno per un po', quest'antica pratica orale che, a suo giudizio, rischiava di definirla solo per una delle sue innumerevoli qualità...

A quei tempi Angela divideva l'affitto di un appartamento uso foresteria (2 camere salottino angolo cottura bagno terrazzino calpestabile zona romanica no stranieri no agenzie) con la sua compaesana Verdiana Ceccherini.

Verdiana era appena rientrata a casa tutta trafelata, aveva gettato la borsa con i libri sul divano e aveva avvertito l'amica che una voce antipatica si era diffusa per tutta la facoltà.

“Cosa dicono?” aveva chiesto Angela levando il naso dal saggio *Confidenza emotiva* di Gael Lindenfield (imparare a conoscere i sentimenti per controllare il proprio temperamento).

“Be' ... dicono che...”

“Allora?”

Verdiana aveva preso una bella boccata e aveva detto: “Che fai i pompini a chiunque ti porti a cena fuori”.

Sulle prime Angela si era scandalizzata, ma, consultando l'agenda, aveva dovuto ammettere che negli ultimi due mesi, praticamente tutte le sere, tranne quando tornava dai suoi a Frosinone, era uscita a cena fuori con un ragazzo diverso. E si era resa conto che dopo mangiato, immancabilmente, gli aveva fatto una pompa.

“Ma perché?”

Angela ci aveva pensato un po' sopra. “Ma così... Mi offrono la cena... Mi viene spontaneo... Per ringraziarli, ecco”.

La voce si doveva essere sparsa, come un virus, per la facoltà, e infatti, le aveva fatto notare Verdiana, la segreteria telefonica era più intasata di quella di un dentista. Inviti al ristorante, al pub, in pizzeria, a cinesi e trattorie per i prossimi sei mesi. E, crudele, aveva aggiunto che al corso di biochimica le avevano dato pure un soprannome: Idrovora.

“Idrovora?”

“Sì, così ti chiamano”

If Angela Milano, a third-year dentistry student, had given Robbi Cafagna a blowjob, the sad story I am about to tell you wouldn't have happened, and there would be no need for me to tell it.

One afternoon, a bitter destiny brought Angela to have a long talk with her best friend¹ Verdiana Ceccherini, after which she decided to stop exhibiting her oral skills² for a little while, because it prevented others from judging her for her other countless qualities...

During that period,³ Angela was sharing a student flat (2 bedrooms, small living room, small kitchen, bathroom, terrace, Romanesque architecture area, no foreigners or companies)⁴ together with Verdiana Ceccherini, a girl from her same town.⁵

One day, Verdiana had come back into the apartment all in a rush⁶, had thrown her bag full of books on the couch and warned her friend that an unpleasant rumour⁷ was spreading on their campus⁸. In that moment Angela shifted her attention⁹ from an essay called "Emotional confidence" by Gael Lindenfield, subtitled "learning how to recognize your feelings in order to control your attitude", to focus on her friend: "What's the rumour?"

"Well... they are saying that...."

"What is it?"

Verdiana inhaled deeply and said: "... that you give a blowjob to all those that take you out to dinner".

Angela's first reaction was of disbelief, but by looking at her journal¹⁰ she realized that for the past two months she had been going out to dinner with a different guy every night, except for when she went back to her parents in Frosinone. She also noticed that after each dinner she had inevitably¹¹ given a blowjob¹² to every one of these guys.

"But why?"

Angela thought about it for a second: "No particular reason... I mean, they pay for the dinner... it's just spontaneous, as a way of thanking them, I guess."

Apparently, word spread as fast as a virus on campus, and to prove it, Verdiana pointed out¹³ that not even a dentist's voicemail had ever had so many messages. She had been invited to restaurants, pubs, pizzerias¹⁴, to eat Chinese¹⁵ and to trattorias. She was booked for the next six months. To add salt to the wound¹⁶, Verdiana added that she had also been given a nickname by those in biochemistry class: Vacuum cleaner¹⁷.

"Vacuum cleaner?"

"Yes, that's what they call you."

“E che vuol dire?”

Avevano dovuto consultare il dizionario Zanichelli.

Atto ad assorbire o smaltire rapidamente masse d'acqua. Pompa I. (o assol. Idrovora s.f.).

Angela era diventata tutta rossa, si era messa una mano sulla bocca e aveva cominciato a singhiozzare.

Verdiana aveva consigliato ad Angela di seguire almeno due regoline.

Numero 1: Mai pompini al primo incontro.

Numero 2: Una pizza e una rosa dell'indiano non valgono un pompino.

Quella sera Robbi Cafagna pagò le conseguenze delle nuove norme proibizionistiche in materia di fellatio di Angela Milano.

A mezzanotte meno un quarto Robbi Cafagna stava seduto al volante della Micra di sua madre e riaccompagnava a casa Angela Milano.

Era felice. Era vicino alla meta e il cervello gli volava a quando finalmente l'Idrovora glielo avrebbe preso in bocca e avrebbe cominciato a suggerire.

Angela trafficava da cinque minuti nel cassetto del cruscotto.

Queste erano le classiche cose che gli facevano girare i coglioni. *Ma che è la macchina tua?*

Robbi sbuffò e poi le domandò zuccheroso: - Che cerchi?

-Un po' di musica. Tu non parli. Sei così silenzioso- Angela trovò una cassetta nera. - Che non ti piace la musica?

-Sì, ma non quella che piace a mia madre.

-Che musica piace a tua madre?

-Che ne so... Roba vecchia.

-Sentiamo-. Angela infilò la cassetta nell'autoradio. I Supertramp cominciarono a cantare *Breakfast in America*.

-I Supertramp! Li adoro! - Angela iniziò ad agitarsi come se avesse il Parkinson.

-Che merda! - gli uscì a Robbi.

“But what does it mean?”

They had to refer to the Zanichelli dictionary:

“A device made to quickly absorb or dispose of large quantities of dust and dirt thanks to a great power of suction”.

Angela suddenly blushed, put a hand to her mouth and started sobbing.

Then Verdiana advised her to follow at least two simple rules¹⁸:

Number 1: no blowjobs on first dates

Number 2: A blowjob is not worth a pizza and a rose bought from an Indian guy¹⁹.

That same night, the one that suffered the consequences for these new prohibitionist²⁰ rules regarding Angela Milano’s oral performances was Robbi Cafagna.

At a quarter to midnight, Robbi Cafagna was sitting at the wheel of his mother’s Micra, taking Angela Milano back home. He was happy. The destination was close, and his mind wandered to the moment when the Vacuum cleaner would finally take his dick in her mouth and begin to suck it.

Angela had been rummaging²¹ in the glove box for five minutes. This was one of those things that really got on his nerves²². *“Do you think this is your car?”*

Robbi grumbled, and proceeded to ask her in the sweetest possible way: “What are you looking for?”

“Some music, since you don’t talk much. You’re such a silent type,”²³ Angela found a black cassette. “You don’t like music?”

“I do, but not the kind my mom listens to.”

“What kind of music does she like?”

“I don’t know... old stuff.”

“Let’s listen to it”. Angela slipped the cassette in the car radio. Supertramp started singing

“Breakfast in America “.

“Supertramp! I love them!” Angela started squirming as if she suffered from Parkinson’s disease.

“This is shit!” blurted Robbi.

-Sono bravissimi, perché non ti piacciono? Piacciono a tutti. E a te no. Tu devi fare il diverso. Ora voglio una spiegazione logica del perché non ti piacciono.

La detestava, aveva un tono da prima della classe, da so tutto io. Non fosse stato per il pompino l'avrebbe scaraventata fuori dalla macchina.

-Non mi piacciono. Non mi piace la loro musica.

Lei scosse la testa. -Questa non è una risposta intelligente. Ritenta e sarai più fortunato.

Lui sbottò, non ce la faceva più. Stava esagerando.

-Perché sono una manica di frocioni. Con quelle vocine che sembra che li hanno castrati da piccoli e quel sassofono del cazzo. È musica per vecchi culattoni nostalgici.

Lei lo guardò di traverso. -Che hai qualcosa contro gli omosessuali?

Stai calmo, si ripeté. Ricordati che tra poco ti deve fare un pompino.

-Allora, che hai contro gli omosessuali, si può sapere?

Non mollava.

-Niente. Assolutamente niente -. Quanto avrebbe voluto invece dirle: "I froci mi fanno schifo. È gente malata che si sente pure 'sto cazzo e si credono artisti solo perché lo prendono in culo".

Meno male che erano arrivati.

Robbi posteggiò davanti a casa di Angela, in posizione strategica, spense il motore, si accese una sigaretta, si schiarì la voce, si fece coraggio e chiese: - Che faccio? Salgo?

Come a dire: preferisci farmelo qui o sopra?

Gli avevano raccontato che l'Idrovora era imprevedibile, a volte ti faceva salire su, a volte te lo faceva in macchina, il risultato comunque non cambiava: faceva pompini superiori, si applicava con una maestria e una sensibilità da artigiano fiorentino.

Angela accennò un sorriso, aprì la portiera della macchina e sussurrò un: -No. Meglio di no. Vado a dormire."

-Cosa?

-Vado a dormire.

“They’re very good, what don’t you like about them? Everybody likes them, but not you, only because you want to be different. Now give me a good logical reason as to why you don’t like them.”²⁴

He hated her, her know-it-all way, her teacher’s pet attitude.²⁵ The only thing keeping him from kicking her out of the car was the blowjob.

“I don’t like them nor their music.”

She shook her head: “This answer is not smart enough. Try your luck again.”²⁶

He couldn’t take it any longer, so he snapped. She was crossing the line.

“It’s because they are a bunch of faggots²⁷ with squeaky voices and that fucking sax. It seems as if they were castrated when they were little. This music was made for old nostalgic faggots.”

She looked at him sideways: “What’s your problem with homosexual?”

“*Just stay calm*” he repeated to himself: “*Think about the blowjob you will get in a minute.*”

“So, may I know what’s your problem with homosexual?”

She did not desist.

“No problem. No problem at all”. But he actually wanted to say: “Faggots make me sick. They are twisted, they think a great fucking deal of themselves, believing that they are incredible artists and whatnot just because they take it in their asses.”²⁸

Thank god²⁹ they made it to her house.

Here, Robbi strategically parked the car in front of her house, turned it off, lit a cigarette, cleared his voice, and when he had summoned enough courage he asked: “So, what’s the plan?³⁰ Should I come upstairs?” As if to say: would you rather do it here or inside?

He was told that the Vacuum cleaner was unpredictable: sometimes she was going to take you upstairs, sometimes she would go right at it in the car. The result however, never changed: her blowjobs were top quality, and she applied to them with the craftsmanship of a Florentine artisan.³¹

Angela slightly smiled, opened the car door and whispered: “No. It’s better not. I’m going to go sleep.”

“What?”

“I’m going to go sleep.”

-Non ho capito.

-Vado a dormire.

Allora aveva capito bene.

Come andava a dormire? Dove aveva sbagliato? Aveva fatto tutto preciso: si era lavato, si era cambiato le mutande, era andato a prenderla a casa, l'aveva portata al ristorante, le aveva pure offerto un gelato con la cialda al palazzo del ghiaccio.

Con la voce di un bambino a cui hanno proibito il giro sulle giostre le chiese: -E perché?

Angela allungò una gamba fuori dallo sportello.

-Stasera non mi va.

Fermala se ne sta andando.

Ebbe l'impulso di afferrarla per i capelli e di rimetterla seduta, ma invece smozzicò: -Non te ne puoi andare così, non vale. Ti ho por... - ...*tata al ristorante*. Qualcosa gli impedì di finire la frase. Rimediò con un: - Dài, rimani altri cinque minuti, a chiacchierare.

Angela rimise la gamba dentro e incrociò le braccia.

-Che hai? Sei arrabbiata per la questione dei froci? – le domandò.

Angela rispose imbronciata: - No, non è per quello. Io lo so perché non vuoi che me ne vado.

-Perché?

-Perché vuoi quello.

Fece il finto tonto: - Quello che?

Angela fece una smorfia e abbassò lo sguardo.

-Non fare lo scemo. Lo sai benissimo cosa.

L'unica cosa che Robbi Cafagna sapeva con certezza era che aveva speso centoventi carte per una cena di merda e che le aveva pure offerto il gelato. Né Andrea Sabatini né Pierpaolo Pennacchini le avevano offerto il gelato. E quindi era molto più in regola degli altri. Quel dannato pompino se lo meritava più di loro.

-Te lo giuro che non voglio niente. Voglio solo parlare.

“I don’t understand.”

“I’m going to go sleep.”³²

He understood too well. What did she mean by that? What had he done wrong? He had done everything meticulously: he had washed himself, changed his underwear, picked her up at her house, took her to the restaurant. He had even gone as far as to pay her an ice-cream with wafer at the Ice Palaceⁱ.

As if he was a kid who was just denied a ride at the amusement park³³, he whined: “But why?”

Angela put one leg outside the car door.

“Tonight, I don’t feel like it.”

Stop her, don’t let her leave.

Instinctively, he would have dragged her back into the car by her hair, but instead he muttered³⁴: “It’s not fair if you leave like that. I to..” “...ok you to the restaurant”. Something prevented him from finishing the sentence. He tried to save himself by saying: “Come on, stay here some more, let’s talk a bit.”

Angela drew back her leg and crossed her arms.

“What’s the matter? Did you get angry at what I said about faggots?” He asked her.

Angela answered, grumpy: “No, that’s not the problem. I know why you don’t want me to leave.”

“Why?”

“Because you only want... that.”

“ ‘that’ what?” he played dumb.

Angela smirked and lowered her eyes: “Don’t act as if you don’t know. You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

The only thing Robbi Cafagna was sure of, was that he had spent 120.000 liras³⁵ on a fucking dinner³⁶, and on top of that he had paid for her ice-cream. Neither Andrea Sabatini nor Pierapaolo Pennacchini had bought her the ice-cream. He went the extra mile³⁷, so he deserved that stupid blowjob more than them.

“I swear, I’m not after anything in particular. I just want to chat.”

ⁱ The Ice palace here mentioned is a very famous and old gelateria in Rome.

Lei lo guardò per un'infinità e poi disse: -Veramente? Non mi prendi in giro?

-Veramente-. Nel buio dell'abitacolo non riusciva a vederla bene, ma aveva l'impressione che avesse gli occhi lucidi.

-E allora perché mi hai chiesto di uscire con te? – Lo incalzò lei.

Ora che le raccontava?

-Che fai? Non sai che rispondere?

Robbi prese una boccata di sigaretta. -No, assolutamente...- balbettò. - È che... è difficile dire certe cose.

Lei era sospettosa. -In che senso?

-In che senso? – si buttò. – Ecco, con te mi sento bene, a posto insomma... Sai quando stai in grazia di Dio? Così -. Prese un respiro. – Proprio così.

-Ti piace stare con me?

-...Sì. Abbastanza -. In che ginepraio si stava cacciando?

-Vuoi dire che vorresti stare con me?

Disse bye-bye al pompino. – No... Intendo come amico.

-Ah!- Angela piegò la testa sul petto e fece un sospiro. -Be' forse è meglio così, anche tu non sei il mio tipo ideale. Però possiamo essere amici. È la prima volta che un maschio vuole essermi amico,- sorrise. I denti bianchi le splendettero nel buio. – Allora siamo amici?

-Certo, - rispose affranto.

Rimasero in silenzio, imbarazzati, poi lei se ne uscì con: - Tu lo sai come mi chiamano in facoltà?

Idrovora. Lo aveva inventato lui quel soprannome dopo aver sentito i racconti di Sabatini.

Fece un tiro di sigaretta. – No, come ti chiamano?

Angela strizzando i manici della borsetta mormorò: - *Idrovora*.

-E perché? – lo disse con la naturalezza e lo stupore del grande attore.

Lei sollevò la testa e lo guardò sorpresa. – Che non lo sai?

She stared at him for a long time before saying: “You mean that? You’re not kidding me?”
“I swear.” The darkness in the car prevented him from seeing her properly, but he had the impression her eyes were getting teary.

“Then why did you ask me out?” She urged him on.

What was he supposed to tell her now?

“So? Cat got your tongue?”³⁸

Robbi took a hit from his cigarette, and he stuttered: “No no, that’s not it... It’s just...it’s just that it’s not easy to say things like this.”

She was suspicious: “What do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” he went for it: “Well, when I’m with you, I feel good, I mean...it feels like I’m home³⁹, you know? That’s it.” He took a deep breath: “Yep⁴⁰, that’s it”

“You enjoy being with me?”

“... well, yeah, I do.” Why did he keep kicking the hornet’s nest?⁴¹

“Do you mean that you want me to be your girlfriend? “

He waved goodbye to the blowjob: “Oh... no, I mean as a friend.”

“Oh!” Angela lowered her head to her chest and took a deep breath: “Well, it’s probably for the best, you’re not exactly my type. But we can be friends. You’re the first guy who wants to be friends with me.” She cracked a smile. Her white teeth shone in the darkness. “Are we friends then?”

“Sure.” He answered, distraught⁴².

They remained silent and embarrassed until she said: “Do you know the nickname I was given on campus?”

Vacuum Cleaner. He was the one who invented that name after hearing Sabatini’s stories. He took a hit from the cigarette: “No, what nickname?”

Angela was tightly gripping⁴³ the handles of her bag when she murmured: “Vacuum cleaner.”

“Oh, why is that?” he said that with an actor-like surprise.

She lifted her head up and looked at him surprisedly: “You actually don’t know?”

Si mise la mano sul cuore. – Parola.

-Vedi che quella cretina di Verdiana dice le stronzate per farmi stare male –. Lo sussurrò appena, come se lo stesse dicendo a se stessa.

Una spia verde gli si riaccese nel cervello. – Perché ti chiamano così?

Lei prese fiato e sembrò rianimarsi. – No, non mi va di dirtelo...

-A questo punto me lo devi dire -. Quella era la direzione giusta. Vedeva una luce in fondo al tunnel.

Angela ci rifletté un attimo. – Te lo dico, ma tu giuri di non dirlo a nessuno?

-Te lo giuro -. Sentì il cazzo smuoversi nelle mutande.

-Perché dicono che mi piace fare i pompini.

Per poco Robbi non si strozzò. – Ed è vero?

Angela fece segno di no con la testa. -No, è che... - Gettò un'occhiata a Robbi e poi guardò oltre il finestrino nel buio della strada. – Perché devo dirti le bugie? Siamo amici, no? Io adoro fare i pompini. Ma che c'è di male? Mica ammazzo qualcuno?

-Scherzi? Non c'è niente di male, assolutamente niente di male, anzi perché... - Robbi si impedì di continuare. Ora l'uccello gli pulsava dolorosamente. Fece un bel respiro, allungò una mano e gliela appoggiò sulla coscia.

Lei non sembrò nemmeno accorgersene. – Verdiana dice che li faccio solo perché non credo in me stessa. Per farmi accettare. A me piace proprio farli. Che ne so... Mi piace tutto, il sapore dello sperma. Io credevo che fosse normale... Forse no, forse sono... Come si dice? C'è una parola...

-Ninfomane? – le suggerì Robbi facendole risalire la mano verso il seno.

Lei gliela prese e la rimise a posto. – Esatto.

-Guarda che è normale. Alla nostra età... - ragliò Robbi affondando le mani nella poltrona della Micra. Se quella puttana non la smetteva immediatamente di farlo arrapare come un babbuino la stuprava là per là.

He put a hand to his heart: “I swear.”

“See? I knew that Verdiana was acting like a jerk⁴⁴, she says bullshit only to hurt me.” She whispered, as if she was saying this to herself.

A green light switched on in his brain: “Why do they call you that?”

She took a breath and seemed to liven up: “I don’t feel like telling you...”

“Since we got this far, you have to tell me.” He felt he was heading in the right direction, there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Angela pondered for a second: “I’ll tell you, but it stays between us, agreed?”

“I swear.”⁴⁵ He felt his dick twitching in his pants.

“It’s because everyone says I like giving blowjobs.”

Robbi almost choked: “Is it true?”

She shook her head: “No.. thing is...” She looked at Robbi, and then at the dark street beyond the window: “Why should I lie to you? We’re friends, aren’t we? I love giving blowjobs.

What’s wrong with that? Does it kill anybody?”

“Are you kidding me? It’s completely, absolutely fine, in fact...” Robbi forced himself to stop. His dick⁴⁶ was throbbing so much that it hurt. He took a deep breath, reached out with his hand, and placed it on her thigh.

She didn’t even seem to notice: “Verdiana’s opinion is that I give them only because I don’t believe in myself. Because I want to fit in. I simply really like giving them. I mean.... I like everything about them, including how the sperm tastes. I used to think it was normal... but maybe it’s not, maybe I am a... How is it called? There’s a word...”

“Nymphomaniac?” Robbi suggested this while moving his hand upwards, towards her breasts.

She took it, and moved it away: “Yes, exactly.”

I think it’s normal. You know, at our age...” said Robbi with a constrained donkey-like bray⁴⁷, while pushing his hands into the Micra seat. If that bitch didn’t stop making him hornier than a baboon⁴⁸, he was going to rape her right then and there.

- No, mi devo trattenere. Verdiana mi ha detto che se voglio far risalire l'autostima a un livello, diciamo, normale, non posso più continuare così. È una cosa che faccio, in qualche modo, per compensazione. Come... Come quando pesti a piedi nudi una puntina da disegno, ti viene da toccarti il piede.

-Guarda che è normale -. Robbi si era fissato sul concetto di normalità.

-E allora perché Verdiana non fa come me?

Lui sollevò le mani al cielo. -Perché nessuno vorrebbe farselo prendere in bocca da una che ha tutta quella ferramenta attaccata ai denti. Può essere pericoloso, che cazzo.

Angela sbuffò. – Non offendere Verdiana, per favore.

Robbi si accolorò. – Scusami, ma tu non hai nessun problema -. Si batté il petto, - Lasciatelo dire da me, tu sei sanissima. Non devi starla a sentire -. E poi non ce la fece più. – E dài, fammi salire. Che ti costa?

Angela non gli rispose nemmeno e cominciò a tirare su col naso e a stropicciarsi gli occhi.

-Che fai? Ti metti a piangere?

Iniziò a singhiozzare disperata.

Robbi tirò fuori dal cassetto del cruscotto dei fazzoletti di carta. – Tieni.

Lei li prese e si soffiò il naso. – Capisci come sto? Mi metto a piangere per qualsiasi cosa-.

Cercò di ricomporsi. – Grazie Robbi. È stata una serata bellissima... Grazie, veramente -.

Aprì la portiera della macchina. – È la prima volta che parlo con un ragazzo dopo essere andata a cena fuori. Sei una persona eccezionale -. Allungò il collo per baciarlo, Robbi provò a baciarla sulla bocca, ma lei, con una mossa abile, schivò l'affondo e gli stampò le labbra sulla guancia e uscì dalla Micra. La vide fare due passi verso il cortile del palazzo poi si fermò.

Forse ci ha ripensato.

-Stasera sei stato troppo carino, Robbi.

Lui provò a dire qualcosa ma Angela era già scomparsa nel portone del palazzo.

Aldo Teramo, detto "il Tenaglia", se ne stava spaparanzato nudo sul suo letto con i suoi cento e dispari chili di ciccìa. Guardava la televisione poggiata sulla scrivania e con una mano si mangiava un panino con la mortadella mentre con l'altra si massaggiava l'uccello.

“No, I need to hold myself back. Verdiana said that if I want to get my self-esteem back to a decent level, I need to stop doing this. It’s something I do, in some way, to compensate. It’s kinda like... when you stomp on a pin while barefoot and you keep touching your foot afterwards.”

“Trust me, it’s normal,” Robbi was not going to let the “it’s normal” argument go⁴⁹.

“But then, why doesn’t Verdiana do it just like me?”

He lifted his hands up in the air: “Nobody would want to give their thing to a mouth full of iron such as hers. Goddammit⁵⁰, that could be dangerous.”

Angela grumbled: “Don’t insult Verdiana, please.”

Robbi started to heat up: “Yeah I’m sorry, but you have no problems.” He hit his chest: “Let me tell you this, you’re completely fine. You should not listen to her.” At that moment, he couldn’t hold it in any longer: “Come on, let me in now. I don’t bite.”⁵¹

Angela didn’t even reply and started sniffing and rubbing her eyes.

“What’s the matter? Are you gonna cry?”

She began sobbing desperately.

Robbi took some tissues from the glove box: “Here, take these.”

She took them and blew her nose: “Do you understand how I’m feeling? Every little thing makes me cry.” She tried to pull herself together: “Thank you, Robbi. It has been a great night.... Thank you, truly.” She opened the car door: “It’s the first time I spoke with a guy after he has taken me to dinner. You are an amazing person.” She stretched her neck to kiss him, Robbi tried to go for her mouth, but she skilfully⁵² avoided him and kissed him on the cheek, after which she got out of the car.

He looked at her while she was walking towards her building, and then she stopped.

“Maybe she changed her mind.”

“You have been a sweetheart tonight, Robbi.”

He tried to say something, but Angela had already disappeared behind the front door of her building.

Aldo Teramo, a.k.a. Tenaglia⁵³, was lying naked on his bed with his 100 and counting⁵⁴ kilos of fat. He was watching the tv, placed on the desk, a mortadella sandwich in one hand, his dick in the other.

La stanzetta del Tenaglia era così piena di roba che c'era spazio appena per muoversi. I muri erano tappezzati di poster dei Metallica, dei Pearl Jam, dei Fantastici Quattro. Il tavolo era ricolmo di computer, alcuni sani altri ridotti a pezzi, monitor, fili, casse acustiche da cui pendevano tweeter sfondati.

In un angolo, accanto al letto, erano ammassati fumetti, "Vip", "Scoop" e riviste di motociclismo. La camera era in penombra, illuminata solo dalla luce fioca di un terrario con dentro un'iguana in coma.

Alla tele trasmettevano la maratona del Telethon. Ventiquattro ore per la distrofia muscolare. Aldo aveva deciso di spararsela tutta fino alle dieci della mattina dopo.

Il Tenaglia non era molto sensibile alle forme patologiche di questa terribile malattia, ma alle forme di Lorella Cuccarini sì. Da quando era bambino e la soubrette faceva *Fantastico* aveva sognato di trombarsela. E ora che la presentatrice aveva raggiunto una certa maturità, e quindi più esperienza, glielo faceva tirare ancora di più.

A suo giudizio era una gran porca, ma di quelle della specie superiore, quelle che fanno le mamme degli italiani, acqua e sapone, e invece sono in grado di fare robe che Selen e tutte quelle pornstar rifatte nemmeno s'immaginavano. Uno dei suoi sogni erotici preferiti era sodomizzarla sopra una cucina Scavolini.

E ora che era lì per una notte intera non se la voleva perdere nemmeno un minuto.

All'inizio si era fatto delle seghe a caso, dissipando energia a cazzo, osservando il suo "amore" mentre introduceva gli ospiti, scherzava, guardava il tabellone e incitava la gente a casa a mandare i soldi. Poi si era reso conto che aveva davanti a sé ancora tante ore di trasmissione e quindi aveva deciso di ottimizzare le seghe per arrivare a fine maratona vivo. Se ne sarebbe fatta una per ogni miliardo che totalizzavano.

Ora erano a sette miliardi e trecento milioni e Aldo poteva riposarsi un po'.

In quel momento il telefono squillò.

Il Tenaglia guardò l'orologio, prese la cornetta e sbadigliò: -Chi scassa?

-Aldo! Sono io, Robbi.

Tenaglia's room was so stuffed with random things⁵⁵ that you could barely move in it. The walls were covered by Metallica, Pearl Jam and Fantastic Four posters. The table was bursting with computers, some working, some broken, together with screens, wires, and speakers with destroyed tweeters dangling from them.

In a corner close to the bed, there was a big cluster⁵⁶ of comics and tabloids, like "Vip" and "Scoop"⁵⁷, and bike magazines. The entire room was in penumbra, dimly lit⁵⁸ by a terrarium containing a comatose iguana.

On tv, the telethon⁵⁹ was running. A 24 hour-long live program for muscular dystrophy, which Aldo was dead set on watching in its entirety, until 10 am the next morning.

In truth, Tenaglia wasn't too interested in the effects⁶⁰ that this horrible condition gave to people, not as much as he was in those that Lorella Cuccariniⁱⁱ gave him. Ever since he was a child and saw the showgirl on the program "Fantastico", he had been dreaming of banging her. Now that she had also acquired even more maturity, and therefore experience, she made his dick harder than ever.⁶¹

She may have been acting like a pure simple and classic Italian mother, but he did not fall for it and in his opinion, she was a woman of the dirtiest kinds⁶² when it came to it, possessing skills that not even Selen and those other fake pornstars could ever dream of. One of his favourite wet dreams involved sodomizing her on a Scavoliniⁱⁱⁱ kitchen.⁶³

He could not have missed the opportunity to watch her for a whole night.

Initially, he jerked off without a purpose, wasting his energy, all the while watching his "beloved" introducing guests, joking, looking at the donations board and spurring the audience from home to donate. At one point, he realized that he had many hours of transmission left, so he decided to optimize his masturbating session so as to not die before the marathon was over.

He would masturbate one time for every donated billion.⁶⁴

The amount now corresponded to 7 billion and 3 hundred thousand, which meant he could rest a little.

In that moment, his phone rang.

Tenaglia glanced at his watch, picked up the phone and yawned: "Who's the fucker?"⁶⁵

"Aldo, it's me, Robbi!"

ⁱⁱ Lorella Cuccarini was an Italian showgirl and Tv host.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Scavolini" is a well-known kitchen brand in Italy.

Alla fine chiamò il Tenaglia.

Aveva lasciato Angela da mezz'ora e adesso era fermo al lato di una lunga e brutta strada illuminata da lugubri lampioni. Era ancora al Nuovo Salario.

Aveva girato come un calabrone intorno al palazzo della troia indeciso sul da farsi.

Le suono o me ne torno a casa?

Aveva cercato di riflettere, di farsi calare l'incazzatura guidando attraverso strade buie e silenziose, costeggiando giardinetti, serrande imbrattate di scritte e cassonetti che rigurgitavano immondizia, ma il film a luci rosse con la Milano gli continuava a girare la testa e lo tormentava come Erinni. Alla fine, disperato, le aveva suonato al citofono. Niente. Non aveva risposto. Ci si era attaccato. Niente. Aveva preso a calci il portone.

-Ahò?! Robbi! Com'è andata?!- il Tenaglia era eccitato come se stesse parlando con Giovanni Soldini dopo il giro del mondo.

- Cosa? – si rese subito conto che aveva fatto una cazzata a chiamare il Tenaglia.

-Come cosa? Con l'Idrovora? Com'è andata?

Gli dico la verità. Mi devo sfogare. Mi ha fatto troppo incazzare quella stronza. Inspirò e disse: -Bene. Come poteva andare?

Il Tenaglia cominciò a ululare come un coyote nel deserto di Sonora. Poi passò a fare i versi del gorilla di montagna e infine a belare come un agnello.

-Piantala! Tenaglia piantala! – Quando era felice poteva passare in rassegna tutto il mondo animale anche per una mezz'ora.

-E dài, fammi sfogare! Ora manco solo io! Domani la chiamo e la invito a cena. Tu dove l'hai portata?

-Al *Magazzino del Sale* -. Lo disse con un sampietrino ficcato su per la gola.

- Porco zio! Quel posto costa una cifra. Il Sabatini l'ha portata al grottino del *Laziale*. Ha speso trenta sacchi. Tu quanto hai speso?

Mentì: - Novanta.

-E che s'è mangiata?

-Non me lo ricordo.

He ended up calling Tenaglia.

Half an hour ago he had left Angela at her house and was now parked at the side of a long and not-so-safe street, lit by gloomy streetlights. He was still in Nuovo Salario.^{iv}

He had been circling around that whore's building like a hornet, still undecided about what to do next.

"Should I ring her, or just leave and go home?"

He tried to think straight, driving along dark and silent streets in order to calm down, passing alongside small gardens, shop shutters full of graffiti⁶⁶ and bins which barfed garbage onto the street. Nonetheless, the soft porn movie starring Milano wouldn't stop playing in his head, haunting him like Erinni.⁶⁷

Finally, he rang her bell, desperate. Nothing. No answer. He did not desist. Nothing. He started kicking the door.

"Ahò?!⁶⁸ Robbi! How did it go?!" Tenaglia sounded as excited as if he was talking with Giovanni Soldini^v after the world tour.

"What?" He instantly realized that calling Tenaglia was a bad idea.

"What do you mean 'what'? With the Vacuum Cleaner? How did that go?"

"I'll tell him the truth. I need to vent. That bitch really got on my nerves". He breathed in and said: "Well. How do you think it went?"

Tenaglia began to howl like a coyote of the Sonora desert. He then made some mountain gorilla sounds, and ended bleating like a veal.

"Knock it off! Tenaglia, knock it off!"⁶⁹ When he was happy, he could imitate the whole animal word for half an hour.

"Come on, let me vent!⁷⁰ I'm the only one missing now! Tomorrow I'll call her, and I'll invite her to dinner. Where did you take her?"

"To the 'Salt Warehouse'."⁷¹ He replied with a lump as big as a cobble stuck in his throat.⁷²

"Holy moly!⁷³ That place costs the earth. Sabatini took her to the "grottino del Laziale".⁷⁴ He spent 30.000 liras^{vi}. How about you?"

He lied: "Ninety."

"What did she eat?"

"I don't remember."

^{iv} "Nuovo Salario" is a district in Rome.

^v Giovanni Soldini was an Italian sailor.

^{vi} More or less 15 euros.

-Come non te lo ricordi? Non è possibile. Dài, che cazzo s'è mangiata. Dài, ricordatelo.

Il Tenaglia era il tipo che continuava a massacrarti i coglioni per il resto dei tuoi giorni se non gli rispondevi. – Le linguine con l'astice.

-Cazzo! Le piace mangia' bene all'Idrovora. Il Sabatini le ha offerto una capricciosa e, mi pare una bruschetta con i carciofi. Lui sì che è tecnico. E io dove la porto? La potrei portare all'economica a via Tiburtina, quella pure fa le bruschette...Dici che le può piacere?

Robbi voleva sospendere quella telefonata. -Tena', mi si sta scaricando il cellulare. Che stai facendo?

-Mi sto guardando il Telethon...

-E che è?

-È una colletta per la distrofia muscolare.

-Ah! E perché lo guardi?

- Sono cose importanti.

Robbi non avrebbe mai immaginato che un sentimento umanitario albergasse nell'animo del Tenaglia. La cosa più umanitaria che gli avesse visto fare era stato bucare le ruote a una volante della polizia.

-Vabbè, allora non passo.

-Meglio di no.

-Buonanotte allora.

-Buonanotte.

Il Tenaglia abbassò il telefono e vide che il tabellone delle sottoscrizioni era salito a sette miliardi e settecento milioni. Doveva cominciare a scaldarsi, ma poi partì la sigla del Tg notte.

Il Tenaglia sbuffò: -Che palle, quasi quasi mi faccio un altro panino.

Uscì dalla stanza in punta di piedi. I suoi dormivano.

“What do you mean you don’t remember? Impossible. C’mon, what did she eat? Come on, think about it.”

Tenaglia was that kind of guy that would not stop annoying the shit out of you until he received an answer: “Linguine with lobster.”

“Shit! The Vacuum cleaner sure likes to eat gourmet⁷⁵. Sabatini bought her a capricciosa^{vii} pizza⁷⁶ and a bruschetta with artichokes, I think. He sure is technical. Where should I take her? I could try the “Cheapo”⁷⁷, on Tiburtina street, she makes bruschettes too... Do you think she might like it?”

Robbi just wanted to hang up. “Tena’, my phone’s dying. What are you up to?”

“I’m watching the telethon...”

“What’s that?”

“It’s a fundraiser for muscular dystrophy.”

“Oh! And why are you watching it?”

“These are important things.”

Robbi would never have imagined that Tenaglia could possess a humane feeling in him. The most humane thing he had seen him do was puncture the tires on a police car.

“That’s fine, I won’t stop by.”

“It’s better not.”

“Goodnight then.”

“Goodnight.”

Tenaglia lowered his phone and saw the donation board counting 7 billion and 7 hundred thousand. He needed to start warming up, but the intro theme of the night news channel started to play.

He grumbled: “Oh c’mon, might as well make another sandwich.”

He tiptoed out of the room.⁷⁸ His parents were sleeping.

^{vii} The capricciosa pizza is a margherita pizza topped with black olives, artichokes, ham and mushrooms.

E mentre il Tenaglia si confezionava una rosetta con pancetta e maionese, la giornalista, nel piccolo schermo della televisione, annunciò che quel pomeriggio un altro transessuale era stato trovato morto. Il cadavere era stato buttato su un prato ai bordi della Cassia. Era il sesto transessuale ucciso in tre settimane e, per il modus operandi, l'omicidio doveva essere opera del Killer del Sole. Anche questo, come tutti gli altri cadaveri, aveva due soli rossi disegnati intorno agli occhi.

Robbi non poteva andarsene a letto così.

Continuava a ripensare all'Idrovora che gli diceva tutta candida che adorava fare i pompini.

Se non l'avesse portata a cena fuori non ci avrebbe sofferto tanto.

Basta. Me ne vado a casa, mi faccio una sega e mi metto a dormire.

Accese l'autoradio. I Supertramp ripartirono a tutto volume. – Froci! – Buttò la cassetta fuori dal finestrino, selezionò Radio Dimensione Suono e imboccò corso Francia.

La voce della giornalista diede le ultime notizie.

Uno scontro ferroviario in Lituania, il papa in Messico e il ritrovamento di un altro transessuale morto. Il Killer del Sole aveva colpito di nuovo. Il transessuale si chiamava Giulio Paternò, ventitré anni, originario di Macerata.

Quando si riconcentrò sulla strada si accorse di aver svoltato nel Villaggio Olimpico. Non che la strada fosse sbagliata, solo che a quell'ora lì c'era il delirio.

Il Villaggio si riempiva di macchine zeppe di uomini che andavano a mignotte. Là tra quelle schiere di viali alberati e di case basse, costruite per le Olimpiadi del 1960, c'era il più grande puttanicificio della capitale.

Ecco! Mi faccio fare un pompino da una troia.

Ma c'erano dei problemi:

- 1) Non era mai andato a puttane.
- 2) Erano pericolose. Aveva più virus nel sangue una di quelle che il reparto malattie infettive del Fatebenefratelli.
- 3) Era da sfigati. A puttane poteva andarci il Tenaglia che, poveraccio, con quel naso che sembrava un cannolo siciliano e quei due pneumatici avvolti intorno allo stomaco, non poteva aspirare a niente di meglio. Robbi Cafagna non doveva ricorrere ai soldi per prendersi certe soddisfazioni.

While Tenaglia was getting a loaf of bread with bacon⁷⁹ and mayonnaise ready, in the small tv screen the reporter announced that another trans was found dead in the afternoon. The corpse was thrown in the grass on the side of Cassia street. With this, a total of six transsexuals had been killed in the past three weeks and judging by the modus operandi, the Sun Killer probably was the culprit. Just like all the others, this corpse too had two red suns drawn around his eyes.⁸⁰

Robbi could not have gone to bed like this. He kept thinking about the Vacuum Cleaner candidly telling him that she loved giving blowjobs. If he had not taken her out to dinner, now he wouldn't be so upset.

“That’s it. I’ll go home, jerk off and go to bed.”

He turned the radio on. Supertramp blasted from the speakers. “Faggots!” He threw the cassette out of the car window, changed the radio frequency to Radio Dimensione Suono and turned into corso Francia.

The reporter’s voice announced the latest news.

A train crash in Lithuania, the Pope in Mexico, and another trans found dead. The Sun Killer had struck again. The trans’ name was Giulio Paternò, 23 years old, from Macerata.

When he shifted his attention back to the road, he realized he had turned into the Olympic Village. The road was not the wrong one, but this was the one with the most traffick.

The Village was chock-full of cars whose passengers were looking for prostitutes. Among the tree filled avenues and the low-roof houses built for the 1960 Olympics, you could find the biggest open-air brothel in the capital.

“That’s it! I’ll go to a hooker to get a blowjob.”

However, there were a few problems:

- 1) He had never tried whoring before.
- 2) They were dangerous. You could find more viruses in their blood than in the “contagious diseases” wing of the Fatebenefratelli hospital.
- 3) It was something only losers would do. Tenaglia was the type who could have gone whoring. Unfortunately for him⁸¹, since he had a Sicilian cannoli-like nose, and a stomach which seemed made up of two car tires, he could not hope for anything better. But Robbi Cafagna did not need money to be satisfied.

4) Era come la droga. Suo zio Antonio glielo aveva detto: “Una volta che ci vai sei fottuto per tutta la vita. È una rovina”.

Non aveva il becco di una lira. Gli erano rimasti appena trenta sacchi.

Lascia perdere, si disse. Vattene a casa.

Era incanalato in una fila di macchine. Avanzano piano e costanti, come al casello dell’autostrada. Di fare inversione a U non se ne parlava, anche nell’altra direzione era un unico serpente di auto. Dietro aveva un’Audi A4. Al volante ci stava un uomo di mezza età, serio, con un cappello con la falda, gli occhiali da vista e i baffetti neri. Davanti il culo di una Golf. Sembrava che saltasse per i decibel della musica house che sparava. C’era stipato un branco di balordi che si sbracciavano e si affacciavano dai finestrini. Più in là c’erano luci colorate. Pareva un incrocio tra la sagra della porchetta e una discoteca.

Il villaggio era diviso in zone. Quella delle negre, quella dei travestiti, quella dei marchettari, quella delle slave.

Eccola.

La vide.

Era la prima.

Una negra appoggiata a un albero con in mano una busta di plastica.

Era così alta che sembrava Ronny Austin, il giocatore di basket dei Bolton Celtics.

Lui non era razzista, ma le negre gli facevano schifo.

Erano cessi incredibili, vestite di merda. Le negre erano buone solo per fare i lavori a casa.

Andando avanti ne vide altre, accanto a dei falò. Sempre con quegli occhi tristi, da bambino del Biafra. Era questo che lo faceva imbestialire delle negre. Non erano delle professioniste, ti facevano sentire uno sfruttatore, che stavi facendo una cosa terribile, come mangiarti un delfino o accannare il cane sul raccordo.

Robbi era sicuro che con trenta sacchi da una negra un pompino lo rimediava, ma piuttosto seghe per il resto della vita.

La stradina fu avvolta da una nube di fumo grigio di carne arrosto. C’era un camioncino tutto illuminato che vendeva panini e bibite fredde. A un lato, su una griglia bruciavano wurstel e salsicce.

4) It's like a drug. His uncle Antonio had told him: "After you get a taste of it, you're screwed for life. It's a curse."

He had no money. He barely had 30.000 liras⁸².

"Just forget it, let's go home," he said to himself.

He was stuck⁸³ in a car line. They were proceeding slowly but surely, as if they were exiting the highway. Making a U turn was out of the question, since in the other lane the cars were lined up too. Behind him, an Audi A4. At its wheel sat a serious-looking middle-aged man with a black moustache wearing a broad brimmed hat and a pair of glasses. In front of him, the back of a Golf, which looked like it was jumping up and down because of the house music blasting from it. Inside, a group of thugs⁸⁴ were sticking their faces and flailing their arms outside the windows. In the distance you could see some coloured lights. The scene resembled a mix between a disco and the pork fair.

The village was divided into different areas: black, cross-dressed, faggots⁸⁵, and slavic.

There she is.

He saw her.

She was the first one.

A ni**a⁸⁶ leaning on a tree holding a plastic bag in one hand.

She was so tall she resembled Ronny Austin, a Boston Celtic basketball player.

He wasn't racist, but ni**as were repulsive to him.

They were ugly as fuck, dressed like shit. They were good only for house-cleaning. As he proceeded, he saw more and more of them, standing beside some bonfires. They always had sad eyes, as if they were kids from Biafra. And this is exactly what drove him mad. They were no pros, they made you feel as if you were exploiting them or doing something horrible like eating a dolphin or abandoning a dog on the Raccordo Anulare.^{viii}

Robbi had no doubt he could have managed⁸⁷ to get a blowjob from a ni**a for 30.000, but he would have preferred to keep on masturbating for the rest of his life.

The road was enveloped in a grey smoke curtain proper of roasted meat. There was a small, completely lit up truck that was selling sandwiches and cold drinks. On one of its sides, wurstels and sausages were being burnt⁸⁸ on a grill.

^{viii} The Raccordo Anulare is a ring road which forms a circle around the city of Rome.

Nel nebbione intravide brillare delle paillettes. E dalla foschia apparve sculettando una dea, una fica alta un metro e ottanta con due tette grosse e tonde come bocce da bowling. Aveva le gambe lunghe come autostrade, una chioma color savana e dei tacchi d'oro così fini e lunghi che sembravano due matite. In mano teneva il reggipetto che alla luce dei fari rifletteva come una palla da discoteca. Aveva due labbra che sembravano un anello di calamaro e un paio di occhiali con margherite sulla montatura. Un'altra avanzava, scura, completamente nuda tranne che per un perizoma e un casco da vigile che le si posava sulle trecchine verdi. In mano aveva una paletta e dirigeva il traffico. Altre due, argentate come sirene, giocavano a frisbee. E una, vestita di pelle, si faceva trascinare da un alano arlecchino.

Erano troppo fiche per essere donne, quelle erano trans.

Questa cosa lo faceva diventare pazzo. Se beccavi una puttana fica, potevi mettere la mano sul fuoco che aveva il sorpresone.

Bisognava essere froci per andare con i trans. Non contava niente che molte si erano fatte asportare il cazzo e che erano più fiche di Alessia Marcuzzi, in ogni cellula del loro corpo c'era sempre una fottuta Y.

Erano uomini.

E da che mondo è mondo chi va con gli uomini è frocio.

Pure per un pompino?

Forse il pompino non valeva. In fondo una bocca è una bocca. Se te lo fai prendere in bocca da un trans non devi essere per forza frocio. E poi i travestiti devono fare dei pompini incredibili perché conoscono il cazzo molto meglio delle donne essendone provvisti dalla nascita.

Improvvisamente il motore singhiozzò due volte e le luci del cruscotto si accesero tutte insieme, poi la Micra spirò.

-Noo!!! – Robbi girò la chiave dell'accensione pregando Dio.

Ma Dio non lo aiutò.

La macchina era morta.

Ci riprovò ancora senza successo.

Le macchine dietro cominciarono subito a suonare. Non potevano superarlo su quel viottolo.

Amidst the fog he could see sequins glittering, which turned out to be a goddess, waddling⁸⁹ her way through the fog, six feet tall, with huge round breasts, almost like bowling balls. Her legs were as long as highways, her hair resembled a yellow mane, and her golden heels were thin and long just like pencils. In one hand, she was holding her bra, which thanks to the headlights was glittering like a disco ball. She had lips like a squid ring, and she wore a pair of glasses with daisies designs on them. Another one came forward, dark, stark naked except for a thong and a police helmet which rested on her green braids. She was holding a paddle and directed the traffic. Two more, as silver as two mermaids, were playing with a frisbee, while a fifth, all clad in leather, was getting dragged around by a harlequin Great Dane.⁹⁰ They were too hot to be women, they must have been trans.

This kind of thing drove him mad. If you were to find a sexy whore, you could have bet that she had a surprise for you down there.

You had to be a faggot to have sex with a trans⁹¹. It did not matter if they had their dicks removed and if they were hotter than Alessia Marcuzzi^{ix}, because on the inside, every cell had a fucking Y in it.

This made them men. And from time immemorial those who go with men are faggots.

“Even if it’s for a blowjob?”

Maybe a blowjob didn’t count. In the end, a mouth is a mouth on everybody. If you stick it in a trans mouth you are not necessarily a faggot. After all, since these cross-dressers have had a dick their whole life, they know how it works better than any woman does, making them extremely skilled.

In that moment, the engine hiccuped a couple of times and all the lights on the dashboard turned on simultaneously, after which the Micra stopped working.

“Noo!” Robbi turned the key while praying to God.

But God did not help him.

The car was dead.

He tried again, unsuccessfully.

The cars lined up behind him immediately started honking. There was no space for them to pass him on that path.

^{ix} Alessia Marcuzzi was an Italian showgirl who now works a Tv host.

Robbi non sapeva che fare. Guardò nello specchietto e vide che si stavano incazzando. C'era una fila di trecento metri. Il tipo distinto con i baffi si attaccava al clacson come un disperato. Altri, più indietro, erano usciti dalle macchine.

Un incubo.

Robbi scese dalla macchina e urlò: - Si è rotta, che minchia ci posso fare?

Un tipo grosso con gli occhialetti tondi e i capelli ossigenati rispose: -Spostala, no? Che cazzo aspetti? Che ti linciano?

Figurati se qualche pezzo di merda gli dava una mano.

Bestemmiò e cominciò a spingere la macchina. Fortuna che non aveva preso la Bmw di suo padre. Mentre si faceva venire l'ernia sentiva gli sguardi di tutti che lo osservavano. Il trans con il casco da vigile si era messo in mezzo e ancheggiava. - Vai bello di mamma, forza Ciccio, su, che stai a fare l'ingorgo, e poi arrivano le guardie. Vai!

Un gruppo di coatti con i panini con la porchetta ridevano e gli davano consigli balordi. - Buttala! Cambia macchina! - Dài che ti fa bene al fisichetto -. E in coro: - E uno e due e tre. Robbi a occhi chiusi, attaccato al finestrino, spingeva come un boia e ripeteva: - Froci, froci, bastardi.

Finalmente la strada si allargò un poco e con un ultimo sforzo riuscì almeno a metterla di lato e permettere alle macchine di passare.

Era tutto sudato. Per lo sforzo gli girava la testa.

E ora che cazzo faccio?

Non poteva certo lasciarla lì. Ce ne ritrovava cinque. Chiamare l'Acì? Una follia. Chiamare sua madre? Un'eresia. Chiamare il Tenaglia?

Chiamò il Tenaglia.

Il telefono cominciò a suonare.

Il Tenaglia lo guardò come fosse un enorme scarafaggio. -Ancora? Ma che è stasera?

Proprio sul più bello, mancavano ventimilioni a otto miliardi ed era tutto concentrato. La Cuccarini si era pure cambiata d'abito e si era infilata una minigonna maialissima.

Robbi had no idea what to do. He looked in the mirror and saw that the drivers were getting mad. The line was 300 meters long. The serious-looking man with the moustache was honking like a madman. Some others further behind got out of their cars.

It was a nightmare.

Robbi got out of the car and yelled: “It’s broken, what the hell⁹² am I supposed to do?”

A bulky guy wearing small round glasses and with bleached hair replied: “Just move it out of the way, the fuck are you waiting for? To be lynched by these guys?”

As if⁹³ one of these assholes would help him out.

He cursed⁹⁴ and started pushing the car.

Luckily, he had not picked his father’s BMW. As he was destroying one of his discs, he could feel all the stares on him. The trans guy wearing the police helmet placed himself in front of him while shaking his hips: “Come on honey, hurry up, you’re blocking the way, chop chop⁹⁵, before the police comes. Chop chop!”

A bunch of thugs eating pork sandwiches were laughing at him and making idiotic suggestions⁹⁶ like: “Just throw it away! Get a new car!” “It’s good for that weak body of yours.” And they also chanted: “And one and two and three.”

With his eyes closed, leaning on the window, Robbi was pushing with all his might⁹⁷ while he repeated: “Faggots, faggots, assholes.”

At one point the road broadened a little and with a final push he managed to move the car to the side, letting all the other vehicles free to go.

He was drenched in sweat and dizzy because of the strain.

“What the fuck do I do now?”

He sure as hell could not leave it there. Someone would steal it for sure.⁹⁸ Call the insurance company? Hell no. Call his mom? Even worse. Call Tenaglia?

He called Tenaglia.

The phone began to ring.

Tenaglia looked at it as if it were a gigantic cockroach: “Again? What’s the deal tonight?”

The timing was the worst⁹⁹, only 20 million left to reach 8 billion and Tenaglia was extra focused. Cuccarini even changed her outfit and put on a slutty¹⁰⁰ miniskirt.

Rimase a osservarlo, indeciso sul da farsi. E poi abbaiò: - Chi cazzo è? La gente a quest'ora dorme. La gente lavora!

-Tena'?!

-Robbi?! Ancora!

-Tena' sto nella merda.

-Che succede? – il Tenaglia intanto continuava a fissare il tabellone. Altri quattro milioni.

Mancano solo sedici milioni. – Che c'è?

-Mi si è rotta la macchina, devi venire qua.

-Qua dove? – quindici milioni.

-Al Villaggio Olimpico.

-E che ti posso fare? – dodici milioni.

-Mi tiri.

-E con che cazzo ti tiro? – undici milioni.

-Con la macchina di tuo padre.

-È chiusa nel garage, - otto milioni.

-Con la tua?

-Se alla mia ci attacco qualcosa si apre come un divano letto. Senti, scusami, ti devo salutare - La Cuccarini si era messa a ballare in tanga.

-Sto nella merda.

-Mi dispiace, veramente. Ci sentiamo domani. Ora devo abbassare -. Mancavano tre milioni.

-Tenaglia sei uno stronzo!

-Lo sooooh -. Abbassò e venne.

E ora? Si disse Robbi.

Aprì il cofano. Dentro c'era il motore. Nero, sporco, pieno di fili, incomprensibile come un manufatto alieno.

Lo guardò.

-Se lo guardi non si aggiusta mica.

Robbi girò la testa.

He kept staring at the phone, not sure whether to pick it up or not. And then he barked¹⁰¹:

“Who the fuck is it? People are sleeping. People have to work!”

“Tena’?!”

“Robbi?! You again!”

“Tena’, I’m knee deep in shit.”¹⁰²

“What’s going on?” All the while Tenaglia was keeping a watchful eye on the donation board.

4 million were just donated. 16 million to go. “So, what’s up?”

“My car broke, you have to come here.”

“ ‘here’ where?” 15 million.

“Olympic Village.”

“And what am I supposed to do?” 12 million.

“You tow me.”

“How the fuck am I supposed to do that?” 11 million.

“Use your father’s car”.

“It’s locked inside the garage.” 8 million.

“Can’t you use yours?”

“If I were to tow something with mine, it would rip open like a sofa bed. Listen Robbi, I gotta go.” Cuccarini was dancing with just a thong on.

“I am knee deep in shit.”

“I’m sorry, I swear. I’ll call you tomorrow. I have to hang up now.” 3 million to go now.

“Tenaglia you are an asshole!”

“ I knooooow.” He ended the call and came.

“*What now?*” said Robbi to himself.

He opened the hood. Inside, there was the engine. It was black, dirty, covered in cables, as incomprehensible as an alien artefact.

He stared at it.

“It won’t fix itself just by looking.”

Robbi turned his head.

C'era un travestito, abbronzatissimo, che assomigliava a Mara Venier, solo più femminile. Addosso aveva la maglia di Totti. Aveva le gambe lunghe e due scarpe argentate con delle zeppe alte venti centimetri. -È un problema elettrico. Controlla lo spinterogeno. A volte si stacca e non fa più contatto.

Robbi lo guardò con disgusto. Un trans, romanista, esperto di meccanica. Cosa esisteva al mondo di più ripugnante? -Grazie. Faccio da solo, - disse tra i denti evitando di guardarlo. Il trans rimase lì.

Robbi cominciò a toccare fili a cazzo.

-Stammi a sentire. È lo spinterogeno -. Il travestito si avvicinò e mise le mani sul motore.

- Non toccare. Anzi, ti sposti per favore -. Si trattenne dal dargli una spinta.

-Scusami, cercavo solo di aiutarti.

Robbi sollevò la testa da dentro il cofano. -Senti, perché non te ne vai? Ti ho chiesto aiuto? Non mi sembra. Perché non te ne vai a lavorare?

Il travestito scosse la testa. -Ho capito, sei uno stronchetto con un mucchio di problemi. Perché sei venuto qua? Che cerchi? Non lo sai nemmeno tu, eh?

Robbi fece due passi verso il travestito, a testa in avanti, gonfio come un galletto amburghese.

-Ringrazia Iddio che non sono un tipo violento... Sennò...

Quello gli sbottò a ridere in faccia: -Sennò che facevi? Me lo sbattevi in culo? Ma chi sei?

Non si tenne più. -Ma chi sei tu! Ma ti sei visto come vai combinato? Frocio! Vai a fare in culo. È giusto che vi ammazzano ai bordi delle strade.

-Pezzo di merda -. Il travestito si allontanò e poi gli disse: - E comunque io lavoro alla Nissan, coglione.

Robbi infilò la testa nel motore, non ci vedeva più dalla rabbia, tutto questo casino per colpa di quella profumiera della Milano.

Perché non se n'era rimasto a casa.

There stood an extra tanned cross-dresser, who looked like a more feminine version of Mara Venier^x. He was wearing the football player Francesco Totti¹⁰³ shirt. His legs were long and at the end you could see two silver shoes with 20 cm long wedge heels. “The problem is electric. Check the distributor. Sometimes it comes off and does not send the impulse.”

Robbi looked at him with revulsion. A trans, fan of the Rome football team¹⁰⁴, skilled in mechanics. Was there anything more repulsive in the world? “Thanks. I don’t need your help.” He said through his teeth, while trying to avoid looking at him.

The trans did not move.

Robbi aimlessly¹⁰⁵ tried to move some cables.

“Listen to me. It’s the distributor.” The trans came closer and started working on the engine. “Don’t touch anything. In fact, make room, will ya?” He wanted to shove him away so badly, but he resisted.

“I’m sorry. I was just trying to help.”

Robbi lifted his head up from the hood. “Listen here, why don’t you scram? Did I ask you for any help? Yeah, didn’t think so. Why don’t you go do your job?”

The cross-dresser shook his head: “Yeah, I get it. You’re just a little shit with some problems. Why did you come here? What are you even looking for? You don’t even know that yourself, do you?”

Robbi moved two steps closer to the trans, head held high, ridiculously full of himself¹⁰⁶.

“You better thank God I’m not the violent type... otherwise...”

The trans burst in a fit of laughter in Robbi’s face: “Otherwise what? You would hump me? Who do you think you are?”

He couldn’t hold it in any longer: “Who do you think you are! Do you ever look at yourself in the mirror? Faggot! Go fuck yourself. The lot of you deserve getting killed on the side of the streets.”

“Piece of shit.” The trans started walking away and said: “By the way, I work at Nissan, you moron.”

Robbi stuck his head in the engine. He was blinded by his anger, and all of this was Angela the “profumiera”’s fault.^{xi}

Why didn’t he just stay at home?

^x Maria Venier is a tv host, famous for her own show where she invites and interviews celebrities.

^{xi} “Profumiera” is a term used in Roman dialect and refers to a girl who likes to flirt with boys without really giving them what they want. The word itself comes from “profumo”, that is “perfume”, to indicate that these girls use such products to attract boys.

Poi vide che una specie di valvolona da cui uscivano una selva di fili elettrici era aperta e leggermente sollevata. La spinse in giù e sentì un clic.

Rientrò in macchina e girò la chiave.

La macchina si accese.

Era lo spinterogeno.

Inserì la prima, sgommò superando a destra le auto in fila e schizzò via dal Villaggio.

Robbi desiderava solo tornarsene a casa, ficcarsi in camera e dormire.

Ma gli venne un'idea che avrebbe lenito un po' il dolore di quella serata di merda.

Mi affitto un bel film porno.

Con un milione e mezzo di pompini. Il Tenaglia ne aveva consigliato uno, uno fantastico...

Come si chiamava? Mangiatrici di sperma. La storia sembrava interessante. Una tribù di amazzoni che per una strana mutazione genetica erano costrette per sopravvivere a nutrirsi solo di sperma.

Speriamo che ci sia.

Parcheggiò davanti al videobancomat, smontò dalla macchina, tirò fuori la tessera dal portafoglio e stava per infilarla nel distributore automatico quando si accorse che di fronte a lui, sull'altro lato della strada, c'era una ragazza.

Era alta e magra, indossava una giacchetta verde e una minigonna bianca, estiva, e degli stivaletti a punta di pelle verde. Poggiata sotto un lampione, fumava e si scaldava strusciandosi le mani sulle braccia.

Doveva essere una troia.

Una donna normale non sta impalata a lato della strada alle tre di notte. Certo non ha scelto una strada adattissima, si disse Robbi. *Non passa un culo di qui.*

Robbi continuò a sfogliare i biglietti che aveva nel portafoglio studiandola con la coda dell'occhio.

Sembrava pure carina. Quella poteva essere perfetta.

E se non è una puttana? O è un travestito?

Gli venne un'idea. Bastava andare lì e con la scusa di chiederle di cambiargli diecimila lire poteva rendersi conto se batteva o se era un travestito.

Attraversò la strada senza fretta e si avvicinò alla ragazza.

At one point he saw that a big valve with a forest of cables spurting from it was loose and a bit lifted. He pushed it down and heard a clicking sound.

The car turned on.

It was the distributor.

He shifted into first and dashed along the right side of all the lined-up cars, fleeing from the Village.

All Robbi wanted to do was go home, go straight into his room and sleep.

However, an idea came to him which could soothe¹⁰⁷ the pain of that fucking night.

“I’ll rent me a nice porno.”

Yeah, with a million and a half blowjobs. Tenaglia had suggested him one, a really good one.... *“What was it called? Sperm-eaters”*. The plot seemed intriguing: a genetically mutated amazon tribe had to feed on sperm in order to survive.

Let’s hope I can find it.

He parked in front of the video renting machine¹⁰⁸, got out of the car, took his card from the wallet, and just as he was about to slide it in he noticed a girl standing on the opposite side of the street in front of him.

She was tall and skinny, wearing a green jacket together with a white summer miniskirt and two green leather boots with heels. She was leaning against a street light pole, smoking and rubbing her hands on her arms to warm up.

She was probably a whore.

A normal woman wouldn’t just stand there on the roadside at 3 am. Sure, she didn’t choose the best street, since not a soul¹⁰⁹ ever comes through here. Said Robbi to himself.

Robbi kept flipping through the money in his wallet as he was studying the girl out of the corner of his eye.

She seemed quite cute too. She might have been perfect.

“What if she is not a prostitute? Or maybe she is a trans?”

He came up with an idea. All he had to do was go to her, ask her if she could change 10.000 liras for him, and there he would find out whether she was a prostitute or a trans.

He calmly crossed the road and approached her.

Lei non sembrò nemmeno notarlo. Batteva i piedi per riscaldarseli.

Tirò fuori il deca e le si avvicinò: - Scusa, hai da cambiare? – Con la testa indicò il distributore automatico. – Per la macchinetta.

-No, - disse lei senza emozioni. Non era un travestito, anzi. Era una ragazza e per di più molto carina. Non doveva essere italiana, aveva la pelle bianca delle slave e sotto i capelli neri si vedeva la ricrescita bionda. Aveva due grossi occhi verdi, il viso magro e il collo lungo. Le guance leggermente rovinata dai postumi di un'acne antica.

Niente male nel complesso.

-Grazie -. E ora? Che le diceva? Quanto vuoi? No, non ne avrebbe avuto mai il coraggio. Si girò e fece due passi verso la macchina.

-Hai una sigaretta? – sentì dietro di sé.

Robbi sorrise, si girò e sollevò le mani. – Non fumo, mi dispiace.

Lei alzò le spalle. -Non fuma più nessuno.

Parlava italiano con un accento straniero indefinibile.

-È vero, - fece Robbi. E poi per attaccare discorso disse: - È un problemaccio per chi fuma. Immagino...

Lei gettò la cicca a terra e la schiacciò sotto la suola. – Che ti stai a vedere? – gli domandò senza troppa curiosità.

Che intendeva? – Cosa? Non ho capito?

-Che film?

Dille la verità, che cazzo ti frega. Chi la rivede più a questa. Sorrise e disse: - *Il gladiatore.*

Lei fece due passi verso di lui. -Che è un film porno?

-No. Ma volevo affittarne uno...

-Non preferisci farle le cose che vederle in televisione? – Lo aveva raggiunto e lo guardava con un sorrisetto malizioso sulle labbra.

- Be' ... Certo.

-Allora non buttare i soldi. Ti faccio divertire io.

-Quanto vuoi?

She didn't even seem to notice him. She kept stomping her feet to warm them up.

He took the money out and got closer: "Excuse me, could you change this money for me? For the renting machine". He pointed at it with his head.

"No." said she, emotionless.

She was no trans. On the contrary, she was a more than attractive girl. She didn't seem Italian, her skin was a typical Slavic white, and you could see some blonde regrowth under her black hair. She had a lean neck and a thin face, with two big green eyes and two acne-survivor cheeks.¹¹⁰

*"Overall grade: not bad"*¹¹¹

"Thanks," What now? What should he say? 'How much do you want?' No, he would never have mustered up enough courage. He turned around and started going to his car.

"Do you have a cigarette?" he heard behind him.

Robbi smiled, turned around and raised his hands: "I don't smoke, sorry."

She shrugged: "Nobody does anymore". She spoke in Italian, but her accent was foreign and undefinable.

"It's true," replied Robbi. To start a conversation, he added: "It's quite a problem for those who still do. I bet..."

She threw her ciggy on the ground and smothered it with her shoe. "What are you going to watch?" she asked, without too much interest.

What was she talking about? "Excuse me? I don't think I understand."

"What movie?"

Just tell her the truth, who cares. You'll never see her again. He smiled and replied with:

"The Gladiator."

She started walking towards him: "Is that a porno?"

"No. But I was looking to rent one..."

"Wouldn't you rather do those things instead of just watching them on the tv?" She was close to him now, looking at him with a naughty grin on her lips.

"Well... of course."

"Then don't waste your money. I'll show you a good time."

"How much then?"

Lei lo guardò, indecisa. – Cento?

Robbi scosse la testa.

-Cinquanta?

-È troppo...

-Guarda che con me puoi fare tutto quello che fanno nei film pornografici. Quanto vorresti pagare?

Deve essere proprio disperata. Strano, una ragazza così bella. Più la osservava e più gli piaceva. Da quella minigonna uscivano due gambe lunghe, slanciate, e atletiche. E anche se non riusciva a vederle il culo infagottato sotto la giacca era sicuro che gli sarebbe piaciuto.

-Senti, ho solo trentamila lire. Lo so, è poco. Ma non ho nient'altro. E io...- balbettò Robbi. - Io non voglio... Fare tutto. Voglio solo un pompino e basta. Non chiedo niente di più -. Fece un passo indietro e scosse la testa come i cani di plastica sui lunotti posteriori. -Ho passato una serata allucinante. Ho speso centoventimila lire in un posto di merda con una stronza perché dicevano che faceva i pompini se le portavi a cena fuori e quella, alla fine, non mi ha fatto niente. E tu sei mille volte più bella. Senti, non è che mi faresti uno sconto? Per una volta lo puoi fare. Se vuoi domani ti porto il resto...

Lei sorrise. Aveva una fila di denti bianchi e perfetti incorniciati da labbra sottili e sensuali.

Robbi si mise le mani sulla faccia abbattuto. -Io ridotto così non ci posso tornare a casa.

Qualcuno, questa notte, mi deve fare un pompino sennò impazzisco!

-Sei proprio disperato?

-Sì. Se potessi me lo farei da solo, ma non ci riesco.

-Stasera mi sento buona. Te lo faccio per trenta.

Robbi cominciò a saltare. -Non ci posso credere!?! Veramente? Grazie mille... sei una santa!

Comunque non ti preoccupare, vengo e me ne vado.

Lei allungò la mano. -Andiamo?

-Dove?

-Ti porto da me.

Robbi rimase interdetto. Da lei? Perché? – Scusa, in macchina non va bene?

-Che sei matto? Non la guardi la televisione?

She looked at him, unsure about what to say: “A hundred?”

Robbi shook his head.

“Fifty?”

“It’s too much...”

“When you’re with me, you can do any of the things you see in pornos. How much are you willing to pay?”

She must be desperate.

That’s odd, coming from such a pretty girl. The more he got to look at her, the more he liked her. From underneath her miniskirt you could see two long, slim and athletic legs coming out. Also, he was sure he would have liked her ass even if it was now covered by her jacket.

“Listen, I only have 30.000 liras. I know, it’s not that much, but I don’t have anything else. And I...” Robbi stuttered. “I don’t want to do ‘everything’, I only want a blowjob, nothing more.” He took a step back and shook his head just like those bobbing head dogs you put on the back window: “I had a horrible night. I spent 120.000 liras in a shithole with a bitch,¹¹² who I was told was going to give me a blowjob if I took her out to dinner but bailed¹¹³ on me at the end. You are a thousand times more attractive than her. Listen, is there any chance you could give me a discount? You could do it for once. I could bring you more money tomorrow...”

She smiled. Her teeth were white and perfect, framed by thin and sensual lips.

Distraught, Robbi put his hands on his face: “I can’t go back home like this. Someone has to give me a blowjob tonight, otherwise I’ll go mad.”

“Are you that desperate?”

“Yes. I would do it myself, but I can’t reach it.”

“Tonight, I feel generous. I’ll give it to you for thirty.”

Robbi started jumping: “I can’t believe it?! For real? Thank you so much... you’re a saint! And don’t worry, I come and leave.”

She held her hand out: “Shall we go?”

“Where?”

“I’ll take you to my place.”

Robbi stopped in his tracks¹¹⁴. Her place? Why? “Sorry, but what’s the problem with doing it in the car?”

“Are you crazy? Don’t you watch the news?”

-E allora?

-Non hai visto che c'è un pazzo che ammazza la gente. Che vuoi morire?

Robbi improvvisamente si ricordò del Killer del Sole. -Ah, già! – Solo che andare a casa di una così poteva essere altrettanto pericoloso. - Non lo so...

-Stai tranquillo. Abito qui sotto. Comunque se non vuoi, prenditi la cassetta e vattene a casa e immagina come te lo avrei fatto.

Era impossibile dire di no. Quella ragazza era bellissima. Ed era pure gentile. Se non prendeva quell'occasione si sarebbe mangiato le mani per i prossimi sei mesi. -Ma è lontano?

-Cinque minuti.

Stavano scendendo giù per il crinale della collina, ai bordi di una discarica. Nonostante visse da sempre in quella zona non si era mai accorto che di fronte al suo videonoleggio, proprio dietro al giardinetto, c'era una stradina che scendeva verso la ferrovia.

La ragazza aveva tirato fuori una torcia elettrica che diradava giusto un po' le tenebre. Il fondo del viottolo era fangoso e Robbi doveva afferrarsi ai rami dei cespugli per non scivolare con i mocassini.

-Quanto manca? – ripeté per l'ennesima volta.

-Poco. Tu non sei un leone, eh?

-No, è che... - Non terminò la frase perché poggiò un piede in un buco e scivolò nel pantano.

-Sono caduto, vaffanculo!

-Alzati, forza -. La ragazza gli diede la mano. Robbi si tirò su.

Si era imbrattato di terra tutti i pantaloni. I suoi pantaloni migliori, che aveva comprato da *Colby* in via Nazionale.

Che serata del cazzo.

Finalmente la discesa finì. Si ritrovarono su un terrapieno, a due metri dai binari della ferrovia. Alla sua sinistra c'era la bocca di un tunnel, due lucine verdi rischiaravano appena e facevano brillare l'acciaio dei binari.

-E ora?

-Di qua.

“So what?”

“Haven’t you seen? There’s a crazy man going around killing people. Do you wanna die?”

Robbi suddenly remembered the Sun Killer: “Oh right!” Thing was, going to a place like hers was probably as dangerous as the killer: “I’m not sure...”

“Don’t worry. I live nearby. However, if you change your mind you can get that tape and go home, while dreaming about how I would have done it.”

He couldn’t say no.

That girl was beautiful. She was kind too. If he did not take that chance, he would regret it for the next six months. “Is it far?”

“Only 5 minutes.”

Now, they were going down a hillside, close to a dumpster. Even though he lived there his whole life, he had never realized that behind the garden right in front of the renting machine¹¹⁵, there was a street going down to the railway.

The girl produced a flashlight which barely cleared the darkness. The path was muddy, so Robbi had to hold onto the branches of the hedges in order not to slip with his moccasins.

“How much further?” he asked for the umpteenth time.

“Not too much. You’re no lion, are you?”

“Well, no, it’s just that...” he couldn’t finish the sentence because he put his foot in a hole and slipped into the mud: “For fuck’s sake¹¹⁶, I fell!”

“C’mon, get up.” The girl gave him her hand. Robbi stood up.

His trousers were now completely covered in dirt. This was his favourite pair, the one he bought at *Colby* on via Nazionale.

“What a fucking night.”¹¹⁷

The descent was finally over. They found themselves on an embankment two meters from the railway. On his left the entrance of a tunnel, two green lights were barely dissipating the darkness and making the steel of the railway glimmer.

“What now?”

“This way.”

C'era una rete di metallo arrugginita. La costeggiarono per una decina di metri e trovarono un foro circolare nelle maglie. La ragazza ci passò attraverso con l'agilità di un gatto, Robbi con quella di un ippopotamo. Scesero una scaletta di legno pericolante e attraversarono i binari. Dall'altra parte, tra gli alberi di alloro, il viottolo ricominciava. Era coperto di buste, cocci di bottiglia, pneumatici divorati dal fuoco.

-Eccoci, - disse la ragazza, spostò la fronda di un albero e Robbi vide un grande accampamento circondato dalla foresta. Roulotte, vecchie Mercedes, baracche di lamiera, un paio di fuochi dove sedevano delle figure scure. Un recinto con delle galline. Due capre legate ai resti di una 500.

Un accampamento di zingari!

Si era fatto fottere come un pischello. Si inchiodò.

Lei gli puntò la torcia in faccia.

-Che hai paura?

-Levami quella luce. No, non ho paura.

-E allora muoviti.

Era strano ma quel posto risultava invisibile da tutte le strade che costeggiavano quel fazzoletto di verde. Aveva un aspetto sinistro, antico, quasi medioevale. Sembrava di stare in un futuro post-nucleare, alla *Mad Max*.

-Bello qui, vero?

-Taaaaanto, - fece Robbi. Il cuore gli sbatteva nel petto e aveva la bocca secca.

La ragazza incontrò un paio di figure nere e le salutò. Robbi fece ciao con la mano. Si sentì osservato.

La ragazza si fermò davanti a una roulette. Non aveva più le ruote ed era poggiata sopra muretti di mattoni. Davanti avevano costruito una veranda di legno e laminati di fibra di vetro. Tutto intorno c'erano delle latte di olio che servivano come vasi per piante di pomodoro e gerani. Attaccato a una corda c'era un bastardaccio che cominciò a mugolare appena vide la padrona.

-Buono, Silvio -. Il cane si accucciò sotto la roulotte. – Questa è la mia casetta -. Tirò fuori un mazzo di chiavi, aprì la porta e fece segno di entrare.

Robbi ansimò: - Carina-. Ed entrò.

There was a rusty metal fence. They walked beside it for some ten meters, until they found a round hole in it. The girl went through it as nimble as a cat, while Robbi did it as nimble as a hippo. Then, they climbed down a shaky¹¹⁸ wooden ladder and crossed the tracks.

On the opposite side, the path continued among the laurel trees. It was littered with bags, smashed bottles and scorched tires.

“Here we are,” said the girl moving away a tree branch, behind which Robbi saw a big campsite surrounded by the woods. Caravans, old Mercedes, foil shacks, a couple of fires with a few dark figures sitting around them. There was a fence with a few hens, and two goats were tied to the remnants of a 500.

“A gypsies’ camp!”¹¹⁹

He had let himself get screwed over like a rookie¹²⁰.

He stopped right where he stood.

She pointed the torch right in his face.

“What? Are you scared?”

“Move that light away. No, I’m not scared.”

“Let’s move then.”

Weird, that place was invisible from the roads running beside that patch of green. It had a sinister, ancient and almost medieval look. It felt like some kind of post-nuclear, *Mad Max* - like future.¹²¹

“It’s nice here, don’t you think?”

“Yeeeah...” Answered Robbi. His heart was pounding in his chest and his mouth was dry.

The girl met and greeted a couple of the dark figures. Robbi waved his hand. He felt eyes staring at him.

The girl then stopped in front of a caravan. It had no tires, and it was set on a low brickwall.

On the front, they had built a porch out of wood and fiberglass supports¹²². All around it, empty oil cans were now used as vases for tomatoes and geraniums. A mutt tied to a rope started whining as he saw his owner.

“Sit, Silvio.” The dog sat himself under the caravan. “This is my home sweet home.” She took out a bunch of keys, opened the door and welcomed him in.

Robbi gasped: “Looks cute...” and entered.

Dentro, in effetti, non era per niente male e faceva pure un bel teporino.

Da una parte c'era un grande letto coperto di cuscini colorati. Una piccola lampada diffondeva una luce calda. C'era un grande specchio su cui erano appese collanine, rosari, pendoli e, infilate nella cornice, cartoline e vecchie fotografie. Le finestre avevano delle tendine ricamate. C'era un vecchio stereo. Un cucinino in ordine con una fila di calici verdi messi ad asciugare e una torta di mele e crema. C'era un divano coperto da un vecchio plaid scozzese su cui dormiva un grosso persiano bianco e nero. Un tavolinetto con sopra un vaso pieno di fiori di campo. Una chitarra. E una televisione dipinta di rosa. A terra una moquette color vinaccia su cui aveva poggiato un tappeto consumato.

-È molto accogliente! – disse Robbi guardandosi in giro.

-Lo vuoi un tè? – Lei mise un bricco con dell'acqua a scaldare e poi prese una cassetta: - Ti piace la musica?

Robbi fece segno di sì con la testa.

Lei accese lo stereo e una musica allegra, tutta violini e cornamuse, invase la roulotte. – È la musica del mio paese-. Poi si levò la giacchetta.

Sotto aveva un gilè da uomo sopra una maglietta a maniche lunghe. – Io mi spoglio...

Robbi, in piedi, rimase incantato a guardare lo spettacolo.

La ragazza si tolse la maglietta. Indossava un reggiseno di cotone bianco. Di quelli semplici, senza fronzoli e nastri. Se lo levò senza farsi problemi.

Aveva due tette tonde e piccole ma nemmeno troppo. I capezzoli erano scuri e puntavano all'insù. Poi si sedette sul divano, si accese una sigaretta, si tolse le scarpe e le gettò in un angolo. Si sfilò la gonna e le mutande insieme e si mise in piedi. Robbi ebbe un giramento di testa. Aveva un corpo perfetto. Magro ma con i fianchi. La pancia era piatta e muscolosa. I peli della fica formavano una strisciolina castana e le chiappe alte e sode.

In vita sua Robbi aveva visto un fisico così solo sulle copertine dell' "Espresso".

La ragazza versò l'acqua nella teiera, - Che fai, non ti spogli?

-Giusto -. Robbi si strappò i vestiti di dosso.

-Infilati a letto. Ti porto il tè.

Robbi non se lo fece dire due volte, planò sul materasso mentre i violini zingari eseguivano una *doina* struggente.

Inside wasn't as bad as outside. It was nice-looking and there was a cozy warmth.

On one side there was a big bed full of coloured pillows, and a small lamp gave out a warm light. On the frame of a big mirror rosaries, necklaces and amulets were hung, while stuck in the frame there were some old photos and postcards. The windows were covered by nicely embroidered curtains¹²³. There was also an old stereo. The small kitchen was clean and tidy, with a row of green wine glasses out to dry and a cream and apple pie. On the couch a large Scottish carpet was the bed of a big black and white Persian cat. A small table with a vase full of field flowers. A guitar. A tv painted pink. A red carpet was on the floor, on which a tattered rug was placed.

"It's quite cozy!" said Robbi, looking around.

"Would you like some tea?" She put a kettle on the stove and grabbed a cassette: "Do you like music?"

Robbi nodded.

She turned the stereo on, and from its speakers, violins and bagpipes played a cheery music that filled the caravan. "This is the music of my homeland." And then she took off her jacket.

She was wearing a long-sleeved black shirt under a man vest: "I'm going to undress now...."

Robbi, still standing, remained entranced while watching the show.

The girl took off her shirt, revealing a white simple cotton bra, without frills or ribbons. She took it off nonchalantly. Her breasts were round and not too small. Her nipples were dark and pointed upward. She sat down on the couch, lit up a cigarette, took her shoes off and threw them in a corner. She removed her skirt and her underwear in one move and stood up. Robbi felt his head spinning. Her body was perfect. Lean, but curvy. Her belly flat but fit. On her vagina she had a line of brown hair, while her ass was up and round.

In all his life, Robbi had seen such a body only on the Espresso magazine cover.

The girl poured some water into the tea pot: "So, aren't you gonna undress?"

"Oh yeah, right." Robbi tore off his clothes.

"Lay on the bed, I'll bring you some tea."

Robbi did not need to hear that twice and flung himself on the mattress, while the violins were playing a dramatic *doina*.

Lei spense la luce. La roulotte cadde nella penombra. Dalla finestrella accanto al letto entravano i bagliori dei fuochi dell'accampamento.

La vide avanzare verso di lui, tra le mani aveva un vassoio, nel buio s'intravedeva la linea perfetta dei seni. Sentì il cazzo indurirsi.

Lei gli si sedette accanto, poggiò il vassoio a terra. – Come sta il tronchetto della felicità?

-Non c'è male -. Lui le prese un polso e la tirò verso di sé.

-Aspetta-. Spense la sigaretta e gli carezzò una gamba.

Al contatto con quella mano fresca sentì lo stomaco strizzarsi come una spugna, fece un respiro e buttò indietro la testa.

Ebbe l'impressione che una sagoma lo osservasse.

Girò lo sguardo un istante verso la finestra e vide dietro il vetro Franco Nero.

Franco nero in *Django*.

Non ebbe nemmeno il tempo di stupirsi, di strillare, di sollevarsi, di scostarsi, di fare niente, che un braccio grosso come un coscio di prosciutto e una mano forte come una morsa gli si serrò sul padiglione dell'orecchio e fu tirato fuori attraverso la finestrella con una forza incredibile.

Si ritrovò nudo nel fango. Cercò di sollevarsi ma un camperos lo inchiodò a terra come un scarafaggio. Il sosia di Franco Nero lo guardava con due fessure buie. Era enorme. Molto più grosso dell'attore. Peloso. Con una criniera biondicia che gli cadeva sulle spalle. Una barba scura e incolta gli arrivava sopra gli zigomi. Appeso al collo aveva un teschio d'argento, addosso un gilè di pelle con ricami di perline e tra le mani stringeva un fucile con il calcio intarsiato in madreperla.

Django gli poggiò in fronte la doppietta. -Chi cazzo sei tu? Ti scopi mia moglie, pezzo di merda, in casa mia. E ora muori.

Robbi gli vomitò sullo stivale e poi, fremendo come un tritone albino, chiuse gli occhi.

Il colpo non arrivò.

Sentì invece una voce femminile che urlava: -Cjenik usluga u domacinstvu! Così capisci che vuol dire tornare a casa e trovare che ti stanno tradendo. Così impari, figlio di puttana, l'ho fatto per farti capire come mi sento ogni volta che torno e ti trovo...

She turned the lights off. The caravan was now in penumbra. The fires of the campsite were visible from the window on the bedside.

He saw her coming towards him, tray between her hands, her perfect boobs visible in the dark. He felt his dick stiffening. She sat beside him and placed the tray on the floor: “How’s the happy stick doing?”

“Not bad at all.” He grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her towards him.

“Wait.” She smothered the cigarette and caressed his leg.

The feeling of her cool hand made his stomach squeeze as if it was a sponge, he then breathed deeply and threw back his head.

He had the impression a figure was looking at him.

He turned his gaze to the window for a second and behind the glass saw Franco Nero^{xii}.

The *Django* version of Franco Nero.

Be surprised, scream, get up, move away, try anything at all¹²⁴: he had no time to do any of these things, because an arm as big as a pig thigh and a hand as strong as a vise grabbed him by the ear and dragged him through the window with an enormous strength.

He found himself naked in the mud. As he tried to stand up, a camperos boot pinned him to the ground as if he was a cockroach. Franco Nero’s doppelganger was staring at him from two black slits. He was humongous. Way bigger than the actor, and hairy. A blonde mane resting on his shoulders. A black and untamed beard grew on his face up to his cheekbones. At his neck, dangling, there was a silver skull and he wore a leather vest with pearls embroidered on it. In his hands, a gun¹²⁵ with a stock adorned with nacre.

Django placed the double-barrelled shotgun on his forehead. “Who the fuck are you? You wanna fuck my wife in my own house, you little shit. Well now you die.”

Robbi puked on the boot and closed his eyes. He was trembling like an axolotl¹²⁶.

No shot hit him.

Instead, he heard a girl’s voice yelling: “Cjenik usluga u domacinstvu!¹²⁷ Now you understand how it feels when you come home to find someone’s cheating on you. Learn your lesson asshole, I only did it, so you know how I feel every time I get back home and see you...”

^{xii} Franco Nero is a famous Italian actor: in the movie *Django*, he plays a ruthless gunslinger.

Robbi riaprì gli occhi e dalla sua angolatura raso terra vide la ragazza nuda che con un manico di scopa colpiva l'orco slavo sulla schiena e sulla testa. -Non è bello, vero? Vedi! Vedi! Vedi! Ti odio! Tutte te le sei scopate! Marija, Rijeka, Visevica! Ti odio, maiale, porco!

Django cercava di ripararsi e mantenere il piede schiacciato su Robbi, ma la ragazza continuava a menare colpi come un'invasata. Alla fine fu costretto a mollare la presa per difendersi.

Robbi ne approfittò immediatamente e sgusciò nel fango sotto la roulotte.

L'orco strappò la mazza dalle mani della ragazza, la spezzò in due e le diede un rovescio che la fece volare a diversi metri di distanza. Grugnì come un orso ferito, gli occhi scomparvero tra i peli della barba e urlò: - Povecava!- e poi si gettò sulla roulotte. L'afferrò con due mani cercando di ribaltarla.

Robbi urlava e strisciava. -Io non c'entro niente. Non ho fatto niente. È stata lei a portarmi qua. La prego, la smetta! Parliamo.

Intanto intorno si era radunato tutto il villaggio. Gli uomini stringevano forconi, zappe e torce. Le donne tenevano cani feroci che raspavano il terreno e si strozzavano. Tutti urlavano.

Ora mi ammazzano! Ora mi ammazzano! Robbi cominciò a cercare di scavare a terra una buca mentre sopra di lui la roulotte sbatteva e sussultava come se l'avesse investita una tromba d'aria.

Django mollò la presa e iniziò a dare calci sotto la roulotte urlando: - Esci fuori! Esci se sei un uomo! Battiti da uomo! – Robbi andava avanti e indietro come un topo in trappola.

Qualcuno che stava là insieme agli altri urlò qualcosa: - Vanskji potvori rui!

Improvvisamente ci fu il silenzio.

Qualcuno è intervenuto. Il capo del villaggio. Gli avrà detto di smetterla.

Non ebbe il tempo di tirare un sospiro che sentì un latrato ai suoi piedi e un diavolo nero con sessantaquattro denti gli venne addosso cercando di azzannarlo.

Schizzò fuori da sotto la roulotte.

E poi ci fu il nero.

Riaprì gli occhi quando gli arrivò in faccia una secchiata d'acqua gelata.

Strabuzzò gli occhi.

Dove si trovava?

Robbi opened his eyes and from his ground level point of view, he could see the naked girl hitting the Slavic ogre on his back and head with a broom stick.

“It ain’t that nice, is it? See! See! See! I hate you! You’re a man-whore, you fucked all of those girls! Marija, Rijeka, Visevica! I hate you pig, you swine!”

Django was trying to defend himself and keep his boot on Robbi, but the girl was hitting him non-stop, as if she was possessed. In the end, he had to free him to protect himself.

Robbi did not think twice before scurrying in the mud under the caravan.

The ogre ripped the stick from the girl’s hands, snapped it in half and slapped her so hard that she flew a few meters away. He grunted like a wounded bear and his eyes disappeared amidst the beard. He screamed “Povecava!”¹²⁸, after which, he flung himself onto the caravan, grabbing it with both hands in an effort to flip it.

Robbi was screaming and slithering: “I got nothing to do with this! I didn’t do anything. She was the one who brought me here. Please, stop! Let’s talk about it!”

In the meantime, the entire village had gathered around the scene. The men were holding pitchforks, hoes and torches. The women had vicious dogs which were scraping the ground and choking on the leashes. Everyone was yelling.

They’re going to kill me! They’re going to kill me! Robbi tried to dig a hole under the caravan while above him it rocked as if a tornado was hitting it.

Django let go and instead started kicking the space below the caravan, yelling: “Come out here! Come out here if you’re a man! Fight like a man!” Robbi was going back and forth like a rat in a cage.

Someone in the group yelled something: “Vanskji potvori rui!”

Suddenly silence fell.

Somebody intervened. The village chief. He must have told them to stop.

He couldn’t even catch his breath, when suddenly a bark came from behind him and a black devil with 64 teeth tried to maul him. He shot away from under the trailer.

Next thing he saw, was black.

He opened his eyes when a bucket of ice-cold water was thrown at him.

He opened his eyes wide.

Where was he?

Era nudo, legato contro un palo. In una mano aveva il coperchio di un secchio dell'immondizia e nell'altra un tubo di ferro.

Alzò lo sguardo. Era all'angolo di un'arena cinta da steccati e pneumatici. Al centro del ring una 127 sport bruciava sollevando fiamme che rischiaravano la notte. Dietro c'erano vecchi, ragazzini, donne che impugnavano fiaccole e urlavano. Cani che abbaiano. Di fronte a sé, dall'altra parte della recinzione c'era Django. Si era tolto il gilè, aveva le braccia completamente avvolte da due cobra tatuati. Il sudore che lo copriva lo faceva brillare come un'insegna al neon. Urlava come un matto. Lo trattenevano. In tre.

Il suono di un gong e Django si sollevò ruggendo, Robbi provò a scappare, a scavalcare la recinzione ma dietro aveva un piccoletto calvo con un cacciavite in mano. Glielo infilò nelle reni. Robbi urlò di dolore come un babbuino ferito. Una vecchia gli tirò una bottiglietta di Oransoda in testa.

Poi gli sciolsero le corde e lo spinsero verso il centro dell'arena.

Provò di nuovo a uscire fuori ma il piccoletto lo colpì ancora con il cacciavite. Tutto intorno era un muro umano. Lo incitavano a combattere. Da dietro le fiamme apparve Django.

Ruotava sopra la testa una corda a cui era legata una batteria Magneti Marelli.

Robbi cominciò a scappare inseguito dall'orco facendo infuriare la folla che gli tirava addosso immondizia, sassi, di tutto. Cercò di fare uno slalom ma fu colpito in testa da una bottiglia di Jagermeister. Non ci vide più. Sentì le gambe trasformarsi in pongo e per poco non cadde a terra. Quando gli tornò la vista Django era di fronte a lui. Sentì un sibilo e la batteria gli passò fischiando a cinque centimetri dal naso. Sollevò il tubo per difendersi ma gli schizzò dalle mani colpito dalla batteria.

Fece due passi indietro e sentì un dolore lancinante nella schiena.

-E mo' basta! Hai rotto il cazzo! – e con tutta la forza che aveva lanciò alle sue spalle come un frisbee il coperchio del secchio colpendo sulle gengive il piccoletto calvo, che crollò a terra sputando sangue.

Ci fu un attimo di silenzio.

Il pubblico era ammutolito.

Robbi si guardò intorno, poi con un balzo insospettabile superò la staccionata e caracollò sul ferito, si rimise in piedi e cominciò a correre mentre intorno a lui si sollevavano le urla.

He was naked, tied to a pole. In one hand, a trash bin lid, in the other, a metal pipe. He lifted his eyes up. He was in the corner of an arena delimited by tires and a picket fence. In the center of the ring, the flames of a burning 127 Sport lit up the night. Behind him there were old men, kids, women all holding torches and shouting. Dogs were barking too. In front of him, on the other side of the arena, was Django. He wasn't wearing his vest anymore, and his arms were completely covered by the tattoo of two cobras. He was so sweaty that he shone like a neon sign. And he was shouting like a madman. Three people were keeping him still. A gong sound was the cue for a roaring Django to rise up, and for Robbi to try and flee by vaulting over the fence, if it weren't for a bald dwarf that stuck a screwdriver in Robbi's lower back. He screamed like a wounded baboon¹²⁹. An old lady flung an oransoda bottle at his head.

They then loosened the ropes and pushed him towards the center of the arena.

He tried to escape one more time, but the dwarf hit him again with the screwdriver. All around him a wall of human bodies. They were shouting at him to fight. From behind the flames, Django appeared. Over his head, he was whirling a rope with a Magneti Marelli battery at its end.

Robbi began running around with the ogre right behind him, upsetting the crowd which threw trash, rocks and whatever you could think of at him. He tried to zigzag, but a Jägermeister bottle hit his head. He couldn't see anymore. His legs felt like play dough and he could barely keep his footing. As soon as he regained his sight, Django was in front of him. He heard a hissing sound and the rotating battery missed his nose by 5 centimetres. He then took up¹³⁰ the metal pipe in his hands, only for it to be torn away by the battery.

He receded a few steps, when he felt a stinging pain in his back.

“That's it! I'm done with you!”¹³¹ and with all his strength he threw the lid behind him like a frisbee, hitting the mouth of the bald dwarf, who collapsed on the ground and spat blood.

For a moment, there was silence.

The audience didn't make a sound.

Robbi looked around and with an incredible¹³² leap vaulted over the fence. He landed on his victim and stumbled¹³³ on the body, he then rose and ran, while the crowd was roaring.

Correva disperato nel buio, a bocca aperta, a mani avanti, l'adrenalina che gli intasava le arterie, il cuore che gli scuoteva lo sterno.

Correva e piangeva.

Non c'era una parte del corpo che non gli facesse male, che non fosse graffiata, contusa, lacerata. I rami lo artigliavano, i cespugli lo frustavano, i sassi gli bucaivano i piedi. Era riuscito a prendere un po' di vantaggio, ma li sentiva dietro. Non mollavano. Appena si fosse fermato lo avrebbero ripreso.

Una piccola porzione del suo cervello continuava a ripetergli che era solo un sogno, un incubo, il peggior incubo della sua vita, che si sarebbe svegliato e avrebbe trovato nonna Carmela che gli portava il caffè e le macine del Mulino Bianco.

I cani. I cani lo terrorizzavano più di ogni cosa. Li sentiva abbaiare.

Aveva perso completamente l'orientamento. E quello spicchio di bosco tra l'Olimpica e viale Parioli era in realtà un bosco enorme. Decise di risalire il versante di una collina. Ma se non si fermava a riprendere fiato moriva. La milza gli pulsava sopra l'inguine piegandolo in due dal dolore.

Si arrampicò su un grosso condotto di cemento che correva dritto tra gli alberi. Sotto non vedeva niente. Era tutto nero. Poteva esserci un metro come sei.

Torna indietro.

I cani e le urla si avvicinavano e un bagliore di fuochi rischiarava i tronchi neri degli alberi.

Eccoli.

Strinse i denti, chiuse gli occhi e si gettò nel buio bestemmiando. Sprofondò in un cumulo di immondizia senza farsi niente. Era finito tra buste, frutta marcia, poltrone di automobili, scatole di cartone. C'era una puzza da vomitare.

Doveva fare come Rambo quando era inseguito dall'esercito degli Stati Uniti.

Cominciò a coprirsi con bucce di banana, lische di pesce marcio, la carcassa di un pastore tedesco, giornali.

Rimase lì tremante a pregare mentre i suoi inseguitori lo superavano.

Quando fu sicuro che fossero abbastanza lontani, si tirò fuori e sollevò le braccia al cielo.

Scese dal cumulo di immondizia e si ritrovò in un piazzale tra gli alberi. In lontananza sentiva il rumore delle macchine. Le nuvole grigie riflettevano le luci della città rischiarando un po' le tenebre.

Forse era salvo.

Desperately, he ran in the dark, mouth gaping, hands forward, arteries chock-full of adrenaline and the heart shaking his sternum.

He ran and cried.

Every single part of his body was hurting and full of cuts, hits or rips. Branches clawed at him, hedges whipped him and rocks pierced his feet. He managed to stay on top of the pursuers, but he could hear them behind him. They did not desist. If he were to stop, they would catch up.

A small fraction of his brain was telling him that it was all just a dream, a nightmare, the worst one of his life, and that he would wake up and find Grandma Carmela bringing him coffee and “Mulino Bianco” “Macine”.^{xiii}

Dogs. Dogs were the most frightening creatures of them all. He heard them barking.

He had no idea where he was. The small wood between the Olimpica and viale Parioli was in fact huge. He decided to go up a hillside, but he needed to catch his breath badly. The pain from the spleen pulsing right above his groin made him bend over.

He climbed a big cement pipe which ran straight through the trees. He couldn't make out anything below him. Everything was black. The drop could have been a meter, or even six.

Go back.

Dogs and cries were getting closer, together with a glimmer of fires illuminating the black tree trunks.

They're coming.

He clenched his teeth, closed his eyes and leaped with a curse on his lips.

He plunged in a pile of garbage, unharmed. Around him, bags, rotten fruit, car seats and cardboard boxes. The stench was unbearable.

He had to act like Rambo when he was on the run from the USA army. He covered himself in banana peels, rotten fishbones, the corpse of a German shepherd and newspapers.

The pursuers passed him as he stood still, trembling and praying.

When he was sure they had gone far enough, he got out and raised his hands to the sky. He then went down the pile, to find himself in a little square among the trees. In the distance, he could hear car noises while the gray clouds reflected the city lights, clearing the darkness a bit.

Perhaps he was safe.

^{xiii} “Macine” are a ring-shaped biscuit produced by “Mulino Bianco”, which is a famous sweet and biscuits Italian brand.

Si avviò zoppicando verso una baracca di lamiera accanto a un deposito di materiali da costruzione. Era buia, ma avvicinandosi vide che dietro gli scuri filtrava una bava di luce. Ebbe l'impulso di bussare, ma si trattenne. Se dentro c'era uno di quelli del villaggio? Dietro la baracca era tirato un filo a cui erano appesi dei panni. Si avvicinò e prese in mano una specie di lunga maglietta. Se la infilò. Gli stava strettissima. Si rese conto che era un vestitino da donna, scollato, che gli arrivava a malapena sotto l'ucello. Si diresse verso le macchine, attraversò un pantano e si ritrovò in un giardinetto ben curato con tanto di panchine, scivolo e altalene.

Ce l'ho fatta.

Era su una grossa arteria dove sfrecciavano automobili. Non era lontano da casa. Stava per avviarsi quando sentì strillare: - Ostap preda odlegadi! Ostap!

Django. Con tutti gli altri.

Lo avevano beccato.

Cominciò a correre e quando vide una vecchia Mercedes grigia venire verso di lui, si piazzò in mezzo alla strada sbracciandosi.

La macchina inchiodò a una ventina di metri e lo sportello posteriore si aprì e Robbi zoppicando e ringraziando Dio ci si tuffò dentro a pesce.

“Aria. Nell'aria. Voglia. Di te. È domenica e tu chissà che cosa fai... La mia voglia è grande, è scandalosa ormai”, cantava Marcella Bella nell'autoradio.

-Grazie! Grazie! Mi avete salvato la vita. Mi volevano ammazzare -. Robbi guardava nel lunotto posteriore scomparire Django e i guerrieri della palude silenziosa. -Non so come...-

La frase gli morì in bocca quando vide gli occupanti della macchina.

Dentro la Mercedes c'erano tre ciccioni, enormi, con i capelli tagliato a zero. Avevano le teste tonde e grosse come angurie che si avvitavano direttamente sulle spalle. Gli occhi piccoli e inespressivi come uova di tortora. Dalle labbra umidicce spuntavano sfilze di dentini storti come lapidi.

Tutti e tre indossavano tute acetate Sergio Tacchini azzurre e sotto delle magliette bianche con scritto: “Gemelli Francescini. Caldaie a metano, installazioni e riparazioni.”

Ai polsi avevano orologi d'oro grossi come saponette e bracciali che sembravano catenelle del cesso, e sorridevano.

He limped towards a foil shack close to a deposit for building materials. It was dark, but as he got closer, he saw some light through a slit in the blinds.

He wanted to knock but held himself back. What if one of the village guys was in there?

Behind the shack, there was a rope with clothes hanging. He got closer and grabbed a long t-shirt. He put it on. It was a very tight fit. He then realized it was a woman's dress with a neckline, and it barely covered his dick.

He started walking towards the cars, crossed a muddy patch and found himself in a well-kept garden with a few benches, a slide and a seesaw.

I made it.

He was now on a big road¹³⁴ where many cars were passing. Home was not far now, and as he started heading there, he heard someone shouting: "Ostap preda odlegadi! Ostap!"

Django. With everyone else.

They found him.

He ran, and as soon as he saw an old grey Mercedes coming towards him, he jumped in the middle of the street flailing his arms.

The car abruptly stopped some twenty meters from him and one of the back doors opened, Robbi limped towards it, and dived on the seat while thanking God.

"Aria. Nell'aria. Voglia. Di te. É Domenica e tu chissà che cosa fai... La mia voglia è grande, è scandalosa ormai". Marcella Bella^{xiv} was singing on the radio.

"Thank you, thank you! You saved my life. They wanted to kill me." said Robbi as he watched through the back-window Django and his silent swamp warriors disappear. "I don't know how to..." the voice died in him when he realized who the car passengers¹³⁵ were.

Three fat, enormous, bald guys were sitting in the Mercedes. Heads big and round like watermelons screwed on their shoulders. Eyes small and emotionless like turtledove's eggs.

Rows of small teeth as crooked as tombstones popping up between wet lips.

All three of them were wearing light blue Sergio Tacchini acetate suits over white shirts, where you could read: "Francescini bros. Methane heaters, installations and restorations."

Watches as big as soap bars and bracelets resembling toilets' chains were on their wrists.

They were smiling.

Django e compagni erano dei buontemponi in confronto ai tre gemelli.

^{xiv} Marcella Bella was an Italian singer

Quello seduto accanto a Robbi sarebbe stato in grado di ingoiarsi una libreria dell'Ikea smontata e di cacarla montata, con tanto di sportelli.

Quello seduto davanti storse il naso e aprì il finestrino. – A Ivo, questa puzza peggio di un cadavere. Sto per vomitare.

Ivo che guidava scosse la testa. -E mo' 'sta puzza m'impregna tutta la tappezzeria, proprio oggi che l'avevo portata al lavaggio. Tullio, domandagli se se lava con i morti.

Tullio, quello seduto accanto a Ivo, tirò fuori una pistola e la puntò in faccia a Robbi. -Certo che come travestito sei proprio una merda. Ma che cazzo fai? Prima di andare a battere ti fai il bagno nella fogna? Che è una nuova tecnica per farsi notare?

Lo avevano scambiato per un travestito.

Robbi provò a parlare ma aveva la sensazione che uno scorpione gli avesse punto la lingua trasformandogliela in un babà rinsecchito. Sbiassicò una frase senza senso.

-Non si capisce una sega. Dev'essere extracomunitario, - fece Tullio agli altri e poi scandendo le parole a Robbi: - S-e-i-e-x-t-r-a-c-o-m-u-n-i-t-a-r-i-o?

Ivo intanto continuava a osservare Robbi nello specchietto retrovisore e a scuotere la testa: -Io penso che pure per battere ci vuole un minimo di professionalità. Non s'è nemmeno fatto la barba. E guarda che cazzo di peli ha sul petto... Ma ti rendi conto...

Quello accanto a Robbi disse: -Un travestito con i peli è come un negro con la Ferrari. Stona - . Poi tirò fuori dai pantaloni della tuta una pistola e con la canna sollevò il vestito di Robbi. - Ci ha pure il cazzo. Piccino.

Robbi cominciò a battere i denti e provò a difendersi, ma la voce gli tremava come un violino scordato. -Guardate che vi state sbagliando, io non sono un travestito. Io sono normale. Un gruppo di pazzi mi voleva uccidere. Questo vestito me lo sono messo perché mi hanno rubato i miei.

-Allora meno male che siamo arrivati noi a salvarti, - disse Ivo e prese a sghignazzare come se avesse fatto la battuta più divertente del mondo.

Intanto Marcella Bella, nello stereo, continuava a cantare.

-Guardate che io non sono un travestito. Ve lo giuro su Dio, vi sbagliate, io i froci li odio. E i travestiti li vorrei vedere tutti morti. Mi fanno schifo.

Compared to these triplets, Django and co. were a bunch of amateurs¹³⁶.

The one sitting next to Robbi could have easily swallowed all the parts of an IKEA bookshelf, and poop it in its assembled form. Windows included.

The guy sitting in the front turned his nose¹³⁷ and opened the window: “Yo Ivo, a corpse’s stench is nothing compared to this guy. I’m ‘bout to vomit.”

Ivo, the driver, shook his head: “Yeah, and now the smell will seep in the leather. Right when I got it cleaned. Tullio, ask him if he showers using dead people.”

Tullio, the one sitting next to Ivo, took out a gun and pointed it right at Robbi’s face: “You are the shittiest trans ever. The fuck you thinking? You wash yourself in a dumpster before fucking someone? Is this some kind of new trick to attract attention?”

They had mistaken him for a trans.

Robbi tried to say something, but his tongue felt like a scorpion had stung it and it had become a dried baba^{xv}. He mumbled something unintelligible.

“Can’t understand shit¹³⁸. Must be an immigrant.” Said Tullio to the other two. He then spoke out loud for Robbi to understand: “a-r-e-y-o-u-a-n-i-m-m-i-g-r-a-n-t?”

Meanwhile, Ivo kept looking at Robbi using the rear window and shaking his head: “I believe that even a job such as his requires some professionalism. He didn’t even shave his beard, and look at those fucking chest-hairs. Unbelievable....”

The one next to Robbi said: “A trans with hair is like a ni**a with a Ferrari. Just doesn’t suit him.” He took his own gun out from his trousers and lifted Robbi’s dress with the muzzle.

“He even has a dick. A tiny one.”

Robbi’s teeth started clattering and he tried to defend himself, but his voice stuttered like an off-key violin: “You’re getting it wrong, I’m no trans. I’m normal. A group of madmen tried to kill me. I’m wearing this dress because they stole my clothes.”

“Well then, good thing we came to your rescue”. Said Ivo, who then started laughing as if he had told the best joke ever.

All the while, Marcella Bella kept on singing on the radio.

“I swear I’m not a trans. I swear to God, you are making a mistake, I hate faggots. I want to see trans people die. They are repulsive to me.”

E Tullio disse: - Sì come a me fanno schifo i profiterole e il monte bianco.

^{xv} A baba is a common dessert in Italy. It is made of a dough which rises with yeast and it is usually covered in rum.

Scoppiarono tutti e tre a ridere e si davano gomitate.

Si fermarono a un semaforo rosso. Robbi, senza pensarci si avventò sulla maniglia. La porta non si aprì.

-Ho messo la sicura per i bambini cattivi che vogliono buttarsi di sotto, - spiegò Ivo e domandò a quello seduto dietro: -Augu', che ne facciamo di questo?

Augusto ci rifletté un po' sopra e poi disse: - Non lo so... Non so se prima incularmelo e poi ucciderlo, o viceversa.

La musica finì e Robbi sentì delle urla soffocate e dei colpi arrivare da dietro la schiena.

C'è qualcuno nel bagagliaio.

-Ahò!? Ma non la pianta più? Ma come fa? – si domandò Tullio. – Augù diglie qualcosa.

Augusto cominciò a dare colpi con il calcio della pistola sul pianale posteriore della Mercedes e a urlare: - Ancora?! Hai cacato il cazzo! E basta!

-La criccata dove gliel'hai data?- domandò Ivo.

-E dove gliel'ho data? In faccia.

-Lo vedi che fai sempre le cazzate? Gliela devi dare sul mento, un po' a destra, così gli scardini la mascella, Così è preciso.

-Guarda che me lo hai detto te di dargliela in faccia. Tu comandi e io eseguo.

-Ma che cazzo dici?

Robbi ebbe la certezza che quei tre erano i Killer del Sole e si pisciò addosso. Vide che avevano imboccato il grande raccordo anulare a centottanta all'ora. Cercò di asciugare il lago di piscio con il vestito. Non l'avrebbero presa bene se lo avessero scoperto.

-Augu' devi stare a sentire tuo fratello. Quante volte te l'ho detto? - disse Ivo.

Augusto sbuffò imbronciato.

Tullio tirò fuori un classificatore di cd. – Che metto?

Ivo imboccò lo svincolo per la Pontina. – E su, fai il bravo padrone di casa. Domanda all'amichetta che musica vuole sentire.

Augusto aggiunse: -Così scopriamo se è frocio o ci fa. Dalla musica si capisce facile. È la migliore prova.

Augusto gli puntò la pistola sotto il mento. – Che musica ti piace?

Tullio said: “Yeah right, just like I hate profiterole and Mont Blanc.”

They all burst into laughter and started elbowing each other.

They stopped at a red light. Without giving it any thought, Robbi went for the handle. The door did not open.

“I locked it, so naughty kids don’t risk falling out.” Said Ivo, and he asked the one behind him: “Augu’, what should we do with him?”

Augusto pondered for a second and replied: “Dunno... I’m not sure if I wanna first fuck him in the ass and then kill him, or the other way around.”

The music stopped and Robbi could hear some muffled screams and some hits coming from behind him.

Someone’s in the trunk.

“Aho’!? When’s he gonna stop? How does he pull it off?” Said Tullio to himself: “Augu’, say something to him.”

Augusto started hitting the Mercedes trunk panel using the gun stock and yelled: “Again?! I’m sick of your shit!¹³⁹ Stop it!”

“Where did you hit him?”¹⁴⁰ asked Ivo.

“In his face, where else?”

“See? You always fuck it up. You must hit him on his chin, a bit to the right. That way you unhinge the jaw. A neat hit.”

“You’re the one who told me to hit him in the face. You order I obey.”

“The fuck you talking about?”

Robbi was sure those were the Sun Killers and started peeing himself. He realized they entered the Raccordo Anulare at 180 km/h. He tried to clean up the piss lake using the dress. They would not like it if they found out.

“Augu’, you must listen to your bro. How many times have I told you?” Said Ivo.

Augusto grunted.

Tullio grabbed a cd classification folder: “What should I put now?”

Ivo turned into the Pontina junction: “Come on, be a nice host. Ask our friend what she’d like to hear.”

Augusto added: “This way, we’ll understand if he really is a faggot. Music is the only proof you need.”

Augusto placed the gun under his chin: “What kinda music do you like?”

-Non sono frocio. A me piacciono le donne.

-Che musica ti piace?

-Ve lo giuro... A me gli uomini... - Augusto gli mollò il calcio della pistola sui denti.

Robbi sentì un fiotto di sangue riempirgli la bocca. E sputò un paio di incisivi.

-Lo vedi che glieli dà sempre in faccia. Avevo ragione o no? – fece Ivo.

Augusto sbuffò. – Non lo faccio apposta. Mi viene naturale. Allora che musica ti piace?

Robbi era talmente terrorizzato che non riusciva a capire nemmeno la domanda. Si premeva la bocca con una mano.

Augusto gli puntò la pistola alla tempia e sollevò il grilletto. -Che musica ti piace? Hai cinque secondi per rispondere. Uno...

Se non rispondeva bene quello gli sparava. In testa aveva solo una domanda: qual è la musica da froci?

-Due...

Cercava nomi di cantanti, di gruppi rock ma il cervello era un buco nero.

-Tre...

Come se non avesse mai ascoltato musica in vita sua.

Ivo disse: - Forza, mica ti ha chiesto i sette vizi capitali. Rispondi che quello ti ammazza.

-Quattro...

Robbi balbettò: - I... Super...Supertramp...

I tre cominciarono a ridere come matti.

Robbi urlò: -No, non i Supertramp, i Metallica.

Ivo si asciugò le lacrime. – I Supertramp! I Supertramp? I Super sono più froci dei Bee Gees.

Tullio aggiunse: - Pure i Bee Gees.

Augusto: - E di quegli altri, come si chiamano? Quelli che si vestivano da indiano, da poliziotto, da meccanico... Come cazzo si chiamavano? Dài, come cazzo si chiamavano?

Ivo: - I Village People. Che razza di frocioni!

Robbi disse: - Guardate che ho detto i Metallica.

Ivo sterzò bruscamente e inchiodò al bordo della strada sollevando una nuvola di polvere e poi si voltò verso Robbi.

“I’m not a faggot. I like women”

“What kinda music do you like?”

“I swear... Men make me..” Augusto hit his teeth with the gun stock.

Robbi felt a gush of blood in his mouth. He spat two front teeth.

“See! You’re always aiming for the face. I was right, wasn’t I?” Said Ivo.

Augusto snorted: “I don’t do it on purpose. It’s just instinctive. So, what kinda music do you like?”

Robbi was so terrified that he couldn’t even understand the question. He kept a hand on his mouth.

Augusto pointed the gun at his temple and lifted the trigger: “What kinda music do you like? You have five seconds to give me an answer. One..”

If he didn’t answer correctly, that guy would shoot him. In his mind there was nothing but a question: what music do faggots like?

“Two...”

He was trying to think of singers, rock bands, but his brain was a black hole.

“Three..”

As if he had never listened to music in all his life.

Ivo said: “C’mon, he didn’t ask you the seven capital sins. Answer, otherwise, he’ll kill you.”

“Four..”

Robbi stuttered: “Super... Supertramp....”

The triplets began laughing like crazy.

Robbi yelled: “No, not them. Metallica”

Ivo dried his eyes: “Supertramp! Supertramp? Super are even gayer than the Bee Gees.”

Tullio added: “Yeah, Bee Gees too.”

Augusto: “How about those guys, what are they called? Those dressed like an Indian, a policeman, a mechanic... The fuck was their name? Oh c’mon, what the fuck were they called?”

Ivo: “Village People. Some major faggots there too!”

Robbi said: “I said Metallica, you know!”

Ivo steered abruptly and stopped at the roadside, making a big dust cloud. He then turned to face Robbi:

-Stammi a sentire bene. Primo, nei giochi vale sempre la prima risposta. Secondo, sei un travestito di merda che non merita di vivere. Terzo, i Supertramp sono merda per froci. Quarto, scendi da questa macchina.

Robbi piangeva in ginocchio. Gli avevano legato i polsi dietro la schiena con il fildiferro. Erano a una trentina di metri dalla strada in un campo arato. La luna faceva capolino tra le nuvole livide e tingeva di giallo le zolle.

I tre gemelli erano in fila di fronte a Robbi, ognuno con una pistola in pugno.

Augusto disse: - Ora ci fai un pompino a tutti e tre. Mi raccomando lavora bene, che non c'è niente di peggio che un pompino fatto male.

Ivo si fece avanti, si stava abbassando la tuta quando ci fu uno sparo e il ciccione crollò a terra con un foro rosso al centro della fronte. Gli altri due non ebbero il tempo di fare niente, che crollarono a terra pure loro con un buco in testa.

Robbi si girò.

In piedi a cinque metri c'era un uomo, con un casco da motociclista, una tuta viola e un mantello di raso rosso. L'uomo soffiò sulla canna della pistola e sollevò il pollice.

Robbi singhiozzò: - Chi sei? Superman?

Il Tenaglia dormiva sul suo letto. Russava, sfatto dalla maratona. Il tabellone segnava venti miliardi. La Cuccarini disse che doveva lasciare per cinque minuti lo spazio a un'edizione speciale del telegiornale.

Sigla.

La giornalista con aria preoccupata riferì che un altro fatto di sangue si era consumato in quella notte disgraziata. Sulla Pontina era stato ritrovato il cadavere di un transessuale non ancora identificato ucciso accanto a tre gemelli. Partì il servizio.

Se il Tenaglia fosse stato sveglio avrebbe riconosciuto il suo amico Robbi Cafagna in un vestitino a righe e con due soli dipinti intorno agli occhi, steso, morto, tra le zolle di un campo arato.

“Now you listen to me carefully. First, the first answer is the one that counts. Second, you are a fucking trans with no right to live. Third, only faggots listen to Supertramp. Fourth, get out of the car.”

Robbi was on his knees, crying. He had his wrists tied with a steel wire behind his back. The road was some 30 meters away from them, and they were in a ploughed field. The moon was peeking from behind dark clouds and gave the field clumps a yellow hue.

The triplets were lined up in front of Robbi, each holding a pistol.

Augusto said: “Now, you’re gonna give us all a blowjob. Be careful to do it properly, there’s nothing worse than a poorly executed blowjob.”

Ivo approached Robbi and as he was lowering his suit trousers, a gunshot blasted, and the fatty dropped dead on the ground with a red circle on his forehead. The other twins couldn’t even react before they fell on the ground next to their brother, both with a hole in their heads. Robbi turned.

Five meters away from him stood a guy wearing a bike helmet, a purple suit and a red cape.

He blew on the gun muzzle and showed Robbi a thumbs up.

Robbi stuttered: “Who are you? Superman?”

Tenaglia was sleeping in his bed. He was snoring, beat by the marathon. The amount displayed on the board was 20 billion. Meanwhile, Cuccarini announced that she was going to leave for five minutes because of a special edition of the news channel.

Outro theme.

The upset looking reporter announced that once again a murder had been committed during that wretched night. The corpse of an unidentified trans had been found on the Pontina, close to three other dead bodies. The official report than started.

If Tenaglia had been awake, he would have seen his friend Robbi Cafagna lying on a field, with a striped dress on, two red suns drawn around his eyes and dead.

2.2 Rane e Girini/ Frogs and Tadpoles

1.

Michele entrò in camera. In mano stringeva un manico di scopa spezzato. Come prima cosa prese a bastonate un po' tutti i mobili della stanza. Poi salì in piedi sulla vecchia poltrona di pelle vicino alla finestra.

-Pippo, Pippo, guarda che ho inventato! – disse.

Suo fratello Filippo stava sdraiato sul letto a leggere per la centesima volta *Asterix in Corsica*.

-Che vuoi?

-Ho fatto un'invenzione nuova. Vieni a vedere.

Michele inventava di tutto: un frullatore che funzionava da ventilatore, una scatola di scarpe con dentro un kit di sopravvivenza nel caso in cui uno si fosse perso in bagno o in cucina, una slitta di stracci con cui aveva rotto la vetrata del corridoio e uno spara-batterie fatto con un tubo dell'acqua con cui aveva quasi fatto secca sua sorella Roberta.

Michele aveva dieci anni e Filippo dodici.

-Ho inventato un telecomando. Un telecomando per la televisione.

Quella del telecomando era un'annosa e lunga questione.

La famiglia di Filippo aveva da tempo immemorabile un vecchio e scassato televisore in bianco e nero Grundig.

Sembrava sempre che dentro quell'apparecchio nevicasse. Tutto: i film, i documentari, il telegiornale avevano qualcosa di nebbioso, come se i programmi si svolgessero in mezzo a una bufera di neve.

L'acquisto di un televisore a colori veniva rimandato dal padre di Filippo con regolarità al Natale successivo ma a pochi giorni dal 25 dicembre spuntavano fuori spese impreviste: tasse, debiti, rate e l'acquisto si rimandava all'anno successivo.

Filippo e Michele invidiavano un sacco Pietro, il bambino che abitava al terzo piano. I suoi genitori avevano in salotto una specie di gigantesco scatolone americano con un telecomando che sembrava una macchina da scrivere.

-Vieni, vieni, - lo pregò Michele con la sua voce lamentosa.

Afferrò per una manica il fratello e lo trascinò a forza in salotto.

-Guarda.

Si sedette a tavola.

1.

Michele came into the room. In his hand he was holding a broken broomstick. First, he hit every other piece¹⁴¹ of furniture in the room. After which, he stood on the leather chair near the window.

“Pippo, Pippo, look what I invented!” he said.

His brother Filippo was lying on the bed, reading *Asterix in Corsica* for the umpteenth time.

“What is it?”

“I made a new invention. Come see it.”

Michele invented a bunch of things¹⁴²: a mixer which worked as a fan, a shoe box with a survival kit in it for those who got lost in the bathroom or the kitchen, a sleigh made of rags with which he broke the glass door of the hallway and also, a water hose that shot batteries¹⁴³ and with which he almost killed his sister¹⁴⁴.

Michele was 10 years old while Filippo was 12.

“I invented a remote control. A remote control for the tv.”

The remote issue had been going on for a long while now¹⁴⁵.

From time immemorial¹⁴⁶, Filippo’s family had had an old beat-up¹⁴⁷ Grundig tv all in black and white. Inside, it always seemed like it was snowing. Everything: movies, documentaries, news channel, they were all foggy, as if these programs were being shot during a snowstorm.

Filippo’s dad had been regularly postponing the purchase of a colour tv¹⁴⁸ to the next

Christmas, but a few days prior to the 25th of December, unexpected expenses would pop up¹⁴⁹: taxes, debts, instalments and so the purchase would be delayed to the following year.

Filippo and Michele envied Pietro, the kid living on the third floor, a lot. In the living room, his parents had one of those humongous American boxes¹⁵⁰, with a remote control similar to a typewriter.

“Come with me, come with me.” Michele begged him with his whiny voice.

He grabbed his brother by a sleeve and forcedly dragged him into the living room.

“Look.”

He sat down at the table.

Allungò un braccio e con la mazza colpì il televisore un paio di volte facendo un baccano infernale.

Alla terza botta, finalmente, centrò il pulsante di accensione. La tele si illuminò.

Furia, il cavallo del West, nitrì dallo schermo.

-Guarda.

Colpì ancora la grossa pulsantiera dei canali.

Primo, secondo, reti private.

-È un telecomando.

-Come è un telecomando?

-Sì, è un telecomando di legno, - disse Michele mentre un sorriso che andava da un orecchio all'altro gli deformava la faccia. Si aggiustò gli occhiali di ferro sul naso e si rimise su la frangetta.

-Com'è questa invenzione? – continuò.

Filippo prese il manico della scopa, si sedette si sedette anche lui a tavola e assestò un paio di colpi all'apparecchio facendolo vacillare.

Sì, si riusciva a cambiare. Si poteva mangiare e comodamente cambiare canale.

Suo fratello era un genio.

-Molto buona. Sai che facciamo? La regaliamo a papà questa sera.

-Va bene. Però gli dici che l'ho inventata io.

-Sì.

Il padre di Michele e Filippo, il signor Mario D'Antoni, non si vedeva spesso a casa in quel periodo. Aveva da poco aperto con un suo amico un'agenzia di viaggi e tornava la sera distrutto e spesso di malumore. Gli affari non gli andavano molto bene.

Ma quella era una giornata particolare e il signor D'Antoni sarebbe stato conciliante.

Era sabato. E il sabato alla tele c'era Sandokan e i pirati della Malesia. Filippo contava i giorni fra una puntata e l'altra.

Per cena si riunì tutta la famiglia.

Filippo, Michele, Roberta, la sorella di sedici anni, la signora e il signor D'Antoni. Tutti appiccicati allo schermo a guardare lo sceneggiato. *Sandokan* piaceva a tutti e la mamma di Filippo preparava per l'occasione la famosa "pasta alla Sandokan", che poi non era nient'altro che pasta al burro, parmigiano e basilico.

Filippo era molto eccitato e contento anche perché il giorno dopo, domenica, era in programma una gita in campagna.

He stretched his arm and hit the tv a couple of times with the broomstick, making a hell of a noise.¹⁵¹ Finally, after the third hit, he pressed the power button. The tv lit up.

Fury, the brave stallion¹⁵², neighed from the screen.

“Look.”

He hit the control panel once again. First channel, second channel, private networks.

“It’s a remote.”

“What do you mean it’s a remote?”

“Yes, it’s a wooden remote,” said Michele, while a smile was spreading¹⁵³ on his face from ear to ear. He adjusted¹⁵⁴ his steel framed glasses¹⁵⁵ on his nose and his bangs.

“What do you think of this invention?” he continued.¹⁵⁶

Filippo grabbed the broomstick, sat down too, and landed¹⁵⁷ a few hits on the device making it waver.

Yes, you could change channels. You could eat and comfortably change channels.

His brother was a genius.

“Very good. You know what?¹⁵⁸ Tonight, we’ll give it to dad as a gift.”

“Alright. But you tell him I invented it.”

“Yes.”

Michele and Filippo’s father, mister Mario D’Antoni, was rarely at home during that time.

Not long ago, he had opened a travel agency with a friend, and he would come back home in the evening all exhausted and in a bad mood. Business was not going too well.

However, that day was a special¹⁵⁹ one and Mr D’Antoni would be less grumpy and more accommodating¹⁶⁰.

It was Saturday. And on Saturdays, “Sandokan and the Malasian Pirates”^{xvi} was on tv. Filippo was so excited that he would count the days between one episode and the next.¹⁶¹

The whole family gathered for dinner.

Filippo, Michele, their 16 years old sister Roberta, Mrs and Mr D’Antoni. They were all stuck side by side watching the show. Everybody liked Sandokan and for the occasion, Filippo’s mom used to cook the renowned “Sandokan pasta”, which simply was pasta with butter, parmesan and basil.

Filippo was very excited and happy, also because they had planned a trip to the countryside for the next day, which was Sunday.

^{xvi} “Sandokan”: it is an Italian tv series from the 70s.

La famiglia D'Antoni era alla ricerca del posto ideale per fare un picnic. Una consuetudine smentita solo dalle domeniche piovose o troppo fredde.

Filippo adorava la campagna e quello che più gli piaceva era fare da avanguardia al suo drappello di parenti e cercare i posti migliori dove farli accampare. Correva in avanti con suo fratello alle costole e lanciava bombe a mano, guardava la bussola e ogni tanto saltava in aria colpito dalle mine antiuomo.

-Domani dove andiamo a fare la gita? – domandò al padre.

-Domani andremo vicino Tuscania, risaliremo un torrente a valle e cercheremo le famose grotte dove vive l'orso laziale dai denti a sciabola.

Il padre di Filippo e Michele riusciva sempre a dare un tono epico alle loro gite fuori porta. La settimana prima erano stati a Tarquinia nella necropoli a cercare il fantasma del "lucumone", l'antico re degli Etruschi.

Entrò la madre di Filippo con una zuppiera tra le mani. La posò al centro della tavola.

Filippo si gettò sul cibo. Si riempì il piatto e se lo mise davanti.

-Aspetta Filippo! Servi prima gli altri. Io non capisco come mai sei così maleducato, - gli disse la madre sbuffando.

Filippo prese il piatto che aveva davanti e lo passò a suo fratello. Poi cominciò a prepararne un altro per la sorella.

-Papà. Papà. Abbiamo un regalo per te, - disse improvvisamente Michele con il boccone in bocca.

Il bambino si alzò e tornò poco dopo con il manico di scopa avvolto nella carta da pacchi. Si sedette.

-Tieni.

-Che cos'è? – fece il padre poco convinto. C'era il telegiornale.

-Apri.

Il signor D'Antoni strappò rapidamente la carta e tirò fuori il manico di scopa. Poi lo poggiò contro il muro e riprendendo a guardare la televisione disse: - È un bellissimo regalo ma ora mangia la pasta perché se no si raffredda. E poi non ti alzare da tavola.

-Guarda papà.

Michele scese di nuovo dalla sedia e corse dal padre.

-Ho detto di non alzarti da tavola. Cristo.

Michele afferrò con due mani il manico, lo portò sopra la testa, si alzò in punta di piedi e prese la mira.

The D'Antoni family was trying to find the perfect spot¹⁶² to have a picnic. This was a tradition denied¹⁶³ only by those Sundays that were too rainy or cold.

Filippo loved the countryside and what he liked the most was being in the frontline¹⁶⁴ before his posse¹⁶⁵ of relatives, to look for a place to set up camp. He would run forward, closely followed by his brother¹⁶⁶, throw hand grenades, check the compass and sometimes he would be blown up by antipersonnel landmines.

“Where are we going for our trip tomorrow?” he asked his dad.

“Tomorrow, we’ll be going near Tuscania. From the valley, we’ll go up following a stream¹⁶⁷ and we’ll look for the famous caves where the latium sabretooth bear /of latium lives.”

Michele and Filippo’s dad was always able to set an epic tone for their trips. The week prior they went to the necropolis in Tarquinia to look for the “lucumo” ghost, the ancient Etruscan king.

Filippo’s mother entered with a tureen in her hands. She placed it on the table.

Filippo flung himself¹⁶⁸ on the food. He filled his plate and placed it at his seat.

“Filippo, wait! Serve the others first. I can’t believe how you can be so impolite,¹⁶⁹” his mother said snorting.

Filippo picked up the plate in front of him and gave it to his brother. He then started to get one ready for his sister.

“Dad. Dad. We have a gift for you,” Michele suddenly said, with his mouth full.

The kid got up and came back a moment later with the stick enveloped in wrapping paper. He sat down.

“Here you go.”

“What is it?” said his father, a little confused¹⁷⁰. The news channel was on.

“Open it.”

Mr D'Antoni quickly tore the paper off and took out the broomstick. He then leaned it against the wall and as he turned back to the tv he said:

“It’s a very nice gift, but you should eat your pasta, or it’ll get cold. And don’t get up from the table.”

“Dad, look.”

Michele got down from the chair again and ran to his father.

“I said don’t get up from the table, for Christ’s sake¹⁷¹.”

Michele grabbed the stick with both hands, lifted it above his head, got on his toes and aimed.

E poi colpì.

-Guard... - la parola gli si ruppe in bocca.

Non colpì il televisore.

Era troppo lontano e Michele era troppo in basso. Colpì la tavola. Il manico della scopa come una mannaia si abbatté sul centro della tavola.

La zuppiera con la “pasta alla Sandokan” si aprì in due spargendo pasta sulla tovaglia. Il bicchiere di sua sorella Roberta schizzò in aria in mille pezzi. La bottiglia dell’olio rotolò fino al bordo del tavolo e precipitò sulla camicia del padre.

Ci fu un attimo di silenzio. Tutto sembrava essersi fermato nella stanza.

La signora D’Antoni a bocca aperta con la bottiglia di vino in mano. Il signor D’Antoni che si reggeva orripilato la camicia unta. Roberta D’Antoni che guardava i pezzi di bicchiere sparsi tra gli spaghetti.

-Micheleeeee! – urlò Mario D’Antoni.

-Michele sei il solito deficiente, - gli tagliò dietro Roberta.

-La mia zuppiera di Vietri, - si lamentò la signora Gabriella.

Filippo si mise le mani nei capelli.

È morto. Mio fratello è morto.

Si sentiva vagamente colpevole, mortificato, per quello che aveva fatto suo fratello. Lui non c’entrava niente se suo fratello era un cretino ma nonostante questo aveva dentro qualcosa di simile alla colpa.

È colpa mia. Gliel’ho detto io.

Michele fu il primo a riprendersi.

-Mamma! Mamma te la incollo io la zuppiera. Che ho fatto! – miagolò. Poi guardò meglio il disastro che aveva combinato e scoppiò a piangere.

Filippo si alzò e cominciò a raccogliere la pasta dal tavolo.

-Non mettere le mani lì! È pieno di vetri. Ti tagli, - gli urlò sua madre.

Michele continuava a piangere. Roberta dall’orrore era passata al riso che nascondeva con una mano davanti alla bocca.

-Smettila di frignare. Ma sei impazzito. Guarda che hai fatto, - fece il signor D’Antoni. Stava seduto al suo posto con un ghigno sulla bocca a metà tra il disperato e il furioso.

-Ma papà... - singhiozzava Michele.

-Guarda che mi ha fatto alla camicia. È da buttare. Gabriella non dirmi che non si può lavare.

-E che ti devo dire, Mario. Quella neanche in lavanderia...

And then he struck.

“Loo...” the word died in his mouth.

He did not hit the tv.

He was too far away, and he was too low. He hit the table. The broomstick crashed right onto the table like a cleaver.

The tureen containing the “sandokan pasta” split in half, and its content poured on the tablecloth. His sister Roberta’s glass blew up in a myriad of pieces. The oil bottle rolled to the edge of the table and landed on his father’s shirt.

For a moment, all was silent. Everything in the room seemed to be frozen in time.

Mrs D’Antoni was aghast¹⁷², holding a bottle of wine in her hands. Mr D’Antoni was holding his oily shirt with a horrified look on his face. Roberta D’Antoni was looking at the glass pieces scattered in her spaghetti.

“Micheleeeee!” shouted Mario D’Antoni.

“You’re such an idiot Michele, you never change¹⁷³,” brayed¹⁷⁴ Roberta.

“My Vietri tureen,” complained Mrs Gabriella.

Filippo put his hands in his hair.

He’s dead. My brother is dead.

He felt somewhat guilty and mortified for what his brother had done. He had nothing to do with his brother being an idiot, nonetheless he felt something similar to guilt inside.

It’s my fault. I told him to do it.

Michele was the first one to come back to his senses.

“Mom! I’ll fix the bowl. What have I done!” he meowed.¹⁷⁵ He then took a better look at the mess he had caused and burst into tears.

Filippo got up and started picking up the pasta from the table.

“Don’t put your hands in there! There’s broken glass everywhere. You’ll cut yourself.” His mother yelled at him.

Michele kept on crying. Roberta’s horror turned to laughter, which she covered with a hand on her mouth.¹⁷⁶

“Stop whining. Have you lost your mind? Look at this mess,” said Mr D’Antoni. He was sitting in his chair¹⁷⁷ with a half desperate, half furious sneer on his mouth.

“But, dad...” sobbed Michele.

“Look at what he’s done to my shirt. It’s garbage now.¹⁷⁸ Gabriella, tell me this can be washed.”¹⁷⁹

“What can I say, Mario. Even if we took it to the laundry...”

Filippo si avvicinò al fratello e cercò di consolarlo. Ma Michele aveva attaccato con uno di quei pianti diluviali che non terminavano mai.

-Dai Michi, smettila. È solo che hai sbagliato il colpo... Ma il telecomando è mitico.

Gli faceva pena suo fratello. Non ne combinava mai una buona. Aveva delle intuizioni geniali che finivano sempre in un guaio. E questo era proprio bello grosso.

-Io sono stanco. Non ce la faccio più. Lavoro come uno schiavo. Voi mi volete far morire...

Questi due mi faranno venire un infarto... Non imparano niente, - continuò affranto il signor D'Antoni.

Perché mi ci mette dentro sempre anche me quando si arrabbia con Michele? Io che cosa c'entro? Pensò Filippo. Voleva chiederglielo ma non era il caso. Era meglio farlo sfogare. Era meglio stare zitto e aspettare che la bufera passasse, che cacciasse fuori tutto il nero che aveva dentro, poi forse ci poteva parlare di nuovo.

Intanto alla televisione era incominciato *Sandokan*. Nessun sembrava farci caso.

Roberta e la madre sparecchiavano. Il padre continuava a strillare. Era una specie di ciclone che si autorigenerava.

-Papà guarda che Michele ti voleva fare un regalo, - balbettò timidamente Filippo.

Il signor D'Antoni si voltò e guardò il figlio con una smorfia ironica e cattiva. Sì, sembrava veramente cattivo.

-Ah, un regalo? È un regalo prendere a bastonate la tavola?

-No, papà, lui voleva solo cambiare canale. Il bastone può funzionare come un telecomando.

-Adesso basta. Stai zitto. Non voglio più sentirvi, - e poi rivolgendosi alla moglie: - Gabriella portami una camicia pulita.

-Ma io che c'entro?

-Sei grande. Non sei più un bambino. Ti devi occupare di tuo fratello. Se lui fa delle stupidaggini, tu devi dirgli di non farle. Hai capito?

-Ogni volta, alla fine, è colpa mia. È sempre colpa mia, - disse Filippo piangendo.

Il pianto era arrivato e con questo la rabbia. Rabbia verso suo padre che non capiva. Che ogni volta non capiva. Che ogni volta lo incolpava ingiustamente.

Perché?

Perché?

Sentì dentro una strana voglia. Una voglia perfida di riprendere il bastone e incominciare a menare colpi sul tavolo, sul televisore fino a farlo esplodere, su tutto. Ricacciò a forza le lacrime dentro.

Filippo got closer to his brother and tried consoling him. But Michele had started one of his endless apocalyptic cries.¹⁸⁰

“C’mon, Michi, stop it. It’s just that you missed the shot ... but the remote is incredible.”¹⁸¹

He pitied his brother. He never got one thing right. His ideas were ingenious, but they all ended in disasters. And this was a big one at that.

“I’m done. I can’t take this anymore. I slave away at work. You want me dead... These two will give me a stroke... They never learn,” said Mr D’Antoni, distraught.

Why is it that when he gets mad at Michele I get involved too? What do I have to do with this?

Thought Filippo. He wished to ask him that, but it was better not. It was best to let him vent. The best thing to do was to remain silent and wait for the storm to pass, wait for him to cool down¹⁸². After that, maybe, you could talk to him again.

Meanwhile, Sandokan was playing on the tv. Nobody seemed to care.¹⁸³

Roberta and his mother were clearing the table. His father kept on yelling. He was like a self-healing cyclone.

“Dad, Michele only wanted to give you a present, you know,” Filippo mumbled timidly.

Mr D’Antoni turned to him with an ironic and evil sneer. Yes, he looked very evil.

“Oh, a present? You call smashing the table with a stick a present?”

“No, dad, he just wanted to change the channel. The stick can work as a remote.”

“That’s it. Shut up. I don’t want to listen to you anymore,” then, he turned to his wife:

“Gabriella bring me a clean shirt”.

“What do I have to do with this? I didn’t do anything.” Continued Filippo. His felt his throat closing up and tears rising like an unstoppable tide. He was about to cry. He did not want to cry.

“I said, I don’t want to listen to you anymore. Go to your room.”

“What do I have to do with this?”

“You’re a grown up. You’re not a kid anymore. You need to take care of your brother. If he does something dumb, you tell him not to do it. Do you understand?”

“Every time, in the end, it’s my fault. It’s always my fault,” said Filippo, crying.

The tears came, and together with them, anger. Anger towards his uncomprehensive father, who never seemed to understand, who always blamed him unjustly.

Why?

Why?

Inside, he felt a strange desire. An evil desire to pick up the stick and to start hitting the table, the tv until it burst, everything. He forced himself to stop crying.

-Basta! Vai in camera tua! – urlò il signor D'Antoni. Si girò, alzò il volume della televisione e si mise a guardarla.

Filippo rimase un attimo così, volendo rispondere ma senza parole, senza sapere che fare. Afferrò la mano del fratello che ancora singhiozzava e lo portò in camera. Lo fece entrare.

-Stai qua! Torno subito, - gli disse.

Rifece il corridoio poi si affacciò nella sala da pranzo. Suo padre stava pelando una mela, come nulla fosse stato, e si guardava *Sandokan*. Anche Roberta.

-Volevo dirvi una cosa. Io domani in campagna non ci vengo, - disse Filippo ad alta voce.

Sua sorella sembrava quasi contenta di tutta quella storia. Sorrideva, la stronza.

La odiò.

-Che vuoi ancora? – disse il padre girandosi appena.

-Ho detto che domani io in campagna non ci vengo.

Filippo era sicuro che quello era un avvertimento terribile. Che i suoi si sarebbero rimangiati tutto, che si sarebbero scusati, che avrebbero detto che lui non c'entrava niente pur di averlo con loro in campagna.

-E chi se ne importa.

Filippo sentì qualcosa dentro spezzarsi. Un dolore terribile.

“E chi se ne importa”.

A suo padre non importava niente se lui c'era o non c'era in campagna. E così a sua sorella e a sua madre.

Uscì dalla sala da pranzo sbattendo la porta. Corse fino alla sua stanza. Ci si chiuse dentro.

Poggiò i piedi contro il muro e spinse il comò verso la porta.

Si era barricato.

Michele aveva smesso di piangere e stava sul letto a guardare il fratello.

-Che stai facendo? – gli chiese.

-Così non possono entrare.

Filippo si sedette accanto al fratello e lo guardò.

-Domani non ci andiamo in campagna. Va bene? Ce ne rimaniamo a casa. Io e te soli. Ci vadano loro in campagna. Tanto a me non me ne frega niente...

-Neanche a me, - concordò Michele. Filippo gli poggiò il braccio intorno al collo.

“That’s it! Go to your room!” Mr D’Antoni yelled. He turned around, turned up the tv volume and started watching it.

Filippo was dumbstruck¹⁸⁴ for a second, he wanted to answer but he was speechless, clueless on what to do. He grabbed his sobbing brother’s hand and took him to their room. He made him go inside.

“Stay here! I’ll be right back,” he said to him.

He walked down the hallway once again and peaked his head around the corner of the dining room. His father was peeling an apple while watching Sandokan, as if nothing had ever happened. Roberta too.

“I wanted to tell you something. Tomorrow, I won’t be coming to the countryside with you.” Said Filippo out loud.

His sister seemed to enjoy the whole situation. That bitch was smiling.

He hated her.

“What is it now?” said his father, barely turning.

“I said, I won’t be coming to the countryside tomorrow.”

Filippo was sure that this was a terrible warning, that his parents would take everything back, they would apologize, they would say he had nothing to do with this, all in order to have him with them in the countryside.

“Who cares”.

Filippo felt something break inside of him. An excruciating pain.

‘who cares’

His father did not care at all if he went with them or not. Same went for his sister and his mother.

He walked out of the dining room slamming the door, ran to his bedroom, locked himself in.

He placed his feet on the wall and pushed the dresser towards the door.

He barricaded himself.

Michele had stopped crying and sat on his bed looking at his brother.

“What are you doing?” he asked him.

“This way, they can’t get in”.

Filippo sat down next to his brother and looked at him.

“Tomorrow, we won’t be going to the countryside. Ok? We’ll stay at home. Just you and me. Let them go the countryside. I don’t care anyway...”

“Me neither,” agreed Michele. Filippo put his arm around his shoulders.

Forse non sarebbero nemmeno usciti dalla stanza. Lì dentro avevano tutto. Acqua, biscotti. Si sarebbero chiusi dentro per una settimana. Lui e suo fratello. Quella non era una stanza ma un bunker.

-Pippo, Pippo, io voglio vedere *Sandokan!*

La voce del fratello interruppe i suoi pensieri di vendetta.

-Che vuoi?

-Voglio vedere *Sandokan!*

-Non si può. Non si può andare di là. Loro ci odiano.

Filippo sapeva che certe cose suo fratello non le capiva. Si dimenticava subito degli schiaffi, delle punizioni ingiuste. In dieci minuti tutto ritornava normale.

-Se vuoi possiamo giocare con la pista, - gli disse infine.

Doveva distrarlo se no quello era capace di andare di là e distruggergli tutto il piano di isolamento.

-Va bene. Ma io voglio la Ferrari.

-D'accordo. Prendila.

Montarono la pista e giocarono un po'. Ma senza voglia.

A un tratto qualcuno provò a entrare.

-Filippo apri la porta.

Era sua madre.

-No, non apro. Andatevene via. Lasciateci in pace.

-Dài Pippo, apri.

-No, - disse Filippo.

-No, - disse Michele.

-Dài su. Lo sai com'è fatto tuo padre. Apri.

-Lui non mi vuole bene.

-Sì che ti vuole bene.

Filippo fu costretto a spostare il mobile e ad aprire. La madre entrò e fece infilare il pigiama a Michele e lo mise a letto. Filippo si accucciò sul suo e cercò di fare come se lei non ci fosse nella stanza.

-Forza, spogliati e non ti arrabbiare, - gli disse a un orecchio. Poi gli diede un bacio sul collo.

- Dài che domani ci dobbiamo alzare presto, - continuò.

- Io domani non ci vengo in campagna.

La madre finalmente uscì.

Maybe, they weren't even going out of the room. Everything they needed was in there. Water, biscuits. They would lock themselves in for a week. His brother and him. It was not a room, it was a bunker.

"Pippo, Pippo, I want to watch Sandokan!"

His brother's voice interrupted his thoughts of revenge.

"What is it?"

"I want to watch Sandokan!"

"We can't. We can't go back there. They hate us."

Filippo knew that his brother did not get some things. He would immediately forget the slaps he had received and the unfair punishments. Give him ten minutes, and everything was back to normal.

"If you wish, we can play with the track," he finally said to him.

He had to distract him, otherwise he could walk in the other room and ruin his isolation plan.

"Alright. But I want the Ferrari".

"Ok. Take it".

They assembled the track and played for a while. Without enthusiasm.

Suddenly, somebody tried to come in.

"Filippo, open the door."

It was their mom.

"No, I won't. Go away. Let us be."

"C'mon¹⁸⁵ Pippo, open up."

"No," said Filippo.

"No," said Michele.

"C'mon. You know your dad. Open up."

"He doesn't love me."

"Yes he does."

Filippo was forced to move the dresser and open the door. Their mother came in, made Michele put his pyjama on and put him to sleep. Filippo curled up¹⁸⁶ in his bed and pretended she wasn't in the room.

"Come on, undress, and don't be mad," she whispered into his ear. After that she kissed his neck. "Hurry up, we have to get up early tomorrow," she added.

"I won't be coming to the countryside tomorrow."

The mother finally walked out of the room.

Filippo sentiva il respiro pesante del fratello che dormiva. La bava di luce che filtrava dal corridoio sotto la porta si spense. I suoi stavano andando a dormire. La porta della loro camera si chiuse.

Ora tutto era immobile.

Solo il ronzio intermittente del frigorifero e il ticchettio della sua grossa sveglia con Paperino. Ripensò ancora una volta a suo padre, a come lo aveva incolpato ingiustamente, ai suoi occhi duri e piatti. Gli faceva paura in quei momenti e di più gli faceva paura il fatto che lui non riusciva a non abbassare il capo, a fare sempre quello che voleva suo padre. Si sentì indifeso. Indifeso come mai prima.

Guardò fuori e vide le grosse lampade al sodio dei lampioni spargere la loro luce opaca e gialla oltre le sbarre del balcone. Vide il grigio del cielo nuvoloso e vide suo fratello chiudersi meglio tra le coperte.

Si addormentò.

Era ancora presto quando il signor D'Antoni entrò nella loro stanza. Era già vestito.

-Forza, è ora. L'orso dai denti a sciabola ci sta aspettando, - disse con gioia. Accese la radio.

Musica italiana. – Forza dormiglioni. È ora di svegliarsi.

Michele scese dal letto stropicciandosi gli occhi pieni di sonno. Il signor D'Antoni lo afferrò con un braccio e lo sollevò. Era contento.

-Dài Michi, ora ci facciamo la doccia insieme.

Mentre usciva con Michele sotto braccio urlò:

-Filippo prendi la bussola e la borraccia che oggi il percorso è difficile!

Filippo non si mosse. Rimase così, con la faccia contro il muro.

Allora tutto è dimenticato. Tutto. Il colpo in mezzo al tavolo, la camicia, la zuppiera di Vietri.

Tutto è finito. Com'è possibile? Una notte di sonno e tutto è finito. Tutto cancellato, pensò.

E chi se ne importa.

No. Niente è cancellato. Non è giusto. Non è giusto.

Che cosa non è giusto?

Non è giusto incolpare chi non c'entra niente. Non è giusto dimenticare. Non è giusto che arrivi la mattina come se niente fosse successo. Come se non avessimo mai litigato. Come se tutto andasse bene.

Filippo si acciambellò di più e decise che lui in campagna non ci sarebbe andato. Lo potevano uccidere ma in campagna lui non ci andava né ora né mai più.

Si sentì forte.

Filippo could hear his sleeping brother's heavy breathing. The light of the hallway peeking under the door turned off.¹⁸⁷ His parents were going to sleep. Their bedroom door closed. Everything was still now.

There were only the buzzing of the fridge and the tick tacking of his big Donald Duck alarm. He thought once again about his father, about how he blamed him unjustly, about his stern and cold eyes. He frightened him in those moments, and what scared him even more was that he could not keep his head high¹⁸⁸, and he always did what his father wanted. He felt vulnerable. As he had never felt before.

He looked outside and saw the big sodium lamps of the streetlights shedding their yellow opaque light through the bars of the balcony. He saw the grey cloudy sky and saw his brother wrapping himself more tightly with the sheets.

He fell asleep.

It was still early when Mr D'Antoni came into their room. He was already dressed.

"C'mon, it's time to go! The sabretooth bear is waiting for us," he said gleefully. He turned the radio on. Italian music. "Come on sleepyheads. It's time to wake up."

Michele got out of the bed rubbing his sleepy eyes. Mr D'Antoni grabbed him with an arm and lifted him up. He was happy.

"C'mon Michi, we're going to shower together."

While he exited the room with Michele underarm, he shouted: "Filippo, grab the compass and the flask, the path is a tough one today!"

Filippo did not move. He remained still, face to the wall.

So, everything is forgotten. Everything. The blow on the table, the shirt, the Vietri tureen. Everything is over. How can that be? A night of rest and everything is over. All erased, he thought.

Who cares.

No. Nothing's erased. It's not fair. It's not fair.

What's not fair?

Blaming those who don't deserve it, that's unfair. Forgetting is unfair. It's unfair that morning comes as if nothing had ever happened. As if we had never argued. As if everything was fine.

Filippo curled up even more and decided that he would not go to the countryside. They could kill him, but he wasn't going to the countryside neither now nor ever.

He felt strong.

Provò a riaddormentarsi. Il fratello poco dopo rientrò avvolto nel suo accappatoio giallo.

Cominciò a vestirsi.

-Pippo, alzati. Papà è quasi pronto, - disse Michele mentre si infilava i pantaloni.

Allora anche suo fratello non ricordava più nulla. Era come tutti gli altri. Un infame. Come poteva andare in campagna? Lui si era beccato quella sgridata per aiutarlo. E Michele andava in campagna?

-Pippo ti alzi? È tardi.

-Vai via traditore. Non ti voglio più vedere, - disse Filippo senza nemmeno guardarlo,

Michele si infilò la camicia, si chiuse i bottoni e senza dire niente uscì dalla stanza.

Entrò sua madre. Si avvicinò al letto. Ci si sedette sopra.

-Mi ha detto tuo fratello che non vuoi venire in campagna. È vero?

-Certo che è vero.

-Dai Filippo alzati. Non fare il bambino, che è tardi.

-Non voglio venire. Lasciami in pace.

-Guarda che tuo padre ci rimane male se non vieni.

Come?! Mio padre ci rimane male? E io? E io non ci rimango male? Come mai il fatto che mio padre ci rimane male è molto più importante per te, mamma cara, del fatto che IO ci rimango male. Tu non ti rendi conto ma stai sbagliando. Sbagli da morire.

Tutto questo avrebbe voluto dirle, ma sentiva dentro un magone grosso che gli chiudeva la gola, lo stomaco che gli faceva male e di nuovo voglia di piangere.

-Vattene. Vattene. Voglio stare solo.

-Fai come ti pare. Lo senti tu tuo padre.

Anche la madre se ne andò. Ora doveva solo affrontare suo padre. Se lo vide davanti tutto nero con le orecchie a punta, i piedi grifagni, le mani dai lunghi artigli, sputare fuoco nella sua stanza, incenerirgli i poster, la macchina telecomandata.

-Ecco l'eroe. L'incorruttibile Filippo. Guarda che chi ci rimette a non venire sei solo tu, sei tu che rimani a casa da solo. E sai che noi...

Era sua sorella. Ora ci si metteva pure lei.

-Vaffanculo.

-Carino! Sei proprio un ragazzino educato!

In quei momenti la trovava insopportabile. Aveva un tono da "so tutto io". Arrogante e acida.

Finalmente se ne uscì dalla stanza.

He tried to sleep again. His brother came back after a while wrapped in his yellow bathrobe. He started getting dressed.

“Pippo, get up. Dad is almost ready,” said Michele as he was putting his trousers on.

So, his brother too had forgotten everything. He was like all the rest. A traitor¹⁸⁹. How could he go to the countryside? He was shouted at because he protected him.¹⁹⁰ And Michele would still go to the countryside?

“Pippo, are you going to get up? It’s late.”

“Go away, traitor. I don’t want to see you anymore.” Said Filippo without even looking at him.

Michele put his shirt on, buttoned it up and went out of the room without a word.

His mother came in. She went to his bed and sat on it.

“Your brother told me¹⁹¹ you don’t want to come to the countryside. Is that true?”

“Of course it is.”

“Come on Filippo, get up. Don’t be childish, it’s late.”

“I don’t want to come. Let me be.”

“Your father will be sad if you don’t come.”

What?! My father will be sad?¹⁹² How about me? Won’t I be sad? How is it that my dad being sad is more important than ME being sad, my dear mommy¹⁹³. You don’t realize it, but you’re wrong. You’re dead wrong.¹⁹⁴

He wanted to say all this to her, but he felt a big lump in his throat, his stomach was in pain and he felt the urge to cry again.

“Go away. Go away. I want to be alone.”

“Do as you like. You’re going to deal with your father by yourself.”

And his mother left too. Now, he only had to face his father. He imagined his dad in front of him, all black¹⁹⁵, with pointed ears, griffin¹⁹⁶ feet, long clawed hands, spitting fire in the room, incinerating his posters, his remote-controlled car.

“Here’s the hero. Filippo the unflinching. If you stay at home alone, you’re the only one losing out, you know. Must be boring...”

That was his sister. She came to rub it in too.¹⁹⁷

“Fuck you.”

“Nice!¹⁹⁸ You’re such a polite kid.”

He found she was insufferable¹⁹⁹ in moments like this. She had a “know-it-all” tone. Arrogant and bitter. Thank god she left the room.

Di là, in corridoio, stavano finendo di prendere le ultime cose: i panini, la borraccia, gli impermeabili nel caso piovesse, gli zaini. Filippo era ancora a letto, guardava il muro a pochi centimetri dalla sua faccia e ascoltava i rumori, le voci della sua famiglia. Si sentiva solo e deciso. Suo padre non gli aveva detto niente. Un po' ci aveva sperato ma lui non si era fatto vedere.

La porta di casa si aprì. Michele disse alla sorella di chiamare l'ascensore.

Suo padre portò fuori gli zaini.

-Allora, sei sicuro che non vuoi venire?

Era suo padre. Filippo non si mosse. Non si girò nemmeno.

-No. Non vengo.

-Sei sicuro?

-Sì.

-Fai come ti pare.

Sentì i passi di suo padre che usciva. La porta dell'ascensore che si apriva. Suo padre e sua madre che parlavano.

-Non vuole venire?

-No. Ha detto che vuole rimanere a casa.

-Non mi va di lasciarlo solo. Torneremo tardi.

-E che vuoi che succeda?

-Aspetta...

La signora D'Antoni rientrò, si avvicinò al figlio e lo girò dalla sua parte. Gli sorrise.

-Forza Filippo, vieni con noi.

-No mamma. Ho deciso. Voglio rimanere a casa.

-Ok. Se vuoi così. Provo a chiamarti da Tuscania. Fai il bravo e non uscire.

-Va bene mamma.

Si baciaronο, poi la madre uscì chiudendosi dietro la porta. Filippo ascoltò il rumore dell'ascensore che scendeva. Smontò dal letto, andò in corridoio. La porta era chiusa. Rientrò nella sua stanza. Si infilò le pantofole. Aprì la portafinestra che dava sul terrazzino. Uscì.

Sotto c'era la sua famiglia vicino alla macchina. Stavano caricando i bagagli. Michele alzò lo sguardo e lo vide. Sollevò un braccio e lo salutò. Filippo gli fece un segno. Poi tutti salirono, le porte si chiusero. Il rumore del motore che si avviava. La macchina partì.

Filippo rimase un altro po' a guardare la strada deserta e poi rientrò. La casa era silenziosa più della notte. Filippo fece un bel respiro e decise di andare a vedere la televisione.

Quella era la prima volta che rimaneva una domenica da solo.

In the hallway they were getting the final things ready: sandwiches, flask, waterproof coats in case of rain, backpacks. Filippo was still in his bed, staring at the wall a few centimeters from him and listening to the sounds, his family's voices. He felt alone and confident.²⁰⁰ His father didn't say anything to him. He hoped for it a bit, but he did not show up. The house door opened. Michele told his sister to call the elevator. His dad brought the backpacks out.

"So, are you sure you don't want to come?"

It was his dad. Filippo did not move. He did not even turn around.

"No. I'm not coming."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Suit yourself."²⁰¹

He heard his father's footsteps as he went out. The elevator door opening. His mother and father talking.

"He doesn't want to come?"

"No. He said he wants to stay at home."

"I don't like the idea of leaving him alone. We'll be back late."

"What's the worst that could happen?"

"Wait..."

Mrs D'Antoni went back in, approached her son and turned him to her. She smiled at him.

"C'mon Filippo, come with us."

"No, mom. I made up my mind. I want to stay home."

"Ok. If that's what you want. I'll give you a call from Tuscania. Be a good boy and don't go out."

"Ok, mom."

They kissed, after which his mom went out and closed the door behind her. Filippo listened to the sound of the elevator descending. He got down from the bed and went to the hallway. The door was locked.²⁰² He went back to his room and put on his slippers. He opened the glass door of the little terrace and went out. Below, his family was close to their car. They were loading the bags. Michele lifted his gaze and saw him. He raised an arm and waved at him. Filippo made a sign back. After that, they all got in and the doors closed. The noise of the engine starting. The car moved.

Filippo stood there looking at the deserted road for a bit and then went back in. The house was more silent than the night. Filippo took a deep breath and decided to go watch the tv. That was his first time being home alone on a Sunday.

2.

Motore 49cc, sei marce, raffreddamento ad acqua.

Freno anteriore a disco, freno posteriore a tamburo. Ammortizzatori idraulici. Velocità cinquanta chilometri orari.

Non è un motorino, è una bomba. Basta togliergli la membrana al carburatore e ti prende i settanta come niente.

Questo pensava Francesco, anni quattordici, mentre sfogliava una rivista di moto.

Stava seduto sul gabinetto.

Ci stava da almeno mezz'ora là sopra e il sedere cominciava a fargli male. Ma quel giornale lo rapiva. Non c'era niente da fare. Soprattutto le prove su strada. Ci si vedeva sopra quelle belve a due ruote a correre tra i birilli, a provare la ripresa da 0 a 100.

Quello voleva essere da grande: un collaudatore di motociclette.

-Oh, che ti è successo? Sei morto?

La voce di sua madre dietro la porta.

-Esco. Esco.

Francesco si alzò, si abbottonò i jeans, infilò la rivista nella tasca posteriore e uscì. Sua madre era in cucina. Stava preparando l'impasto per la pizza. Francesco prese un bicchiere di succo di pera dal frigo e le si sedette accanto.

-Mamma io esco.

-Dove vai?

-Mah, non lo so. Forse vado a cercare Enrico.

-Ah...

La madre continuava ad affaticarsi sulla pasta, a strizzarla e poi a distenderla con il mattarello. Ogni tanto ci aggiungeva un goccio d'acqua. Guardava l'impasto con un'espressione d'odio.

-Prepari la pizza?

-Sì, mi sta venendo uno schifo. È piena di grumi.

-Lo sai che i genitori di Enrico gli hanno regalato un'Aprilia GSW da cross?

Mentiva. Al suo amico Enrico avevano promesso di comprare un'Aprilia se, e quel "se" era grande come l'oceano, fosse stato promosso a giugno.

-Ah, che bello! – gli rispose la madre distratta.

-Sì, lui è contentissimo. E poi non costa molto.

-Quanto l'hanno pagata?

-Tre milioni e ottocentomila, chiavi in mano.

2.

49cc Engine, six-speed gearbox, water cooling.²⁰³

Front disc brake, back drum brake. Hydraulic shock absorbers. Speed 50 km/h.

This isn't a scooter²⁰⁴, this is a beast. All you need to do is remove the carburetor²⁰⁵ membrane and it can easily reach 70 km/h.

This was what Francesco thought, 14 years old, as he was flipping through the pages of a bike magazine. He was sitting on the toilet.

He had been sitting there for at least half an hour, and his butt was starting to hurt. But that magazine entranced him. He couldn't help it. Especially the test drives. He could see himself on top of those two-wheeled beasts²⁰⁶, running between the cones, trying the speed recovery²⁰⁷ from 0 to 100. That was what he wanted to be when he grew up: a motorbike tester.

"Hey, what happened to you? Are you dead?"

His mother's voice from behind the door.

"I'm coming. I'm coming."

Francesco got up, buttoned his jeans up, put the magazine in his back pocket and went out.

His mother was in the kitchen. She was preparing the pizza dough. Francesco poured himself a glass of pear juice from the fridge and sat down next to her.

"Mom, I'm going out."

"Where are you going?"

"Well, dunno.²⁰⁸ Maybe I'll go look for Enrico."

"Oh..."

His mother kept on straining herself²⁰⁹ on the dough, squeezing it and spreading it using the rolling pin. Every once in a while, she would add some water. She stared at the dough with a hateful expression.

"Are you making pizza?"

"Yes, but it's turning out horribly.²¹⁰ It's clumpy."

"Did you know that Enrico's parents have bought him a GSW Aprilia motocross bike²¹¹?"

He was lying. His friend Enrico was promised an Aprilia only if, and that "if" was as big as the ocean, he passed all the subjects in June.

"Oh, that's nice!" answered his mom, absent-mindedly.

"Yeah, he's very happy. It's not too expensive either."

"How much did they pay for it?"

“3 million and 800 thousand liras²¹², key-in-hand²¹³.”

-Ah. Allora sono ricchi i genitori del tuo amico.

La madre di Francesco finalmente finì. Prese la palla di pasta e l'avvolse in uno straccio bagnato. La poggiò sulla credenza. Tirò fuori dal frigo i fagiolini e cominciò a pulirli.

-Guarda che non è molto. Esistono degli scooter che costano più di quattro milioni, - continuò Francesco ostinatamente.

-Che fai, ricominci? - sbuffò sua madre.

Francesco crollò sulla sedia affranto.

-Dai ma', ti prego, comprami un motorino. Ti prego, Sto malissimo senza.

-Basta Francesco, sei petulante. Te l'ho detto: è no. Quando avrai sedici anni e sarai più grande te lo compreremo. Non ne possiamo parlare tutti i santi giorni...

Francesco rantolò sulla sedia. Allargò le gambe e prese un grande respiro. Si alzò.

-Vabbè, io esco.

-Torna prima di cena.

Francesco si mise la giacca a vento e i guanti. Fuori faceva freddo. Chiuse la porta di casa e scese le scale di corsa.

Due anni. Due anni non finiscono mai. Era l'unico a non avere ancora il motorino. Lui e quello sfigato di Enrico. Un soggetto, ecco quello che si sentiva.

Poi quando avrò sedici anni tutti i miei amici avranno il 125 e io avrò il 50. Perché il mondo è così ingiusto?

Uscì dal portone del condominio correndo, tirò fuori dalla tasca una chiave e aprì il lucchetto che teneva legata la sua mountain bike a un palo della luce. La guardò con disprezzo. Solo un anno prima era la cosa più bella che aveva, ma ora... era solo ferraglia fosforescente.

Ci montò sopra e cominciò a pedalare senza una meta precisa. Prese una stradina laterale tra due palazzoni in via di costruzione. Non c'era nessuno. Nessuno dei suoi amici. Decise di fare un po' di cross. Continuò per la stradina che presto perse l'asfalto. Camminava tra i ciottoli, con la bocca faceva il rumore di un motore a due tempi raffreddato ad acqua e ogni tanto sgommava immaginando di essere sopra un'Aprilia GSW.

Scese dalla bicicletta, se la caricò in spalla e si arrampicò su per una scoscesa sterrata.

Arrivato in cima la mise a terra. Davanti a lui si stendeva un campo abbandonato. Ai lati c'erano mucchi di mobili sfondati, televisori, reti e altra immondizia. In mezzo all'erba e all'ortica si intravedevano le impronte lasciate dalle moto da cross dei ragazzi più grandi. In fondo, in lontananza, ce n'erano tre seduti su una panchina sfondata.

“Oh. Then, your friend’s parents must be rich.”

Francesco’s mom was finally done. She picked up the dough ball and wrapped it in a damp cloth. She placed it on the cupboard. She took out the string beans from the fridge and started washing them.

“It’s not that much, you know. There are some scooters which cost more than 4 million,” insisted Francesco stubbornly.

“Are you starting with me again?”²¹⁴ grunted his mother.

Francesco collapsed²¹⁵ on the chair, distraught.

“Please ma’²¹⁶, buy me a scooter. I beg you. I need it really bad.²¹⁷”

“Stop it, Francesco, you’re being petulant. I told you: it’s a no. When you turn 16 and get older, we’ll buy it. We can’t be having this discussion every single day...”

Francesco wheezed²¹⁸ on the chair. He spread his legs, took a deep breath and got up.

“Fine²¹⁹, I’m leaving.”

“Be back before dinner.”

Francesco put on his wind breaker and his gloves. It was cold outside. He closed the front door and ran down the stairs.

Two years. Two endless years. He was the only one without a scooter. Him, and that loser Enrico. A character²²⁰, that’s what he felt like.

As soon as I turn 16, all my friends will have a 125cc, while I’ll have the 50. Why is the world so unfair?

He ran out of the apartment building door, took out a key from his pocket and opened the padlock which kept his mountain bike tied to a streetlight. He looked at it contemptuously. Just a year back, it was the most beautiful thing in his possession, but now... it was just flashy junk²²¹.

He mounted it and starting pedalling without a destination. He turned into a side road between two buildings under construction. Nobody was there. No one of his friends. He decided to go dirt biking²²². He kept on going along the path which soon lost its paving. He was walking on the pebbles, imitating the noise of a two-stroke water cooled engine, and sometimes he screeched with the bike, dreaming of riding an Aprilia GSW.

He got off the bike, put it on his shoulders, and climbed a steep unpaved path²²³. When he reached the top, he put it down. In front of him spread an abandoned court.²²⁴ On its sides there were piles of broken pieces of furniture, TVs, nets and other trash. Amidst the grass and

the nettle, you could make out the tracks left by the older guys' dirt bikes. At the end, in the distance, three of them were sitting on a crushed bench.

Fumavano e sicuramente parlavano delle loro moto. Sembravano cavalieri medievali seduti accanto ai loro fidi stalloni.

Sarebbe stato il massimo starsene così, con loro, seduto tranquillo a chiacchierare, con la propria moto davanti.

Rimontò in sella. Si lanciò a tutta velocità lungo la pista di fango stando attento a non finire con le ruote della bicicletta nei solchi lasciati dagli pneumatici. Fece un paio di salti ma senza soddisfazione.

Un rumore meccanico scosse improvvisamente il silenzio. Lo strillo acuto di un motore al massimo dei giri. Una motocicletta gli stava venendo incontro a palla, saltando sulle cunette e riempiendo l'aria di un gas bianco e puzzolente. Francesco si buttò di lato e quasi finì lungo, steso nel fango. Il centauro gli passò accanto a pochi centimetri. Gli urlò: -Levati da là con quella bicicletta, cretino!

Poi scomparve oltre una duna. Francesco si girò su sé stesso e spingendo la bicicletta si avviò verso il bordo del campo. Tornò sulla strada. Attraversò una grande arteria trafficata fino alla sala giochi. C'era poca gente e nessuno dei suoi amici. Solo un paio di ragazzi che conosceva appena. Fece un po' di giri con la Formula Uno e riuscì.

Probabilmente i suoi amici erano andati in centro.

Che palle!

Si fermò all'officina di Romano. Davanti, schierati in fila, diversi motorini, alcune moto di grossa cilindrata e un paio di moto da cross.

Francesco mollò la bicicletta su un palo e si mise a osservare i motori, le forcelle. Vicino a una Kawasaki lavorava un giovane, sui sedici, con un codino, un lungo naso aquilino e gli occhiali. Indossava una tuta blu sporca di grasso, gli scarponi scuri e su una guancia aveva una strisciata nera. Stava aprendo la testa del motore e infilando le guarnizioni.

-Ciao Marco! – gli disse Francesco sedendosi sopra un piccolo sgabello di legno.

-Ciao Fra. Sei venuto a rifarti gli occhi? – fece il giovane sorridendo. Aveva un bel sorriso rovinato da un incisivo mancante.

-Mah, passavo di qua.

-Allora che vuoi fare con quel gioiellino? Guarda che se la portano via se non ti spicci.

-Non lo so. Non sono più tanto sicuro che mi piaccia. Forse mi dovrei prendere un KTM, è più compresso.

-Fai come ti pare. Ma una moto così robusta e con un assetto come quello non la trovi. Te lo dice Marco che di moto ne capisce.

They were smoking, and surely, they were talking about their bikes. They resembled medieval knights sitting beside their trusted stallions.

It would have been great being like that, chilling and sitting with them, talking, with your own bike in front of you.

He got back on his saddle.²²⁵ He then shot at full speed along the muddy path, paying attention not to get the bike wheels stuck in the tracks left by the tires. He performed a couple of jumps, without satisfaction.

A mechanical noise suddenly broke the silence. A shrill shriek of an engine revved-up to the max²²⁶. A motorbike was coming towards him at full speed, jumping on the bumps and filling the air with a white and smelly gas. Francesco threw himself to the side and he almost landed flat²²⁷, sprawled in the mud. The biker²²⁸ passed a few centimeters from him. He yelled at him: “Get out of here with that bike, moron²²⁹!” To then disappear behind a dune. Francesco turned around and headed towards the edge of the court, pushing the bike. He went back on the road. He crossed a big busy road and went to the arcade. Only a few people were there, and none of his friends. Just a couple of guys whom he barely knew. He drove a little²³⁰ with the Formula 1 and went back out.

His friends had probably gone to the town center.²³¹

*This sucks!*²³²

He stopped by Romano’s garage. In the front, there were various scooters, some heavy motorbikes²³³ and a couple of dirt bikes, all aligned.

Francesco dropped the bike off on a pole²³⁴ and started looking at the engines and the forks. A young boy, 16 years old, with a ponytail, an aquiline nose and glasses was working close to a Kawasaki. He was wearing a blue coveralls dirty with grease, dark boots and he had a black smear²³⁵ on a cheek. He was opening the engine head and putting in²³⁶ the gaskets²³⁷.

“Hi, Marco!” Said Francesco to him as he sat on a small wooden stool.

“Hi Fra. Have you come to take in the view²³⁸?” Said the boy, smiling. He had a nice smile, ruined by a missing front tooth.

“Well, I was passing by.”

“So, what are you going to do with that gem? If you don’t hurry up²³⁹, they’ll snatch it away.”

“I don’t know. I’m not too sure I like it anymore. Maybe I should buy a KTM, it’s more compact.”²⁴⁰

“Suit yourself. Still, you won’t find a bike this sturdy and with that framework. Take it from Marco, who knows a thing or two²⁴¹ about bikes.”

-Tu dici... - fece Francesco riflettendo.

Stimava molto Marco. Lo aveva visto un paio di volte correre sul campetto. Farsi più di duecento metri su una ruota sola. La sapeva portare la moto.

Tirò fuori da una tasca della giacca a vento un pacchetto di gomme.

-Vuoi una?

-No grazie.

Francesco rimase ancora un po’ a guardare Marco lavorare. Poi si alzò, si tirò su i jeans ed entrò nell’officina.

All’interno era buio. Solo un lungo neon scaricato rischiara un po’ l’ambiente. Su un lato un grosso bancone pieno di attrezzi e una vecchia radio che suonava musica leggera. Al centro della stanza, smontata in mille pezzi, troneggiava una Harley-Davidson gigantesca. Era coperta di borchie argentate e cuoio nero. Sul serbatoio era disegnata una donna nuda che si trasformava in una torcia.

Da un gabbiotto di vetro adibito a ufficio uscì un uomo grasso e pelato. Sopra il naso rotondo poggiava un paio di occhiali a tartaruga. Le lenti spessissime gli trasformavano gli occhi in due puntini neri. Indossava la tuta da lavoro.

-Ciao Romano.

-Ciao Francesco. Hai visto che bestiaccia? – disse il meccanico indicando la Harley.

-Questa è una mille e tre...

I due si conoscevano bene. Da mesi Francesco era un frequentatore assiduo dell’officina.

-Boh, credo di sì.

-Senti posso vederla... - chiese d’un fiato il ragazzo.

-Vai, vai. Tranquillo.

Romano uscì dall’officina e Francesco rimase solo. Si avvicinò a un angolo. Accanto a un mucchio di pneumatici usati c’era una moto coperta da una vecchia trapunta di lana marrone.

La scoprì.

Eccola. La sua moto.

Diventava ogni giorno più bella.

La sua Aprilia GSW.

Con quei parafranghi viola, il serbatoio metà rosso e metà viola. Con quei giganteschi ammortizzatori, con le molle dure e grosse. Il faro piccolo e giallo. Le frecce snodabili. Per

non parlare delle ruote con quei tasselli che sembravano dei Baci Perugina. Veniva voglia di masticarli. Era alta e affidabile. Era semplicemente il massimo.

“You think so...” said Francesco, reflecting.

He thought very highly²⁴² of Marco. He had seen him ride in the court²⁴³ more than once. He saw him ride for more than 200 meters on one wheel. He knew how to handle a bike.²⁴⁴

From his windbreaker he took out a chewing gum pack.

“Do you want one?”

“No, thanks.”

Francesco remained to watch Marco at work a bit longer. After that, he got up, pulled up his jeans and went into the garage.

Inside was dark. Only a long, discharged neon²⁴⁵ lit the place a little. On one side there was a big table²⁴⁶ chock full of tools and an old radio playing light music. In the middle of the room towered a humongous Harley-Davidson, disassembled into a thousand pieces. It was all studded and covered in black leather. On the tank, there was the drawing of a naked woman morphing into a torch.

From a glass bullpen²⁴⁷, which was used as an office, came a fat and bald man. On his round nose a pair of tortoise glasses were placed. His eyes looked like two black dots through the extra thick lenses. He was wearing a coverall.

“Hi Romano.”

“Hi Francesco. Have you seen this monster?” said the mechanic pointing at the Harley.

“This is one of those a thousand and three cc²⁴⁸...”

The two of them knew each other well. Francesco had been a regular visitor of the garage for a few months.

“Dunno²⁴⁹, I think so.”

“Listen, can I see it...” said the boy in one breath.

“Sure. Don’t worry.”

Romano went out of the garage and Francesco remained alone. He got close to a corner. Close to a bunch of used tires there was a bike covered by an old brown quilt.

He uncovered it.

There she was. His bike.

She got more beautiful with each day.

His Aprilia GSW.

With those purple mudguards, the half red half purple tank. Those huge shock absorbers, with thick and tough springs. The small and yellow headlight. The articulated²⁵⁰ turn signals. Not to mention the tires, with those knobbles resembling Baci Perugina²⁵¹ chocolates. You were tempted to chew them. It was tall and trustworthy. It was simply the best.²⁵²

-Lo sai chi la vuole comprare? Quel ragazzo... come si chiama? Quello che lavora al bar *La Palma*.

-Veramente?

Il peggiore dei suoi incubi si era avverato.

Se la sarebbe comprata un altro. Odiò il garzone del bar *La Palma*. Lo conosceva. Bruno Martucci detto "il Pagnotta". Francesco ignorava l'origine di quel soprannome. Se lo ricordava bene però. Brutto. Una specie di torello brufoloso, con la fronte bassa e sempre sudato. Uno di quelli che menano, che non ti lascia dire una parola e già ti ha massacrato di botte. Se lo vide davanti, sulla sua moto, a fare il coglione su e giù per il campetto. A fare le pinne.

Un incubo. Il peggiore della sua vita.

Nooo, mormorò tra sé Francesco in preda alla disperazione.

-Gli ho detto che poteva prenderla ma prima dovevo chiedere a te che cosa volevi fare. Ci sei prima tu. Allora la vuoi?

-Sì... Sì, la voglio io, - disse Francesco sconsolato.

-E i tuoi?

Francesco si girò di nuovo verso l'Aprilia. Si emozionò a vedere il luccichio metallico della marmitta a espansione. Tornò a guardare il meccanico.

-Hanno detto che me la comprano.

-Sei sicuro?

-Certo che me la comprano.

-Quando?

-Anche domani.

Romano sembrava dubbioso.

-Che è non mi credi? – fece Francesco spavaldo.

-No. No. Ti credo. Ti credo.

Qual era il piano di Francesco? Nemmeno lui lo sapeva con esattezza. Nulla gli era chiaro in quel momento. L'unica possibilità che intravedeva era quella di tornare a casa e attaccare un pianto greco fino a che i suoi, stremati, non gli avessero detto di sì.

Sì, sì e sì.

Cosa avrebbe potuto promettergli?

“You know who wants to buy it? That guy... what’s his name? The one working as an assistant²⁵³ at the *La Palma* bar.”

“Really?”

His worst nightmare had come to life.

Someone else was going to buy it. He hated the assistant of the *La Palma* bar. He knew him. Bruno Martucci, a.k.a. “il Pagnotta”. Francesco ignored the source of the nickname. He remembered him well though. Ugly. He was like a dimply bull, with a low set forehead and always sweaty. One of the violent kind²⁵⁴, one who won’t let you say even a word before beating you to a pulp²⁵⁵. He imagined him in front of him, on his bike, dicking around²⁵⁶ all over the court. Popping wheelies²⁵⁷.

A nightmare. The worst one of his life.

Nooo, mumbled Francesco to himself in despair.

“I told him he could have it, but first of all, I had to ask you what you wanted to do with it. You came first. So, do you want it?”

“Yes... Yes, I want it,” said Francesco, sorrowfully.

“What about your parents?”

Francesco turned towards the Aprilia once more. Seeing the shine of expansion muffler made him emotional²⁵⁸. He turned back to the mechanic.

“They said they’ll buy it.”

“Are you sure?”

“They’ll buy it for sure.”

“When?”

“Even tomorrow.”

Romano looked doubtful.

“What is it? You don’t believe me?” said Francesco in a smug²⁵⁹ way.

“No. No. I believe you. I believe you.”

What was Francesco’s big idea?²⁶⁰ He wasn’t even sure of it himself. He was sure of nothing in that moment. The only possibility he could think of was to go back home, start whining with his parents²⁶¹, annoying them until they said yes.

Yes, yes and yes.

What could he promise them back?

Che nella prossima pagella ci sarebbero stati solo sette e otto, che avrebbe portato Pinto, il loro cane, tutte le sere a far pipì ai giardinetti, che avrebbe preparato la colazione per i prossimi cinque anni a tutta la famiglia, che avrebbe rifatto ogni giorno il suo letto e anche quello di sua sorella, che non avrebbe mai più detto una parolaccia in vita sua.

Tutto. Tutto. Avrebbe fatto tutto. Ma mai la sua Aprilia a Bruno Martucci. Questo no, questo no.

Ora la cosa che devo fare è portarla via da lì. Levarla dalle grinfie di quel bastardo del Pagnotta...

La porto a casa poi la faccio vedere a mio padre. Gli spiegherò tutte le caratteristiche tecniche. Lo convincerò.

Sì, era l'unica strada.

-Romano, l'unica cosa è che mio padre la vuole provare. Lui è uno di quelli che non si fida. Gli ho detto che è perfetta e che ha fatto appena duecento chilometri, - disse in un fiato, cercando di essere il più deciso possibile.

Il meccanico intanto aveva preso a rimontare il motore della Harley.

-Non c'è problema. Basta che venga qui prima delle sei e mezza e la può provare come gli pare.

-Sì ma lui torna da lavoro verso le sette, sette e mezza.

-Mi passi quel pezzo, per favore? – disse Romano indicandogli un grosso ingranaggio cromato. Francesco lo prese da terra e lo passò al meccanico.

-Grazie. Allora digli che può venire domani. Noi siamo aperti tutto il giorno. Tu lo sai, no? Francesco parve riflettere. Si aggirò indeciso per l'officina, si avvicinò al meccanico fingendo di essere interessato al lavoro. Poi, facendosi forza, disse tranquillo:

-Forse la cosa migliore è che gliela porto io a far vedere questa sera. Poi la chiudo nel garage con la macchina di mio padre e domani vengo con mia madre e te la paghiamo...

Ce l'ho fatta. Sono riuscito a dirlo.

Romano sembrava non aver udito le parole del ragazzo. Continuava a lavorare come nulla fosse. Francesco aspettava impaziente. Non ce la fece più.

-E allora che ne dici?

Non lo vedeva in faccia. Romano era piegato sopra quel mastodonte di motocicletta.

-Ci sto pensando, - disse dopo trenta secondi che sembravano due secoli.

-Guarda che non ti devi preoccupare. È tutto a posto. Ti lascio qui la mia bicicletta.

That his next report card would only show sevens and eights²⁶², that he would take their dog Pinto out peeing at the park every night, that he would make breakfast for his whole family for the next 5 years, that he would make both his and his sister's bed, that he would never swear again in his life.

Everything. Everything. He would do everything. But giving his Aprilia to Bruno Martucci, never. Never, never.²⁶³

All I have to do now is take it away from there. Snatch it from that bastard Pagnotta's clutches²⁶⁴ ...

I'll bring it home and show it to my dad. I'll explain him all the technical characteristics. I'll convince him.

Yes, it was the only way.

“Romano, thing is, my dad wants to try it. He is one of those who needs proof.²⁶⁵ I told him that it's perfect and that it had barely run 200km,” he said that in one go, trying to be as resolute possible.

In the meantime, the mechanic had started re-assembling the engine of the Harley.

“No problem. All he needs to do is come here before 6 30pm, and he'll get to try it as much as he likes.”

“Yeah, but he comes back home from work at 7, 7 30pm.”

“Can you hand me that part, please?” said Romano pointing to a big chromed gear.

Francesco took it from the ground and gave it to the mechanic.

“Thank you. Then, you can tell him to come tomorrow. We're open all day. You know it, don't you?”

Francesco seemed to be reflecting. He wandered indecisive in the garage and approached the mechanic, feigning interest in his job. After that, he mustered some courage²⁶⁶ and calmly said: “Maybe it's best if I take it and show it to him tonight. After that I'll lock it in the garage together with my dad's car and tomorrow I'll come here with my mom and pay for it...”

I made it. I managed to say it.

It seemed as if Romano hadn't heard the boy's words. He kept on working as nothing had happened.

Francesco was waiting eagerly.²⁶⁷ He couldn't take it any longer.

“So, what do you say?”

He couldn't see his face. Romano was bent on that gigantic²⁶⁸ bike.

“I’m thinking about it,” he said after thirty seconds, which felt as long as two centuries.

“There’s no need to worry, you know. It’s alright. I’ll leave my bike here.”

Il meccanico si girò su sé stesso e lo scrutò a lungo con i suoi piccoli occhi da marmotta. Poi disse poco convinto:

-Ma tu la sai guidare la moto?

-Tranquillo Romano. Non c’è problema. Io al mare ho un Benelli a marce. Lo guido sempre.

-Vabbè prendila. Ma sta’ attento che se caschi e la rovini paghi tutto tu.

-Tranquillo.

Ce l’ho fatta. È mia. E vai così.

Romano si alzò e si stiracchiò. Sembrava un tricheco.

-Forza tiriamola fuori questa belva, - disse.

Francesco sentiva l’emozione corrergli sui nervi e il cuore pompargli adrenalina nelle vene.

La portarono alla luce del sole. Era ancora più bella. Ora doveva solo convincere i suoi genitori. Uno scherzo da niente.

-Allora ti sei deciso a prenderla, - gli fece Marco.

Francesco fece segno di sì con la testa. Non riusciva a parlare.

-Aspetta che te la pulisco, c’è un po’ di polvere.

-Non importa. Non importa.

Voleva solo andarsene. Portare a casa la moto e prepararsi per il ritorno di suo padre.

La afferrò per il manubrio. Era enorme. Gli tremavano un po’ le gambe ma faceva di tutto per non mostrarlo. Anche la saliva era azzerata. Ci montò sopra. La moto si abbassò sotto il suo peso ma era ancora altissima e Francesco toccava appena con la punta dei piedi.

-Come ti ci trovi? – chiese Marco. Lo guardava sorridendo e intanto si puliva le mani sporche su uno straccio. Francesco decise che gli era proprio simpatico quel ragazzo.

-Bene, - gli rispose sorridendogli a sua volta.

Provò ad accenderla con una mossa acrobatica della gamba ma con scarso successo. I suoi colpi erano deboli. Doveva prenderci la mano. Provò un’altra volta. Nulla da fare. Si guardò in giro smarrito.

-Se non giri la chiave puoi restare là tutta la notte, - gli fece Romano appoggiato all’ingresso dell’officina. Aveva l’aria sempre più dubbiosa.

Cretino. Idiota che non sono altro. Quello adesso ci ripensa. Girò la chiavetta di accensione.

Una spia verde si illuminò. Francesco affondò con tutta la forza sulla leva di accensione.

Preciso.

Strook.

La moto, come per magia, si accese con un borbottio metallico.

The mechanic turned around and studied him for a while with his marmot's eyes. Then, he replied, unconvinced:

“Do you even know how to drive the bike?”

“Don't worry, Romano. There's no problem. I have a geared Benelli²⁶⁹ at my sea house²⁷⁰. I drive it all the time.”

“Ok, take it. But beware, if you fall and damage it²⁷¹, you're going to pay it in full.”

“Don't worry.”

I made it. It's mine. Let's go.

Romano stood up and stretched. He looked like a walrus.²⁷²

“C'mon, let's bring this beast out.” he said.

Francesco felt the excitement running through his nerves and his heart pumping adrenaline in his veins. They brought it out under the sunlight. It was even more beautiful. All he had to do now was convince his parents. Child's play.²⁷³

“So, you finally decided to buy it.” Said Marco to him.

Francesco nodded yes. He couldn't speak.

“Wait, let me clean it, there's some dust.”

“It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.”

He only wanted to leave²⁷⁴, take the bike home and get ready for his dad to come back.

He grabbed it by the handlebar. It was huge. His legs were shaking a bit, but he tried his best not to show it. His saliva was also non-existent. He mounted on it. The bike lowered with his weight, but it was still very tall and Francesco could barely place his tiptoes on the ground.

“How does it feel?” asked Marco. He looked at him with a smile, while cleaning his dirty hands with a rag. Francesco decided that he really liked that guy.

“Good.” He replied, smiling back.

He tried to turn it on with an acrobatic move of his leg, but unsuccessfully. His blows were weak. He needed to get the hang of it.²⁷⁵ He tried once more. Still nothing. He looked around, at a loss.

“If you don't turn the key, you can try all night,” said Romano, leaning on the garage entrance. He looked more doubtful by the second.²⁷⁶

Dumbass²⁷⁷. I'm such an idiot. He's going to reconsider now. He turned to key. A green light turned on. Francesco sunk on the ignition lever with all his strength. Neat.

Strook.

The bike turned on with a metallic mumble, as if by magic.

Fantastico.

-Allora... buon viaggio. Stai attento, - gli disse ancora Marco.

E ora veniva il difficile. Francesco in vita sua aveva guidato tre volte un motorino. Una volta un Ciao e due una vespa con risultati molto mediocri. Aveva però letto bene *Il grande libro della moto* in cui al terzo capitolo erano spiegate dettagliatamente tutte le istruzioni necessarie per guidarla. In cuor suo non era più tanto sicuro che quel breve apprendistato gli fosse ora sufficiente.

Si ripeté mentalmente le regole.

Uno: tirare la leva della frizione. Lo fece.

Due: abbassare, in modo da inserire la prima, la leva del cambio. Lo fece.

Tre: lasciare dolcemente la leva della frizione. Lo fece.

La moto partì a razzo sulla strada impennandosi su una ruota sola. Proseguì così per una decina di metri poi crollò vicino a un camion del latte fermo al lato della strada. Lo schivò per miracolo. Francesco proseguì, in prima, con il motore che gli urlava sotto il culo fino a quando si ricordò il punto quattro: *mettere la seconda.*

In qualche modo riuscì a inserirla ma avendo lasciato la manopola del gas la motocicletta prese ad andare avanti a saltelli singhiozzanti. Sentì appena Marco che gli strillava dietro:

-Attento all'autobus!

Si girò e vide davanti a sé un muro arancione fatto di lamiera e vetro che gli veniva incontro urlando come un bufalo scatenato. Si piegò da una parte e lo lisciò per pochi millimetri.

S'infilò finalmente nel flusso di macchine che andava nella sua direzione e si allontanò.

Fu un ritorno veramente impegnativo e Francesco sudò moltissimo. La moto gli si spense un numero imprecisato di volte. Dopo mezz'ora era più o meno in grado di cambiare, di frenare e di girare il manubrio.

Era soddisfatto.

Mancava ancora un po' di tempo al ritorno di suo padre. Decise di fare un salto a trovare i suoi amici. A fargliela vedere. Probabilmente erano tutti al campetto.

Ci si sentiva maledettamente bene su quella moto. Si guardava nello specchietto e si trovava più bello, più grande, più paraculo.

Ce la posso fare. Papà in fondo le ama le moto. Quando era giovane aveva un Guzzi Falcone, me lo racconta ogni volta. Lo convincerò. Lo convincerò.

Si, ce la poteva fare ma dentro sentiva un po' d'ansia compressa, nascosta tra le pieghe dello stomaco. Anche il respiro gli si era accorciato. Aveva osato troppo?

*Amazing.*²⁷⁸

“Well then... have a nice trip. Be careful,” said Marco again.

Now came the hard part. In all his life, Marco had driven a scooter three times. Once a Ciao²⁷⁹, twice a vespa, all with mediocre outcomes. However, he had carefully read *The big motorbike book*, whose third chapter contained all the detailed instructions that you needed to drive it. In his heart of hearts, he wasn't too sure that that short training was enough in that moment.

He mentally went through the rules.

One: pull the clutch lever. He did that.

Two: lower the gear handle, to insert the first. He did that.

Three: gently release the clutch lever. He did that.

The bike shot away on the road on one wheel. He went on like that for ten meters before collapsing next to a milk truck parked on the side of the road. He dodged it by some miracle. Francesco kept on going forward, in first, while the engine was screaming under his butt, until he remembered step four: *put in second.*

Somehow, he managed to insert it, but since he had left the acceleration handle, the bike started hiccupping forward. He barely heard Marco, who yelled from behind:

“Watch out for the bus!”

He turned and saw an orange wall in front of him made of steel and glass coming towards him, screaming like a raging bull. He leaned on one side and avoided it by a few millimeters.²⁸⁰ Finally, he merged into the car flow which headed in his direction and proceeded forward.

The way back was very challenging, and Francesco sweated a lot. The bike died on him more times than he could count.²⁸¹ Half an hour later, he was more or less able to shift gears, brake and turn the handlebar.

He was satisfied.

There was some time before his dad came home. He decided to swing by²⁸² his friends, to show them the bike. They probably were all at the park.

He felt so damn good on that bike. He would look in the rear-view mirror and see himself as more attractive, more adult, and more of a smartass.²⁸³

I can do this. After all, dad loves bikes. When he was younger, he had a Guzzi Falcone and he keeps telling me that. I will convince him. I will convince him.

Yes, he could make it, but inside, he felt some compressed anxiety, hidden in the folds of the stomach. His breath got shorter too. Had he dared too much?

No, non ho osato troppo per niente.

Fece due grossi respiri poi girò l'acceleratore portando la moto su di giri.

È proprio una ficata 'sta moto.

Entrò nel campetto come se fosse la cosa più normale del mondo che lui stesse a cavallo di una moto.

Sciolto. Rilassato.

I suoi amici erano là, seduti sulla solita panchina. Lo videro. Francesco fece un saluto con la mano e poi avanzò piano.

Mi stanno guardando tutti.

Scese dalla moto, la mise sul cavalletto.

-Ti sei comprato la moto? Non è possibile! – gli disse incredulo Enrico, un ragazzo alto e magro come un chiodo con delle grosse scarpe da ginnastica nere ai piedi. Era stupito.

-Sì, oggi. Ti piace?

(Bugia. Bugia gratis).

-Francesco, è pazzesca! – continuava a ripetere Enrico.

-Lo so, lo so.

Tutti, anche le ragazze, ci giravano intorno e Francesco si sentiva bene. I commenti si sprecavano.

-È bellissima!

-Non è troppo alta?

-Mi piace la forma della sella e i colori del serbatoio.

Un rumore potente ruppe la conversazione, di motori a quattro tempi. Poi sbucarono da sopra la collina i più grandi, sulle loro moto. Erano quattro. Girarono intorno a Francesco e gli altri.

Il loro capo, Piero, un giovane con i capelli cortissimi biondi e gli occhiali da mosca gettò a terra il mozzicone che aveva tra le labbra. Lo pestò.

-È tua? – fece a Francesco guardandolo torvo. Era la prima volta che gli rivolgeva la parola. A Francesco prese a battere forte il cuore.

-Sì.

Piero fece ancora un paio di giri intorno alla moto. I ragazzini lo guardavano.

-Bella!

-Grazie.

Enrico diede a Francesco una pacca sulle spalle. Aveva passato l'esame. Incominciava a imbrunire e decise che era il momento di tornare a casa. Probabilmente suo padre era già rientrato. Montò sulla moto e l'accese al primo colpo.

No, I did not dare too much at all.

He took two deep breaths and turned the accelerator handle, revving up the bike.

This bike is so cool.

He went to the park acting as if his being on a bike was the most normal thing in the world.

Chill. Relaxed.

His friends were there, sitting on the usual bench. They saw him. Francesco waved with his hand and drove slowly.

Everyone's looking at me.

He dismounted from the bike and placed it on the kickstand.

“You bought the bike? No way!” said Enrico in disbelief. He was tall and lean as a rail²⁸⁴, big black sneakers at his feet. He was astonished.

“Yes, today. Do you like it?”

(Lie. Gratuitous lie.)²⁸⁵

“Francesco, it's incredible!” Enrico kept on repeating.

“I know, I know.”

Everybody was circling around the bike²⁸⁶, even the girls, and Francesco felt good. Comments were overflowing.²⁸⁷

“It's awesome!”

“Isn't it too tall?”

“I like the shape of the seat and the tank colors.”

A loud noise of four timed engines stopped the conversation. Then, the older guys appeared from behind the hill on their bikes. They were four. They circled around Francesco and the others.²⁸⁸ Their leader, Piero, a boy with very short blonde hair and big lensed glasses²⁸⁹, threw the cigarette butt he had in his mouth on the ground. He stomped on it.

“Is it yours?” he asked Francesco, scowling at him. This was the first time he had ever talked to him. Francesco's heart started beating fast.

“Yes.”

Piero went around the bike a couple more times. The younger kids were looking at him.

“Nice!”

“Thanks.”

Enrico slapped²⁹⁰ Francesco's shoulders. He passed the test. The sky was darkening and so he decided it was time to go home. His father had probably come back. He hopped on²⁹¹ the bike and turned it on first try.

Piero e i suoi amici si erano seduti e fumavano. Lo guardavano. A un tratto Danilo, un ciccione, seduto alla destra di Piero, pelato e con una maglietta nera dei Metallica, si alzò in piedi. Si avvicinò a Francesco e poi guardando i suoi amici disse ridendo:

-Ma questa non è la moto che si voleva comprare il Pagnotta?

Tutti si sganasciarono dalle risate.

Che cazzo c'è di tanto divertente? Che cazzo vi ridete?

Mise la marcia. Con la coda dell'occhio vide che anche Piero era rimontato sulla moto. Gli si fece accanto rombando.

-Allora vieni a farti una corsetta?

-No... No, grazie.

-Hai problemi? – continuò Piero con un ghigno. Sembrava uno squalo con quegli occhialetti scuri. Uno squalo affamato di carne umana.

-No, è che devo tornare a casa, - disse Francesco cercando di fare lo sciolto.

-Dai, solo una corsetta. Così mi fai vedere come ci salti con questa belva.

-No, non posso. Devo andare.

Francesco comprese in un attimo che quello era uno stronzo e che si voleva solo divertire alle sue spalle.

Sono sfortunato da morire.

Doveva andarsene, il più velocemente possibile. I suoi amici, piccole e inutili formiche, lo osservavano scuotendo la testa. Anche Enrico aveva sul volto un'espressione di addolorata rassegnazione. Perse la testa. Con lo stomaco che gli risaliva su per la gola scattò in avanti. Voleva disperderli, scappare fino a casa, non farsi vedere mai più.

Ma non era possibile.

Piero con un balzo lo superò e gli si mise davanti con tutta la moto bloccandolo. Gli afferrò il manubrio.

È la fine.

-Che fai, scappi? – gli disse levandosi gli occhiali. Aveva gli occhi affilati e inespressivi di un barracuda.

-No... no.

Le parole gli morirono in bocca. Non riusciva più a parlare.

Danilo e gli altri lo affiancarono. Gli fecero cerchio intorno.

Era la situazione peggiore in cui si era cacciato in vita sua.

-Andiamo.

Piero and his friends were sitting and smoking. They were looking at him. At one point, Danilo, a fatso²⁹² sitting on Piero's right, bald and with a black Metallica shirt, stood up. He got closer to Francesco, after which he turned back to his friends, and laughing he said:

"Isn't this the bike that Pagnotta wanted to buy?"

They all burst into laughter.

What's so fucking funny? What the fuck are you laughing for?

He inserted the gear. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Piero too had mounted on his bike. He approached him, rumbling.

"So, how about a little race?"

"No... no, thanks."

"Got problems?" insisted Piero, with a grin. Those small dark glasses made him look like a shark.²⁹³ A shark hungry for human flash.

"No, it's just that I need to go home," said Francesco, pretending he was relaxed.

"C'mon, just a little race. That way, you can show me how you can jump with this beast."

"No, I can't. I must go."

Francesco immediately understood that he was an asshole who wanted to have a laugh behind his back.

*I'm the unluckiest boy in the world.*²⁹⁴

He had to leave, as fast as he could. His friends, like small and useless ants²⁹⁵ looked at him shaking their heads. Enrico too had a face showing painful resignation. He lost his mind. With his stomach going up to his throat, he shot forward. He wanted to scatter them, run home, never show himself again.

But that was not viable.

Piero passed him in a single bound²⁹⁶ and placed himself in front of him with his bike, blocking his way. He grabbed his handlebar.

This is the end.

"What are you doing, running away?" he said, taking his glasses off. His eyes were as sharp and emotionless as those of a barracuda.²⁹⁷

"No...no."

The words died in his mouth. He couldn't speak anymore.

Danilo and the others flanked him. They made a circle around him.

This was the worst situation he had ever got himself into in his life.

"Let's go."

Girarono le moto verso il campetto, tranquilli, sorridenti. Anche Francesco fu costretto a girarsi e a seguirli. Enrico, vicino alla bici, faceva segno di no con la testa.

Era come andare al patibolo, e quelli intorno a lui non erano soltanto motociclisti di periferia, ma boia insensibili assetati del suo sangue.

Arrivarono in fondo al campo. Si disposero in fila.

Davanti avevano una ripida discesa, poi un'improvvisa salita che terminava con un balzo.

Francesco li aveva visti saltare da quella cunetta, fare voli di dieci metri e atterrare nel fango su una ruota sola.

No, non è possibile. Mi massacrerò.

Avrebbe voluto dirgli tutto questo ma in bocca, al posto della lingua, aveva una gigantesca lumaca viscida e morta.

-Vado io, - disse Danilo.

Partì rombando. Scomparve giù per il discesone e poi si arrampicò, minuscolo, su quel muro di fango fino in cima, con il motore che urlava e con la testa abbassata. Decollò in aria per parecchi metri, la moto di sbieco, levò su un pugno e urlò un grido di battaglia. Poi sparì oltre.

-Vai, tocca a te, - gli disse Piero. Era un comando. *Devo obbedire se voglio tornare a casa tutto intero.*

-Ora vado, - rispose Francesco. -Ora vado.

Si fece mentalmente il segno della croce.

Ce la posso fare, cazzo! Sono un kamikaze. Banzai!

Prese un bel respiro e si lanciò giù per la discesa. Attraversò il mare di fango attento a non cadere. Si reggeva a malapena. Non respirava. Non frenava. Non pensava. Le ruote scomparivano nel pantano e tiravano su schizzi di melma che gli finivano in faccia, tra i capelli. Si sporcò i pantaloni. Giunto in fondo si sentì meglio, gli rimaneva da affrontare solo la salita e poi il salto. Strinse i denti e accelerò.

La salita era ripida e la moto faceva fatica. Francesco cercava di mantenerla su di giri ma le ruote slittavano sollevando fango. Si stava impantanando. Se non si fosse mosso subito sarebbe rotolato indietro e sarebbe caduto come un cretino. Aveva gli occhi di Piero puntati sulla schiena. Strinse i denti. Scalò. Accelerò a palla.

Forza bella!

Calm and smiling as they were, they turned their bikes towards the park. Francesco was forced to turn around and follow them. Enrico, who stood close to his bike, was shaking his head, signing no.

It was like going to the gallows, and those around him were not mere²⁹⁸ suburban bikers, but ruthless bloodthirsty executioners.

They arrived at the end of the court and formed a line.

In front of them there was a steep descent, followed by a sudden ascent which ended in a jump.

Francesco had seen them jump from that small hill, fly for ten meters, to then land in the mud on one wheel.

No, it's impossible. I'll get crushed.

He wanted to say this to them, however, he had a huge slimy dead snail instead of his tongue in his mouth.

"I'll go first." Said Danilo.

He started with a rumble. He disappeared going downhill and then he climbed up, tiny, on that mud wall up to its peak, with his engine screaming and his head down. He flew for some meters, his bike tilted, a fist in the air and screaming a war cry. Then he disappeared beyond.

"It's your turn, go." Said Piero. That was an order. *I need to obey if I want to make it back home in one piece.*

"I'm going." Replied Francesco. "I'm going."

Mentally, he made the sign of the cross.

I can do it, goddamit!²⁹⁹ I'm a kamikaze. Banzai!

He took a deep breath and threw himself down the hill.³⁰⁰ He crossed the mud sea paying attention not to fall. He was barely holding up. He wasn't breathing. He wasn't braking. He wasn't thinking. The tires were sinking in the marsh³⁰¹ and throwing³⁰² mud clumps in his face and hair.³⁰³ His trousers got dirty. As he reached the bottom he felt better, and he had only the ascent and the jump to confront. He clenched his teeth and accelerated.

Going uphill was steep and the bike was straining. Francesco tried to keep it revved up, but the wheels were slipping, throwing mud everywhere.³⁰⁴ He was getting stuck. If he didn't act quickly, he would roll backwards and fall like an idiot. Piero's eyes were set on his back. He clenched his teeth. He downshifted and accelerated all the way.³⁰⁵

C'mon girl!³⁰⁶

La moto tirò fuori tutti i suoi cavalli e aggredì la salita. Francesco fu sospinto indietro dall'accelerazione ma non mollò. Continuò a salire a duemila, saltando come una pulce impazzita. Andava sempre più veloce. Giunse all'apice della collina come un proiettile e saltò.

Noo!

Ora era in aria. In aria con la sua moto. Lui e lei da soli. Lontani. A bocca aperta. Sotto vedeva Danilo, insetto, sulla sua moto, il campo sporco di spazzatura, la strada ingolfata dal traffico, le palazzine bianche e marroni del suo comprensorio, il balconcino davanti alla cucina di casa sua.

È bellissimo!

Poi precipitò giù. Atterrò malamente, sbilanciato in avanti. Crollò a terra, lontano dalla moto. L'impatto del terreno sulle ossa e sul collo lo rintronò. Riaprì gli occhi e vide verde. Il verde delle ortiche. Non riusciva a dare graduatorie ai suoi dolori. Cosa faceva più male? La caviglia, il braccio, la testa, le ortiche, la figura di merda?

Si rialzò. Zoppicando su una gamba arrivò davanti alla sua moto. Era là, a terra. Uno stallone ferito in battaglia. La forcella storta. La ruota anteriore piegata. Il faro rotto in mille pezzi. Ci si chinò sopra e incominciò a singhiozzare. Dietro di sé sentiva le risa di Danilo. Risa eccessive e sproporzionate. Ma non gliene importava nulla. Aveva pensieri terribili che gli affollavano la testa: che cosa avrebbe detto a suo padre, a sua madre, a Romano che si era fidato di lui. Che cosa avrebbe raccontato a Enrico, a Manuela e a tutti gli altri.

A bocca stretta, solo per sé stesso, incominciò a ripetere:

-Sono un cretino. Sono un povero cretino. Cosa ho fatto? Cosa ho fatto?

Sì, era solo un bambino. Si sentiva più piccolo che mai con quel moccio che gli colava dal naso, la vista sfocata dalle lacrime e il magone in gola.

Piangendo provò a tirare su la moto, a spostarla, ma non ci riuscì. Era piantata nel fango.

Danilo continuava a ridere e non lo aiutava.

Questa è la punizione che ti meriti per aver desiderato troppo quella moto, per aver mentito per impossessartene. Sei un poveraccio Francesco. Vai via! Sentiva rimbombargli dentro le parole di sua madre.

Si pulì il naso con la manica della camicia.

Ma non era ancora finita. Da lontano arrivavano degli strilli inumani, come quelli di un maiale sgozzato.

Che succede?

The bike brought out all its horsepower and tackled the ascent. Francesco was thrown back by the acceleration, but he didn't let go. He kept on climbing with 2000rpm³⁰⁷, jumping like a crazy flea. He was going faster and faster. He reached the hilltop like a bullet and jumped.

Noo!

He was now in the air. In the air, with his bike. He and she, alone. Far away. Mouth opened. Below him he saw Danilo, a bug on his bike, the court littered with trash, the busy road, the brown and white buildings of his district, the small terrace in the kitchen of his house.

It's beautiful!

Then he plummeted. He landed badly, tilted forward and unbalanced. He crashed on the ground, far from his bike. The collision of his bones and neck with the ground made him numb. As he opened his eyes, he saw green. The green of nettle. He couldn't assess³⁰⁸ how much pain he felt. What hurt more? The ankle, the arm, the head, the nettle, losing his face? He got back up. Limping on one leg, he got in front of his bike. It was there, on the ground. A stallion wounded in battle. The fork was crooked. The front wheel was bent. The headlight was smashed in a thousand pieces. He bent over it and started sobbing. Behind him he heard Danilo's laughter. An excessive and disproportionate laughter. However, he didn't care. Terrible thoughts were crowding his mind: what was he going to tell his dad, his mom, Romano, who had trusted him. What was he going to tell Enrico, Manuela and all the others. With his mouth tightly closed, he started repeating to himself:

"I'm an idiot. I'm a poor idiot. What have I done? What have I done?"

Yes, he was only a kid. With snot coming from his nose, his vision blurred by the tears, and a lump in his throat he had never felt so little.

Crying, he tried to lift and move away the bike, but he couldn't. It was stuck in the mud.

Danilo kept on laughing and wouldn't help him.

You deserve this punishment because you were too eager to have that bike, and you lied to get your hands on it. You're pathetic³⁰⁹, Francesco. Go away! He heard his mother's words echoing inside.

He wiped his nose with the sleeve of his shirt.

But it wasn't over yet. From afar, some inhuman screams could be heard³¹⁰, similar to those of a pig with his throat slit.

What's going on?

Di corsa vide apparire sul ciglio della collina una figura bassa e larga. Lo riconobbe subito. Il Pagnotta!

No, il Pagnotta no.

Con le mani in testa il Pagnotta, ancora vestito da garzone, con la fascia nera intorno alla vita e il grembiule bianco sporco di fango, si gettò giù e a grandi falcate raggiunse la moto. Era incredulo.

Con uno sguardo bovino la fissava a bocca aperta.

-Non ci posso credere! La mia moto! Non ci posso credere! La mia moto! – ripeteva automaticamente. Danilo continuava a ridere. Francesco non sapeva che fare. Si spostò in là, a testa bassa, come se a terra non ci fosse soltanto la moto ma la mamma del Pagnotta assassinata.

-Mi dispiace Pagnotta. Non è stata colpa mia, - provò a dire Francesco.

Sapeva di aver detto una stronzata ma non era in grado di dire altro, il cervello gli era partito per la tangente.

Il Pagnotta si girò e per la prima volta guardò Francesco. Aveva strani occhi spiritati e un ghigno che gli storciva la bocca.

È un mostro e ora mi massacra.

-Io non mi chiamo Pagnotta! – gli ringhiò e lo spinse.

Francesco crollò a terra affondato da un pugno. Un treno in un occhio. Poi il bestione gli fu sopra. Incominciò a colpirlo dovunque, senza senso.

-La mia moto! La mia moto! – latrava.

Francesco si chiuse a riccio. Le braccia intorno alla testa.

Poi tutto terminò.

Francesco riaprì gli occhi. C'era Piero che aveva preso da una parte il Pagnotta e gli stava parlando. Non capiva cosa si stessero dicendo. Poi vide Danilo aiutare il Pagnotta a tirare su la moto e a spingerla verso la strada. Piero gli si avvicinò.

-Tirati su, - gli disse e gli porse la mano.

-C'ho parlato io con il Pagnotta. L'ho calmato. Non ti farà niente ma ora vai a casa.

Francesco ricominciò a piangere. Forse erano state proprio le parole gentili di Piero a scatenare di nuovo il pianto. Lo aveva colto impreparato. Pierò rimontò sulla sua moto.

Francesco, con il naso sporco di sangue e moccio, gli si avvicinò.

Il motociclista si era rimesso gli occhiali ed era tornato improvvisamente di nuovo lontano, distante.

-Che devo fare ora? – gli domandò Francesco tirando su con il naso.

On the edge of the hill, a low and wide figure appeared running. He instantly recognized him. Pagnotta!

No, not Pagnotta.

Hands on his head, still dressed as an assistant, with a black belt around his waist and the white apron dirty with mud, he shot down and reached the bike with big strides. He was in disbelief.

He stared at it with a bovine look and his mouth open.

“I can’t believe this! My bike! I can’t believe this! My bike!” he repeated automatically.

Danilo kept on laughing.

Francesco didn’t know what to do. He moved away with his head low, as if on the ground there was the dead body of Pagnotta’s mom and not only the bike.

“I’m sorry Pagnotta. It wasn’t my fault.” Francesco tried to say.

He knew that what he said was bullshit, but he couldn’t say anything else, his brain had already derailed.

Pagnotta turned around and looked at Francesco for the first time. His eyes were weirdly possessed, and a sneer twisted his mouth.

He’s a monster and now he’ll beat me to a pulp.

“My name is not Pagnotta!” he growled and pushed him.

Francesco collapsed on the ground, downed by a punch. A train in his eye. Then the beast got on top of him. He started hitting him everywhere, without a logical order.³¹¹

“My bike! My bike!” he barked.

Francesco closed on himself like a hedgehog, arms around his head.

Then, everything stopped.

Francesco opened his eyes again. There was Piero, who had moved Pagnotta to one side and was talking to him. He couldn’t make out what they were saying. Then, he saw Danilo helping Pagnotta lift the bike and push it towards the road. Piero got closer to him.

“Get up.” He said to him and gave him a hand.

“I talked with Pagnotta. I calmed him down. He won’t lay a finger on you, but you have to go home now.”

Francesco began crying again. Maybe, what made him cry again were precisely Piero’s kind words. He did not expect it.³¹² Piero mounted back on his bike. Francesco approached him, with his nose dirty with blood and snot.

The biker had put his glasses back on, and he suddenly became distant and cold again.

“What do I do now?” asked Francesco, sniffing.

-Cazzi tuoi!

Piero partì su una ruota e si allontanò così. Francesco rimase a guardarlo scomparire. Il rombo della marmitta scomparve poco dopo.

Si avviò verso casa zoppicando. Aveva male dovunque. E il duro doveva ancora venire.

Avrebbe dovuto affrontare suo padre, sua madre e raccontargli tutto.

È tostissima.

Enrico era seduto sulla panchina. Lo aspettava.

-Eccoti finalmente. Hai fatto un botto incredibile! – gli disse, poi gli si fece accanto, gli mise un braccio intorno al collo. Si incamminarono.

-Comunque non andavi niente male su quella salita, te lo giuro, - disse Enrico.

Francesco si fermò e puntò i suoi occhi azzurri, rossi per il pianto, in quelli del suo amico e con un mezzo sorriso interrogativo disse:

-Dici?

“That’s your fucking business!”

Piero started away on one wheel and left like that. Francesco remained there watching him disappear. Soon after, the exhaust rumble disappeared.

He began limping towards home. Everything hurt. But the tough part was yet to come. He had to face his dad, his mom and tell them everything.

It’s very tough.

Enrico was sitting on the bench, waiting for him.

“Finally, there you are. Your bang was loud!³¹³” he said. He then got closer to him and put an arm around his shoulders. They started walking together.

“By the way, you weren’t half bad going uphill, I mean it.” Said Enrico.

Francesco stopped and fixed his blue eyes, now red because of the crying, into his friend’s, and with an interrogative half smile he said:

“Really?”

3.

Hai ventisei anni.

Ti chiami Carlo Condemi.

Oggi per te sarà una giornata tosta. Tosta da morire. Devi fare l'esame di diritto commerciale. È da due mesi che lo studi, anzi è da due mesi che non lo studi, che fai finta di studiarlo. Avrai fatto sì e no metà del programma. Ti mancano tutti i libri speciali e il manuale l'hai letto ma come fosse l'elenco del telefono.

Ma ci devi provare lo stesso, vai a vedere che ti dice bene. *È durissima*. Andare impreparato agli esami ti fa stare male, fisicamente male. Ieri, per punirti, solo per punirti che non avevi fatto nulla da mesi, sei rimasto a casa tutto il giorno, seduto alla tua scrivania davanti al libro. Non è che studiassi, stavi seduto. Un po' guardavi fuori, dalla finestra, le macchine passare, i bambini giocare a calcio al giardinetto, un po' andavi al cesso. In totale avrai passato tre ore sopra il gabinetto. Alla fine ti faceva male il sedere, ti si erano formate delle strisce rosse sulle chiappe... Avevi strizza per l'esame. Capito, avevi strizza per l'esame?! Come puoi avere paura quando hai la certezza matematica che andrà male? Non lo sai. Devi avere qualche squilibrio ormonale.

I nodi vengono al pettine.

Ti sei ripetuto questa frase in testa un milione di volte. È come se fossi sopra un terrazzino all'ottavo piano che in maniera microscopica si ritira all'interno del palazzo, ogni giorno, di un paio di centimetri. Le finestre dietro di te sono sbarrate ma sul terrazzino si sta alla grande, c'è da mangiare, c'è uno stereo che spara a palla musica non male e ci sono delle bonazze che ballano. E allora che fai? Certo non ti preoccupi che questo cazzo di terrazzino ti sta scomparendo sotto i piedi. Ti metti a ballare e ti diverti pure di più perché sai che è l'ultima volta che puoi farlo. Capisci come ragioni?

Ora ti sono rimasti solo un paio di centimetri e poi precipiti di sotto e la voglia di ridere e di ballare ti è passata.

I nodi vengono al pettine. Quanto è vera questa frase.

Comunque. Ti alzi dal letto e come prima cosa ti fai la barba. È da una settimana che non te la tagli ma oggi è necessario. I professori più ti vedono preciso e ordinato e più hanno fiducia in te. È una verità. Non ti resta che tagliarla.

Ti levi l'orecchino.

3.

You³¹⁴ are 26 years old.

Your name is Carlo Condemi.

Today will be a tough day for you. Tough as hell.³¹⁵ You have to³¹⁶ take the business law exam. You've been studying it for two months, or rather, you haven't been studying it for two months, pretending you're studying it. You probably covered more or less half of the program. You're missing all the special³¹⁷ books and you've read the manual as if it were the phonebook.

But you must³¹⁸ try it nonetheless, you never know, it might go well.³¹⁹ *It's super tough.*

Taking the exams unprepared makes you feel bad, physically bad. To punish yourself, just to punish yourself for the fact that you hadn't done anything in months, yesterday you stayed at home all day, sitting at your desk in front the book. It's not like you were studying, you were sitting. You would look³²⁰ outside the window, at the passing cars, at the kids playing in the park and you would go to the john.³²¹ In total, you have probably spent 3 hours on the toilet. In the end, your butt hurt and red signs appeared on your buttocks... you were scared³²² because of the exam. See, you were scared of the exam?! How can you be scared, when you have the mathematical certainty that it will be a failure? You don't know. You must be suffering from a hormonal imbalance.

*The chickens come home to roost.*³²³

You repeated this sentence in your head a million times. It's like you're standing on a balcony on the eighth floor, which is imperceptibly³²⁴ withdrawing towards to the building, by a couple of centimeters every day. The windows behind you are barred, but on the balcony it's awesome, there's food, there's a stereo blasting pretty good music, and some hot chicks³²⁵ are dancing. And so, what do you do? Surely you don't worry about this fucking balcony disappearing under your feet. You dance, and you have all the more fun because you know it's the last time you can do it. Do you get how you think?

Now, there are but two centimeters left and you plummet below, and you don't want to laugh or dance anymore.

The chickens come home to roost. Such truth in this sentence.

Anyway. You get up from bed and the first thing you do is groom your beard.³²⁶ You haven't shaved it for a week, but today, it needs to be done. The more precise and neat you look, the more trust professors put in you. It's a truth. You have to shave it. You take off your earring.

Ti vesti abbastanza acchittato. Un paio di jeans ben lavati, una camicia a righe che ti fa schifo e una giacca di tweed che hai usato sì e no tre volte. Dovrebbe andare.

Prima di abbandonare la cuccia metti il disco di *Hair*, quel musical degli anni Settanta di cui hanno fatto anche un film. È la storia di un ragazzo che parte dalla campagna per andare in Vietnam. Va a New York dove lo devono arruolare. Lui a New York non c'è mai stato e in Central Park fa amicizia con un gruppo di hippie e incomincia a divertirsi, a prendersi qualche acido e si trova pure una donna niente male ma dopo aver passato un paio di giorni pazzeschi è costretto a partire. Il capo degli hippie gli dice che in Vietnam non ci deve andare. Lui non ascolta e se ne va in caserma. Lo mandano in uno stato lontanissimo a fare le esercitazioni prima di imbarcarsi per la guerra. Gli hippie decidono di andarlo a trovare, prendono una macchina e lo raggiungono. Il loro capo travestito da ufficiale entra nella caserma e si scambia i vestiti con l'amico che esce fuori nascosto dai suoi gradi mentre il figlio dei fiori rimane in caserma. È tristissima la scena in cui il giovane va a trovare la donna e gli amici che lo baciano e l'abbracciano. E c'è l'ultima scena in cui si vede il povero figlio dei fiori obbligato a salire su un aereo che parte per il Vietnam che è veramente straziante. Ogni volta che la vedi senti il cuore lacerarsi. Il poveretto che aveva bruciato il foglio del richiamo alle armi, che predicava pace e amore, è costretto a partire al posto dell'amico. Mentre entra nella carlinga insieme ad altri mille canta una canzone funebre.

È quella che ascolti e quando l'ascolti salti per farti coraggio.

Esci dalla stanza. C'è tua madre ancora in vestaglia che sta facendo colazione e ti dice di mangiare qualche cosa. Ma tu hai lo stomaco annodato. Qualsiasi cosa mangi in questo momento la vomiti.

Arriva tuo padre, scattante come al solito, con la sua cartella in mano e l'odore di colonia sul collo.

Ti guarda e in quello sguardo vedi un po' di cose. Da una parte ti sta incitando a romperti il culo, dall'altra ti dice che se non lo passi neppure questa volta sarà lui a romperti il culo.

-Stavolta li massacro! - gli dici tu per farlo contento.

Gli lasci quattro ore di speranza poi lo bastoni all'ora di pranzo.

-Fammi sapere appena l'hai fatto, - ti dice.

Ti dice sempre così. Mai una volta che ti augurasse buona fortuna (che, tra l'altro, porta anche sfiga) o in bocca al lupo. Esce. Tu pure devi andare. Tua madre si raccomanda. E mentre lei si raccomanda la guardi nella sua vestaglia troppo grande, le guardi le rughe in faccia, i capelli tinti e ti rendi conto di quanto è invecchiata e tu invece sei sempre uguale.

You kind of overdress.³²⁷ A nicely washed pair of jeans, a striped shirt that you hate, a tweed suit that you have used more or less three times. This should work.

Before leaving your crib³²⁸, you play the *Hair*³²⁹ disc, that 70s musical which also became a movie. It's the story of a boy who leaves the countryside to go to Vietnam. He goes to New York to get enlisted. He had never been to New York and in Central Park, he befriends a group of hippies and starts having fun, taking acids and he finds a not-half-bad girl, but after a couple of crazy days he must leave. The hippies' leader tells him that he must not go to Vietnam. He doesn't listen to him and goes to the barracks. He is sent to a very distant country for his basic training before embarking for the war. The hippies decide to go and pay him a visit, they get a car and go to him. Their leader, dressed as an official, goes in the barracks and swaps clothes with his friend, who stealthily gets out from his lodgings³³⁰, while the flower child stays in the barracks. The scene where the boy meets his woman and his friends kiss him and hug him is very sad. Then, there's the final scene where you see the poor flower child forced to get on the airplane directed to Vietnam, which is really heartrending.³³¹ Every time you see it you feel your heart being torn. The poor guy who had burned the call to arms paper, who preached peace and love, was forced to leave in place of his friend. While he is entering the cabin together with a thousand others, he sings a funeral song.

That's the one you listen to, and as you listen to it you jump to muster up courage.

You go out of the room. Your mom is there, in her nightgown still having breakfast, and she tells you to eat something. But your stomach is knotted. Whatever you eat you'll throw it up. Your father comes in, as industrious³³² as always, holding his suitcase and with the cologne smell on his neck. He looks at you, and in that stare, you see a few things. On one hand, he is encouraging you to kick their asses³³³, on the other, he is saying that if you don't pass it this time either, he is going to kick your ass.

"This time I'll crush them!" you say to him to make him happy.

You will leave him hoping for four hours, to then deal the final blow³³⁴ at lunchtime.

"Let me know as soon as you finish it," he says to you.

He always says that to you. If only he would wish you good luck (which, by the way, is bad luck), or break a leg³³⁵ just once. He goes out. You must go too. Your mom encourages³³⁶ you. And while she encourages you, you look at her in the oversized nightgown, you look at her face wrinkles, the dyed hair, and you realize how old she has got while you always stay the same.

Ti dice che devi passarlo a tutti i costi l'esame, che tuo padre ci tiene da morire, che devi chiudere con l'università e che ti devi prendere qualsiasi cosa, anche un diciotto. Ti rendi conto che ti sta incatastando, che ti sta facendo del male. Va interrotta. Immediatamente.

-Non preoccuparti, - le dici e poi: - Un diciotto lo porto sicuro a casa.

Esci. Con che faccia riesci a mentire? Chi ti ha dato questa capacità?

E poi perché? Che senso ha se tra meno di tre ore le dirai che ti hanno bocciato.

Prendi il motorino. Si gela e con solo la giacca di tweed puoi anche morire ma risalire non ti va. Il sole è pallido e freddo. Corri per arrivare in tempo, per esserci all'appello ma già sai che arriverai in ritardo.

Corri come un pazzo nel traffico di tram incolonnati, di macchine ferme ai semafori, di autobus pieni di gente.

Vedi avvicinarsi le mura dell'università e ti senti male. La porta è intasata dagli studenti che devono entrare, dai motorini, dagli zingari che ti leggono la mano, dalle bancarelle di reggipetti e mutande.

È un mostro che inghiotte studenti. È un mostro che al posto dei denti ha inferriate di metallo e al posto delle guance ha muri di mattoni su cui è scritto AUTONOMIA OPERAIA e GIUSY TI AMO ANCORA.

Non ce la fai. Non ce la fai a farti masticare anche oggi.

Tanto non sei preparato. Perché ti devi umiliare di fronte a un perfetto sconosciuto. A un fottuto professore che vedi oggi per la prima volta in vita tua.

Prosegui dritto. E vaffanculo. Continui senza sapere dove andare. Giri per i quartieri vicino all'università. Ti perdi nelle piccole vie. Senti dentro la testa il tuo nome chiamato dalla bidella, la vedi sbarrarlo sul foglio, uno dei tanti a cui non gli regge. Non importa, lo potrai sempre rifare fra un mese. Questo mese studi come un pazzo, poi torni e gli spacchi il culo. Bello vero?

Ti fermi a un bar. Ti bevi un caffè.

Forse potresti andare a sentire le domande, casomai segnartele. Ma è tutto inutile, sono solo i sensi di colpa che ti mordono la coscienza come un branco di bastardi affamati. Devi andare, non puoi essere così vigliacco.

Rimonti sul motorino. Lo lasci all'entrata opposta a dove sta la tua facoltà. Ti incammini a testa bassa con un senso di malessere che ti schianta. È pieno di studenti che corrono alle lezioni, che parlano di esami, che li fanno, e tu?

She tells you that you must pass the exam at all costs, that your father cares a lot about it, that you must be done with the university and that you have to accept anything, even an eighteen.³³⁷ You realize that she is making you anxious.³³⁸ She needs to be stopped. Immediately.

“Don’t worry”, you tell her, and then:” I’ll bring home an eighteen for sure.”

You go out. How can you lie with a straight face³³⁹? Who gave you this ability?

And why? What’s the meaning, if in less than three hours you’ll tell her you failed.

You grab your scooter. It’s freezing, and with just the tweed suit you might die, but you don’t want to go back up. The sun is pale and cold. You rush to get there on time, to be present at the roll call, but you already know you’re going to be late.

You drive in the traffic like a madman, among lined up trams, cars at traffic lights, chock full buses.

You see the university walls getting closer and you feel sick. Students who have to get in, scooters, gypsies reading your hand and stands selling bras and underwear all block the door.³⁴⁰

It’s a student swallowing monster. It’s a monster with steel bars instead of teeth, and brick walls instead of cheeks, on which LABORER AUTONOMY³⁴¹ and GIUSY I STILL LOVE YOU is written.

You can’t do this. You can’t let yourself get chewed again today.

You’re not ready anyway. Why should you go and humiliate yourself in front of a perfect stranger. In front of a fucking professor you’re seeing for the first time in your life today.

You continue straight. And fuck off.³⁴² You proceed forward not knowing where to go. You drive³⁴³ in the districts close to the university. You get lost in the small streets. In your head, you hear your name called out by the janitor, you see it being crossed off on the paper, just one of many who can’t do it.³⁴⁴ It doesn’t matter, you can always retry in a month. This month you’ll study like crazy, then, you come back and kick his ass. Nice, right?

You stop at a bar. You drink a coffee.

Maybe you could go and listen to the questions, write them down even. But it’s all useless, this is only the remorse gnawing at your conscience like a pack of hungry mutts.³⁴⁵ You must go, you can’t be such a coward.

You get back on the scooter. You drop it off at the entrance opposite to your campus. You start walking with your head low, with a crushing sense of malaise. It’s full of students running to class, talking about exams, taking them, and you?

Tu sei un estraneo in questo posto, continui a venirci perché non sai dove battere la testa, questa è la verità, cazzo finalmente te la sei detta.

L'edificio dove ha sede la tua facoltà pare esplodere, esplodere per la carne, le ossa, i cervelli che ci sono stipati dentro. Ti fai spazio a gomitate tra quelli che si devono laureare, che aspettano, eleganti nei loro abitini blu, il momento di entrare. Loro la fanno finalmente finita. Loro con le tesi sotto il braccio e i genitori a lato con i fiori.

Li superi. Sali al primo piano.

Il corridoio è invaso da quelli che devono fare l'esame di diritto commerciale, il tuo. Sono milioni. Hanno tutti la bocca secca. Alcuni stanno a terra, altri appoggiati ai muri, altri solo in piedi. Chiedi se hanno già cominciato gli esami con Recchi. Ti dicono che non si sa con certezza, che stanno cercando di capirci qualcosa anche loro. Senti l'ansia aleggiare come uno stormo di avvoltoi su tutto il corridoio. Prendi fiato e t'infilati come un vecchio kamikaze tra la massa compatta. Poi senti il tuo nome. La bidella urla cinque nomi tra cui c'è anche il tuo. Cristo, ti stanno chiamando.

Non dovevi venirci. Lo sapevi, idiota che non sei altro.

E ora che devi fare?

Provare non ti costa nulla. Chiunque direbbe così. Tu no. Non ti piace fare le figure di merda. Chissà chi ti credi di essere per non poterti portare a casa un diciotto rubato! Non ti va di arrampicarti sugli specchi col professore.

Scappi. Incominci a correre e a sbattere contro quelli che aspettano mentre senti il tuo nome ripetersi mille volte.

Quando sei fuori ricominci a respirare e vedi che è una bella giornata. Limpida e frizzante. Ti fa girare la testa.

E ora che fai? Dove ti sbatti fino all'ora di pranzo?

Decidi di andare a cercare Laura, la ragazza con cui ti fai le storie in questo momento. Prendi il motorino e attraversi la città. Passi davanti a un negozio di dischi. Se avessi qualche soldo ti andresti a comprare un paio di cd. Prosegui. Arrivi sotto casa di Laura. La chiami al citofono. Sali, ti dice. La trovi ancora a letto. Ha la faccia piena di sonno. Gli occhi piccoli. Ti chiede che ci fai là, perché non stai all'università a fare l'esame? Tu non hai voglia di parlarne, ma lei incalza, ha già capito tutto. Accendi la tele mentre lei ti dice che non vai da nessuna parte in questo modo. La zittisci con un bacio. Mugugna qualcosa.

You are a stranger here, you keep coming here because you don't know where to bang your head, that's the truth, fuck, you finally acknowledged it to yourself.

Your faculty building looks as if it's about to burst, burst because of the flesh, the bones, the brains squeezed in there. You elbow your way through those who are about to graduate, waiting in their blue suits, elegant, for their moment to go in. They are finally getting it over with. Them, with their dissertations underarm and their parents at their sides with the flowers. You pass them. You go up to the first floor.

The hallway is overrun by those who have to take the business law exam, yours. They are millions. All of them with dry mouths. Some are on the ground, some are leaning on the walls, some are just standing. You ask whether they have already begun the exam with Recchi. They tell you they don't know for sure, that they are also trying to understand something. You feel the anxiety hovering on the hallway like a flock of vultures. You catch your breath and go inside the compact crowd like an old kamikaze.³⁴⁶ Then you hear your name. The janitor shouts five names, among which there's yours.

Christ, they're calling you.

You shouldn't have come. You knew it, you're nothing but an idiot.

What do you do now?

Trying won't hurt anybody.³⁴⁷ Everybody would say that. Not you. You don't like losing your face. Who do you think you are, for not allowing yourself to take home an undeserved eighteen! You don't feel like scrambling³⁴⁸ with the professor.

You flee. You start running and bumping into those who are waiting, while you hear your name being called a thousand times.

When you are outside, you start breathing again and you see that it's a nice day. Crisp and clear. It makes your head spin.

What do you do now? What are you going to do until lunchtime?³⁴⁹

You decide to go and look for Laura, the girl whom you've been dating³⁵⁰ lately. You grab your scooter and cross the city. You pass by a record store. If you had some money, you would buy a couple of CDs. You proceed. You arrive at Laura's house. You call her at the buzzer.

She tells you to come up. She is still in bed. She looks super sleepy. Her eyes are small. She asks you what are you doing there, why aren't you at the university taking the exam? You don't want to talk about it, but she urges you on, she already figured you out. You turn on the tv while she tells you that this way, you won't get anywhere. You silence her with a kiss. She mumbles something.

Incominci a spogliarti. Il piumone, il letto caldo ti attira da morire. Laura ride. Le dici che hai voglia di fare l'amore e di rimanere con lei tutto il giorno sotto le coperte a farvi le coccole. Lei ti dice che non può, che deve andare a sentire una conferenza sui cetacei. Tu le dici che ha la fortuna di avere il più bel cetaceo del mondo nel suo letto, che non c'è bisogno di sbattersi chissà dove per conoscere i rituali di accoppiamento dei delfini, tu puoi insegnarglieli. Incominci a fare dei versi che dovrebbero essere il richiamo delle balene in amore. Lei ride ma intanto continua a vestirsi. Alla fine, quando oramai ha infilato il cappotto e messo gli occhiali da sole ti dice che se vuoi restare non c'è problema. Non sa quando tornerà. Ti dà un bacio sulle labbra e se ne va.

Di nuovo solo.

Almeno ora stai in una casa, al caldo e non in mezzo a una strada. Apri il frigo. Ti mangi il resto di uno spezzatino con i funghi e ti butti a letto.

Accendi la tele. C'è la replica del *Maurizio Costanzo Show*. Cerchi di capire di che parlano ma non ce la fai, stai troppo male. Ti è esplosa dentro un'ansia che non ti lascia respirare. È qualcosa che va oltre l'esame, oltre il fatto che stai dentro un letto mentre tutta Roma è in movimento, lavora e produce, è qualcosa di più indefinibile, di più triste. È la sensazione che non ti scrollerai mai di dosso questa palude che si è allargata dentro. Una palude di intenzioni, di aspettative tradite ogni giorno.

Ti accucci e provi a dormire mentre Rita Pavone parla della condizione delle donne mongole. Ti addormenti.

Quando riapri gli occhi scopri che hai dormito un sacco. Come una pietra. È già mezzogiorno e mezza. Devi tornare a casa e dire ai tuoi che non hai fatto l'esame. Ti rivesti ed esci.

Rimonti sul tuo motorino. Attraversi la città e giochi a non mettere mai i piedi a terra. Sei un povero soldato a cui hanno mozzato le gambe e che è costretto a usare un motorino per andare a trovare la madre morente.

Ai semafori giri su te stesso come una trottola per non cadere ma una macchina ti inchioda davanti e poggi un piede a terra e il gioco finisce.

Non hai voglia di tornare a casa.

Decidi che da domani la storia cambia, che smetti di uscire fino alle tre di notte, di perdere tempo a leggere fumetti e romanzi di fantascienza.

You start undressing. The duvet, the warm bed captivates you so much. Laura laughs. You tell her you want to make love, to stay all day in bed with her, cuddling. She tells you she can't, that she has a conference on cetaceans to attend. You tell her she is lucky enough to have the most beautiful cetacean in the world in her bed, and that there's no need to go anywhere to learn about dolphins mating rituals, you can teach them to her. You start making noises that should resemble the calls of whales in love. She laughs, but all the while, she is getting dressed. In the end, after she put on her coat and her sunglasses, she tells you that it's not a problem if you want to stay there. She doesn't know when she'll be back. She kisses your lips and goes away.

Alone again.

At least you're in a house now, somewhere warm, not in the middle of a street. You open the fridge. You eat the leftovers of a stew with mushrooms and go to bed.

You turn on the tv. There is the rerun of *Maurizio Costanzo Show*.^{xvii} You try to follow what they're talking about, but you can't, you feel too sick.³⁵¹ An anxiety preventing you from breathing has exploded inside you. It's something that goes beyond the exam, beyond the fact that you're in a bed while the whole city of Rome is moving, working and producing, it's something more undefinable, sadder. It's the feeling that you won't ever get rid of this swamp that has spread inside of you. A swamp of intentions, of expectations, betrayed on a daily basis.

You curl up³⁵² and try to sleep while Rita Pavone is talking about the conditions of Mongol women. You fall asleep.

When you open your eyes again you realize you have slept a lot. Like a log.³⁵³ It's already half past noon. You must go back home and tell your parents that you didn't take the exam. You get dressed and go out.

You mount your scooter. You cross the city and you play at keeping your feet off the ground.³⁵⁴ You are a poor soldier whose legs were chopped off, who is forced to use a scooter to go visit his dying mother.

At traffic lights you spin on yourself like a top in order not to fall but a car abruptly stops in front of you and you place a foot on the ground and the game ends.³⁵⁵

You don't want to go back home.

You make up your mind that from tomorrow, the humdrum will change, that you will stop hanging out until 3 in the night, and wasting time reading comics and sci fi novels.

^{xvii} Maurizio Costanzo Show: this is a program similar to a talk show, where the host Maurizio Costanzo interviews different celebrities.

Decidi che troverai qualcuno con cui studiare, non Francesco o Paolo. Con loro finisce che giocate a scopa o a backgammon. Tu hai bisogno di qualcuno che sia preciso, che ti ci faccia sbattere la testa sul libro.

Antonio. Antonio Giovannini.

È lui il tuo uomo.

Ha due anni meno di te e ha fatto più esami di te.

Quasi quasi lo passi a trovare. Non abita lontano.

Arrivi sotto casa sua. Suoni. Ti risponde sua madre. Ti dice che Antonio sta facendo un master di diritto internazionale a Bruxelles. Ringrazi

Cazzo, si è già laureato e fa un master! Non te ne sei neanche accorto. A Bruxelles!

Te ne vai.

Mentre attraversi il ponte di Belle Arti vedi che sul Tevere ci sono i cormorani. Non ci puoi credere. Hai sempre visto solo le buste trascinate dalla corrente, solo quel grigio dell'acqua di fogna. Stanno lì che nuotano, neri con il collo a esse, che si immergono e riescono, uno ha addirittura un pesce in bocca.

Leghi il motorino e scendi giù sulla riva del fiume. Le scale sono viscido e piene di rifiuti. L'argine è parzialmente coperto d'acqua. I cormorani sono diventati molti di più. Saranno una ventina. Ti avvicini a uno che sta pescando. È uno strano tipo. Non ha l'aria del pescatore. Alto. Sulla cinquantina. È vestito in completo di flanella grigio. Ha la cravatta e le scarpe di cuoio. Regge in mano una lunga corda che finisce su una canna, da questa prosegue in acqua dov'è attaccata una rete quadrata. Sta fermo immobile, gli occhi puntati nei gorgi.

Ti ci avvicini. Per lui è come se non esistessi.

-Si pesca? – gli domandi alla fine.

-Oggi poco e niente...

Si è girato verso di te. Ha gli occhi azzurri e sopracciglia folte.

-Ma ci sono pesci?

-Dipende. A volte ne scendono giù tanti. A volte non ne passano per intere settimane.

Rimanete in silenzio. A quest'ora dovresti stare a casa a parlare con i tuoi. Gli dovresti raccontare tutto ma invece continui a startene lì, seduto su una bombola del gas arrugginita. In alto, oltre agli argini, le macchine incolonnate.

A un tratto l'uomo urla. La canna si è piegata e la cima si è tesa.

You decide that you will find someone to study with, not Francesco or Paolo. You always end up playing either “scopa”^{xviii} or backgammon with them. You need someone focussed, who will make you bang³⁵⁶ your head on the book.

Antonio. Antonio Giovannini.

He is your man.

He is two years younger than you and he has taken more exams than you.

You have half a mind to go visit him. He doesn’t live far.

You arrive at his house. You ring his bell. His mother answers. She tells you that Antonio is doing an international law masters in Brussels. You thank her.

Shit, he already graduated and is doing a masters! You didn’t even notice it. *In Brussels!*

You leave.

As you cross the Fine Arts bridge³⁵⁷ you see some cormorants on the Tiber. You can’t believe it. All you have ever seen were bags carried by the current and the typical sewer water grey. They are there, swimming, black, with an s shaped neck, diving and reemerging, one of them even has a fish in its mouth.

You tie the scooter and go down to the riverbank. The stairs are slimy and littered. The bank is partially under water. The cormorants have increased in number. They must be around twenty. You approach a guy who is fishing. He is an odd one. He doesn’t look like a fisherman. Tall. In his fifties. He is dressed in a grey flannel suit. He is wearing a tie and leather shoes. In his hand he is holding a long rope which ends in a rod, from there it goes in the water where a square net is attached. He stands still, eyes fixed on the eddies.³⁵⁸

You approach him. To him, it’s like you don’t exist.

“Fishing, huh?”³⁵⁹ you finally ask him.

“Not that much today ...”

He turned towards you. His eyes are blue, and he has thick eyebrows.

“Are there fish?”

“It depends. Sometimes, many come down. Sometimes they don’t pass for whole weeks.”

You both³⁶⁰ remain silent. By now, you should be at home, talking with your parents. You should tell them everything, but instead, you stay there, sitting on a rusty gas tank. Above, beyond the banks, lined up cars.

Suddenly, the man screams. The rod bent and the line tensed.

^{xviii} “scopa”: I will not explain the rules of this game here, but I will say that it is a very popular and old card game in Italy, which is usually taught by one’s family. Many learn it at a young age, which means that younger and elder people alike play it.

-Oddio! Oddio! Ne ho presi tantissimi. Un intero banco! Aiutami!

Lo aiuti. Pesa un casino. Anche in due fate fatica. Finalmente tirate fuori la rete. Saranno venti chili di pesciolini piccoli e argentati che si dibattono. Il manager è felice e pure tu lo sei. Tutti quei pesci!

-Io non so che farmene di tutto questo ben di dio. Prenditene un paio di buste. Forza! Io lavoro alla Rai, qua dietro a viale Mazzini, non posso tornare con tutti questi pesci...

Tu nemmeno sai che fartene. Alla fine accetti. Ne metti una decina in ogni busta ma ti fanno pena allora ci metti pure l'acqua. Te ne torni al tuo motorino e riparti. Le buste piene d'acqua ti fanno sbandare. Ai semafori controlli che i pesci stiano bene. Ora che fai? Non puoi tornare dai tuoi con i pesci... Quelli vogliono sapere dell'esame. Decidi di portarli da Laura. A quest'ora sarà tornata. Li metterai nella sua vasca da bagno. Poi troverai che farci. È l'unica. Non devono morire.

Ti fai il lungotevere pian piano.

Suoni al citofono. Non è tornata.

Poi te la vedi arrivare. Eccola. Tutta elegante, con un cappello tirolese con la piuma. Le calze marroni ricamate. Gli stivaletti e i guanti.

-Che hai fatto? Guardati! – ti dice mettendo il bloster alla sua Honda 50.

Ti guardi, ti sei inzaccherato il fondo dei pantaloni e delle scarpe. Hai le buste piene d'acqua in mano.

-Non sai! Ho pescato un sacco di pesci! Con un dirigente Rai.

Le racconti tutto. Lei non sembra gioirne come tu ti aspetti. Alla fine le fai il domandone da mille punti:

-Possiamo metterli per un po' nella tua vasca?

-Tu stai veramente male, Carlo.

-D'accordo, come non detto. Sai che faccio? Li sbatto nelle fontane dell'orto botanico. Non mi va di rimetterli nel fiume, verrebbero ripescati subito.

-Carlo io veramente non ti capisco... E soprattutto non capisco come io possa stare con uno come te. Come fai a vivere così? Oggi avevi l'esame e che fai? Te ne vai a pescare. Ma non crescerai mai? L'altro giorno mi hai detto che mi vuoi sposare. Ti rendi conto...

Cerchi di interromperla.

“Oh God! Oh God! I caught so many. A whole school! Help me!”

You help him. It weighs a ton. Even in two you’re having a hard time. Finally, you pull out the net. There must be 20 kilos of small silver flipping fish. The manager is happy, and you are too. All those fish!

“I don’t know what to do with all this good catch.³⁶¹ Take a couple of bags. C’mon! I work at the Rai, right here behind Viale Mazzini, I can’t go back with all these fish...”

You don’t even know what to do with them. In the end, you accept. You put ten of them in each bag, but you pity them, so you put in some water too. You go back to your scooter and go away. The bags full of water make you swerve. At traffic lights, you check on the fish to see if they’re ok. What now? You can’t go back to your parents with the fish... They want to know about the exam. You decide to bring them to Laura. She is probably back by now.

You’ll put them in her bathtub. After that, you’ll figure out what to do with them. It’s the only way. They must not die.

You proceed along the Tiber embankment³⁶², slowly.

You ring her buzzer. She hasn’t come back.

Then, you see her coming. There she is. Elegant, with a Tyrolean hat with a feather. The brown embroidered stockings. The boots and the gloves.

“What have you done? Look at you!” she tells you, while she puts the padlock³⁶³ on her Honda 50.

You look at yourself, your shoes and the end of your trousers are all dirty. You are holding the bags full of water.

“You won’t imagine! I caught a lot of fish! With a Rai manager.”

You tell her everything. She doesn’t seem to be as happy as you thought she would. In the end, you ask her the thousand points question:

“Can we put them in your tub for a while?”

“You are crazy, Carlo.”³⁶⁴

“Ok, forget I said anything. You know what? I’ll throw³⁶⁵ them in the botanical garden fountains. I don’t feel like leaving them in the river, they would be fished back right away.”

“Carlo, I really don’t get you... Above all, I don’t get how I can be with someone like you.

How can you live like this? You had the exam today, and what did you do instead? You went fishing. Will you ever grow up? The other day, you told me you wanted to marry me.

Unbelievable³⁶⁶...”

You try to interrupt her.

-Guarda che io faccio sul serio. Io ti voglio sposare. Ti potrei mantenere pescando... Ho un futuro.

Cerchi di cazzeggiare. Di buttarla sul ridere.

-Smettila. Pensi che si possa scherzare su tutto. Su tutte le cazzate che dici? L'altra sera sei stato un'ora a cercare di convincermi che ci dovevamo sposare... Io ti ascolto, sai. Ti racconti un sacco di storie. Com'era? Mi laureo e poi andiamo a vivere in Maremma. Ma dove vuoi andare... Ma se nemmeno sei in grado di affrontare un esame. Cazzo hai ventisei anni... Stai a pezzi. Le braccia ti fanno malissimo. Quelle due buste pesano un accidente. E senti che ha ragione. Sai che le hai raccontato un sacco di cazzate. Quella sera avevi bevuto, avevi avuto uno strano slancio d'affetto per Laura e allora avevi incominciato a immaginarti felice con lei. Lei però ti ascoltava. Non puoi più permetterti di raccontare i tuoi film. Lei continua a parlare, tu non ascolti più. Cerchi di concentrarti:

-Senti facciamo così: non mi chiamare. Non c'ho voglia di sentirti. Ti chiamo io! – ti sta dicendo.

-Non c'è problema... - le dici acido.

Perché ti difendi in questo modo? Perché ti piace peggiorare le situazioni.

Lei scompare dietro al portone. Vorresti citofonarle ma sai che faresti peggio. Ti odi e odi quei maledetti pesci. Li guardi boccheggiare.

Alla fine te ne vai. Non ce la puoi fare a tornare a casa. Vai avanti sul tuo motorino senza una meta. Arrivi al Colosseo. Non pensi a niente. Però ti dispiace per Laura. La fai sempre incazzare. Quante volte l'hai fatta piangere? Milioni di volte. Ti fermi. La chiami da una cabina. Risponde la segreteria. Non vuole rispondere.

-Piccola, scusami. Mi dispiace. È che in questi giorni non sto bene, non riesco a vivere. Ogni cosa che devo fare mi sembra impossibile, un ostacolo impossibile. Oggi all'università mi è preso un attacco di panico. Non so neanche io che ho. Non so che devo fare. Alle volte ho paura. Ho una paura tremenda. Allora... scusami. Ti voglio bene. Ti richiamo stasera. Rimonti sul motorino.

“I’m serious, you know. I want to marry you. I could earn us a living by fishing... I have a future.”

You try to dick around. To laugh it off.³⁶⁷

“Stop it. You think you can joke about everything; about all the bullshit you say? The other night, for an hour, you tried to convince me to marry you ... I listen to you, you know. You tell yourself a bunch of nonsense.³⁶⁸ How did you put it? I’ll graduate and then we’ll go live in Maremma^{xix}. You’re hopeless³⁶⁹ ... You can’t even face an exam. You’re 26 years old, goddamit...”

You’re beat.³⁷⁰ Your arms hurt really bad. Those two bags weigh a ton.³⁷¹ And you know she’s right. You know you have told her a lot of bullshit. That night, you had been drinking, you had felt a strange surge of affection³⁷² for Laura, and so you began imagining the two of you happy together. But she had been listening to you. You can’t allow yourself to tell your fantasies³⁷³ anymore. She keeps on talking, but you’re not listening anymore. You try to focus:

“Listen, let’s do this: don’t call me. I don’t want to hear from you. I’ll call you!” she is telling you.

“No problem...” you tell her, bitterly.

Why are you on the defensive like that? Because you like to make situations worse.

She disappears behind the door. You would like to ring her, but you know you would make it worse. You hate yourself and you hate those fish. You watch them gasping.

Finally, you leave. You can’t bear to go back home. You keep on going with your scooter without a destination. You get to the Colosseum. You think about nothing. But you’re sorry for Laura. You always make her mad. How many times have you made her cry? Millions of times. You stop. You call her from a phone booth. The voicemail answers. She doesn’t want to pick up.

“Baby, forgive me. I’m sorry. It’s just that I’m not feeling well these days, I can’t live. All the things I have to do seem impossible, like an insurmountable obstacle. Today I panicked at the university. Not even I know what is wrong with me. I don’t know what I should do.

Sometimes I’m scared. I’m terribly scared. So.... Forgive me. I love you.³⁷⁴ I’ll call you again tonight.”

You mount the scooter.

^{xix} “Maremma”: this is a territory in western Italy which extends in two regions: Tuscany and Latium.

Hai cercato di avere un tono patetico nel messaggio. Di colpirla. Speri che così si penta di averti trattato male. Ti stupisci di quanto sei un attore. Di come fingi, di come ti imposti con tutti. Forse non senti niente? Forse sei finto fino al midollo? È tutto mediato dall'ipocrisia nella tua vita. Ti sei bruciato dentro, non senti più niente, ti dici. Cerchi di essere triste. Ti viene da ridere.

Sei sulla Cristoforo Colombo. Fa freddo. Un'enorme strada piena di macchine che corrono. I pesci continuano a boccheggiare attaccati al manubrio.

Vai avanti fino all'Eur. I tuoi ti avranno dato per disperso. Vai avanti con il motore che urla e le gambe che ti tremano.

Sei fuori Roma oramai.

Arrivi a Ostia che è quasi scuro. I lampioni sono accesi. C'è il vento pieno di sabbia che spazza la riviera. Il mare è nero, anche la spiaggia è nera. Ti avvii con le tue buste in mano fino alla riva.

-Belli, ora vi libero...- dici ai pesci.

Li stai per mettere in mare quando ti scoppia dentro un dubbio.

E se fossero pesci d'acqua dolce e in mare muoiono subito?

Tu li hai trovati nel fiume.

Sei un coglione, pensi. Tutta quella strada per portarli a morire nel mare. Te ne torni al motorino. Ti viene voglia di buttarli a terra e di andartene. Poi vedi al centro della piazza una fontana grossa e tonda. Attraversi, attento a non farti investire. Li versi nell'acqua sporca della fontana. Ti siedi sul bordo.

I pesci rimangono un attimo immobili poi scompaiono dietro i sassi.

You tried sounding pathetic in the message. To impress her. You hope that she will regret having treated you badly. You are amazed by how much of an actor you are. How you act, how you pretend³⁷⁵ with everybody. Perhaps you don't feel anything? Maybe you're completely fake down to your bone marrow? In your life, everything is mediated by hypocrisy. You tell yourself that you're charred inside, that you don't feel anything. You try being sad. It makes you laugh.

You're on the Cristoforo Colombo. It's cold. A huge road full of running cars. Attached to the handlebar, the fish keep on gasping,

You proceed until the Eur.³⁷⁶ Your parents must have reported you missing. You keep on going with the engine screaming and your legs shaking.

You're outside of Rome by now.

You get to Ostia when it's almost dark. The streetlights are lit. The wind carrying the sand is sweeping the coast. The sea is black, and the beach is black too. Holding the bags, you start off towards the shore.

"Guys, I'll free you now..." you say to the fish.

As you are about to put them in the sea, a doubt explodes in you.

What if they're freshwater fish and they'll instantly die in the sea?

You found them in the river.

You are a moron, you think. All that way to take them to the sea to die. You return to the scooter. You want to throw them on the ground and leave. Then, you see a big round fountain in the square center. You cross, careful not to get run over. You pour them in the dirty water of the fountain. You sit on the edge.

The fish stay still for a while, after that, they disappear behind the pebbles.

3. TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

IT HURTS A BIT

In this chapter I will analyse the translated texts from a technical point of view. During the process of translation, I encountered some difficulties and the way in which I dealt with them will be here discussed in detail. The examples presented are taken from a range of linguistic aspects, namely culture, register and tone. Firstly, I will analyse some examples for each of these aspects, and secondly, I will list all the changes and processes that have occurred during the translation, indicating where each element can be found in the text.

REGISTER

In this book, the stories I chose to translate are all written in a colloquial manner. “It hurts a little” has a young protagonist, and the situations which he lives are ridiculous and comical. Robbi is constantly surprised and in disbelief at what happens to him, from the rejection of Angela to his death. What is important to notice is that not only in dialogues, but also in the more narrative parts the narrator, who is omniscient, blends with Robbi, describing things as if he was watching them through his eyes, while simultaneously knowing more about the story and the characters. Because of these stylistic choices, the register is informal and colloquial. For a translator as inexperienced as I am, it has been easier for me to tackle a text such as this one, nonetheless, there are many instances where I had to be precise in order to best convey the original feeling and register of the Italian text. As an example:

“Forse il pompino non valeva. In fondo una bocca è una bocca. Se te lo fai prendere in bocca da un trans non devi per forza essere frocio. E poi i travestiti devono fare dei pompini incredibili perché conoscono il cazzo molto meglio delle donne essendone provvisti dalla nascita” (page 11)

I translated it as:

“Maybe a blowjob didn’t count. In the end, a mouth is a mouth on everybody. If you stick it in a trans mouth you are not necessarily a faggot. After all, since these cross-dressers have had a dick their whole life, they know how it works better than any woman does, making them extremely skilled.” (page 10)

I chose this phrase because here it is clear how the narrating voice is a union of Robbi and the narrator. It is not a dialogue nor a thought that the boy says to himself, it is in fact a reflection on the whole situation, blending a personal thought and the general description of the story into the same sentence. This segment is an example showing how the informal register of dialogue can be used seamlessly also for the narration, making it a crucial part of the story.

Another example of how register is important may be found in any of the dialogues in the story:

“-Tena’?!”

-Robbi?! Ancora!

-Tena’ sto nella merda.

-Che succede? – il Tenaglia intanto continuava a fissare il tabellone. Altri quattro milioni. Mancano solo sedici milioni. – Che c’è?

-Mi si è rotta la macchina, devi venire qua.

-Qua dove? – quindici milioni.

-Al Villaggio Olimpico.” (pages 12-13)

Which becomes:

“Tena’?!”

“Robbi?! You again!”

“Cheap, I’m knee deep in shit.”

“What’s going on?” all the while Cheapskate was keeping a watchful eye on the donation board. 4 million were just donated. 16 million to go. “So, what’s up?”

“My car broke, you have to come here”

“ ‘here’ where?” 15 million.

“Olympic Village” (pages 11-12)

It was fundamental not only to use the contracted forms of the verbs to faithfully render the original feeling, but also the more colloquial expressions like “what’s up?” or “knee deep in shit” are very important to characterize the people present in the story.

TONE

While the register is colloquial, here we have a comical tone. In this story Robbi finds himself in absurd situations that may seem unreal at times, and they are created ad hoc for the purpose

of comedy. However, this is not of a straightforward kind, in that it does not rely purely on the ridiculous scenes described, but it is conveyed also using irony.

An example of a purely comical scene may be this:

“-Guarda che è normale. Alla nostra età... - tagliò Robbi affondando le mani nella poltrona della Micra. Se quella puttana non la smetteva immediatamente di farlo arrappare come un babbuino la stuprava là per là.” (page 5)

Translated as:

“ ‘I think it’s normal. You know, at our age...’ said Robbi with a constrained donkey-like bray, while pushing his hands into the Micra seat. If that bitch did not stop making him hornier than a baboon, he was going to rape her right then and there. “ (page 5)

Robbi here feels like a baboon in heat and the comical effect is conveyed through this metaphor, for which “babuino” had to be kept. It also helps us in understanding how Ammaniti chose to deal with the comical aspect of the narration, in that it is not of a light-hearted kind, but instead it is always inscribed in a darker context, in this case the act of raping. However, as previously mentioned, irony is another key element which is used to elevate the topic of the “Blowjob” to a noble state, which contrasts with the events that take place.

We can see irony being used at the beginning of the text:

“Ma una sorte amara volle che proprio quel pomeriggio Angela, dopo una lunga discussione con l’amica del cuore Verdiana Ceccherini, decise di cessare, almeno per un po’, quest’antica pratica orale che, a suo giudizio, rischiava di definirla solo per una delle sue innumerevoli qualità...” (page 1)

Becomes:

“One afternoon, a bitter destiny brought Angela to have a long talk with her best friend Verdiana Ceccherini, after which she decided to stop exhibiting her oral skills for a little while, because it prevented others from judging her for her other qualities...” (page 1)

“Antica pratica orale” as “exhibiting her oral skills” is an ironical statement regarding the blowjobs for which Angela is known. Irony is then an important feature of the text, of which

there are multiple instances that had to be carefully analysed and translated to maintain the original tone.

CULTURE

Another important aspect that had to be translated as faithfully as possible was that of culture. In this text there are many expressions and terms which are proper to Roman dialect, together with places and people that can only be found in Rome. This then contributes greatly to the creation of the tone and the setting, and in most cases I decided to leave these words unaltered. However, some descriptions which strongly characterized either a location or a person had to be translated, and here there are some examples:

“...Robbi vide un grande accampamento circondato dalla foresta. Roulotte, vecchie Mercedes, baracche di lamiera, un paio di fuochi dove sedevano delle figure scure. Un recinto con delle galline. Due capre legate ai resti di una 500.” (page 17)

Becomes

“...Robbi saw a big campsite surrounded by the woods. Caravans, old Mercedes, foil shacks, a couple of fires with a few dark figures sitting around them. There was a fence with a few hens and two goats were tied to the remnants of an old 500. “ (page 16)

This is an example of a culturally characterized setting. We have the gipsy camp with all the things that are commonly used by these people: the foil shacks, the animals all over the place, ecc. Here, it is also important to consider the 500: this is a car which is very famous in Italy and it may be unknown to a number of English speaking people, however, since the car is so culturally pregnant, because it is related to a gipsy camp found in Italy, it was best to keep it. Furthermore, regarding culture, what has been the most common and challenging aspect to deal with were those words and expressions proper to slang, which were also hard for me as an Italian native speaker to understand.

Some I chose to translate:

“-E mo’ basta! Hai rotto il cazzo!” (page 21)

As:

“That’s it! I’m done with you!” (page 20)

“E mo’...” is a dialect expression, which here could not have been left untranslated: since the whole sentence comprised of both the Roman expression and “basta”, keeping it in Italian would have seemed as if this sentence was left out, as if I chose to skip it in the process of

translation. Instead, I translated it in the most accurate way, losing a little of the drive expressed by dialect, to convey the anger that Robbi feels, and the colloquiality of the context. On the other hand, there have been many cases in which the original had to be kept either because a translation was unnecessary, or because I simply could not find a proper equivalent for the term. As regards the former case, we have the nickname given to Robbi's friend, that is "Tenaglia". Initially, I made some research to understand the meaning of the name, and I found that in Roman dialect "tena" is a word used to describe a very cheap person. In order to keep this trait, I thought of a name such as "cheapskate", however, since a proper translation could not have been found, and most importantly this is a name, it seemed more appropriate to leave it unaltered, similarly to what was done with actual names. Finally, a term that did not need any translation was "profumiera", which is another word in Roman dialect. Its meaning is related to that of "attention-whore", but this does not begin to describe its deeper connotation, and in this case I added a note to explain its actual meaning.

After a short introduction to the most important problems and aspects that I had to deal with in the process of translation, I will now briefly analyse the other three stories. At the end of this study, there will be a list of notes that explore in detail the different changes and thought processes that occurred to me while translating the stories.

FROGS AND TADPOLES

Similarly to the previous story, here I have encountered some recurring difficulties and problems. While the register was the same as "It hurts a bit", the aspects which I had to be most careful about were tone and culture. Here however, the aspect which made the biggest difference was the amount of dialect expressions present in the third story and the jargon proper to mechanics of the second. Therefore, I will first look through the general aspects of tone and culture, present in every story, to then focus on the more peculiar ones of the second and the third.

tone

Since the register does not change from one story to the other, it may seem odd that the tone does. However, an interesting characteristic of these stories is that, even though they deal with less dark and absurd events, they narrate them in a more serious and introspective way. This is seen especially in those sections where we are confronted with the thoughts of the main characters, where we are allowed to peek inside their minds, to see how they really feel like. As an example:

“Come?! Mio padre ci rimane male? E io? E io non ci rimango male? Come mai il fatto che mio padre ci rimane male è molto più importante per te, mamma cara, del fatto che IO ci rimango male. Tu non ti rendi conto ma stai sbagliando. Sbagli da morire.”

Becomes:

“What? My father will be sad? How about me? Won't I be sad? How is it that my dad being sad is more important than ME being sad, my dear mommy. You don't realize it, but you're wrong. You're dead wrong.”

This can be seen as the most introspective and pure thought of the protagonist, where he gets mad at his mom because he thinks she cares more about his dad than him. The setting itself makes the tone colloquial, in that it is inscribed in a mother-son dialogue, but the emotion represented and the importance that Filippo attributes to the overall situation, make the tone much more serious than it may appear at first. Thus, it was important to be as faithful as possible, paying attention not to make Filippo sound too formal, nor too comical.

In the second story, where we have Francesco as the main character, a similar example can be found:

*“-Che devo fare ora? – gli domandò Francesco tirando su con il naso.
-Cazzi tuoi!”*

Which was translated as:

“What do I do now?” asked Francesco, sniffing.

“That’s your fucking business!”

This time, I wanted to show a dialogue between two characters of the second story. The events here are described in a very informal manner, as we can see from the older boy response to Francesco’s question. On one hand, we instantly realize that these are two kids and the situation may not be as serious as they make it, on the other hand however, the tone and the context give a different connotation to the scene. Here Francesco is desperate and lonely, and this helps the reader in empathizing with him, finally making the overall atmosphere of the story very heavy and more serious than how it may seem at first.

As the final example to show how these stories have a serious tone, using an informal register, I would like to use a fragment of the third story:

“Provare non ti costa nulla. Chiunque direbbe così. Tu no. Non ti piace fare le figure di merda. Chissà chi ti credi di essere per non poterti portare a casa un diciotto rubato! Non ti va di arrampicarti sugli specchi col professore.”

Becomes:

“Trying won’t hurt anybody. Everybody would say that. Not you. You don’t like losing your face. Who do you think you are, for not allowing yourself to take home a stolen eighteen! You don’t feel like scrambling with the professor.”

This inner dialogue of Carlo is very representative of the tone of the story. Here he is going back and forth between the idea of trying the exam and of skipping it, and while it is quite easy to see the comical effect created by this, it is almost as easy to understand how Carlo is struggling inside of him. The colloquial narration helps in detaching the reader from the problems that we are presented with, but they are problems nonetheless and the situation makes us empathize with Carlo.

As far as the tone is concerned then, it was important to translate the stories conveying in the most accurate way both the light-hearted register, and the more serious events and thoughts described.

CULTURE

Throughout the three stories, there were numerous dialect and colloquial expressions proper to Italian which had to be translated accurately. The most difficult aspect was not conveying the actual meaning of the phrases, but instead trying to condense the multiple meanings of a word into an English one, in order to keep the text fluid and as faithful to the original as possible. The third story was the one with the most examples of these untranslatable terms:

“Tua madre si raccomanda.”

“Ti rendi conto che ti sta incatastando.”

“Quelle due buste pesano un accidente”

They become:

“Your mom encourages you”

“You realize that she is making you anxious”

“Those two bags weigh a ton.”

All these expressions do not have a direct translation in English. “Raccomandarsi” is a way of saying that Carlo’s mom is encouraging him, but in a stern way, conveying both a serious aspect and a hopeful one. “Incatastare” would literally mean “to pile up”, but it is actually a peculiar term, meaning that the mom is piling up anxiety on top of Carlo’s shoulders. Finally, “un accidente”, is a phrase which contains both a general indication to the weight of the bags of fish, and an exclamation of annoyance and pain.

These expressions were not translated as accurately as possible, but they helped in showing the limits of translation, giving an insight into this aspect.

Finally, I would like to discuss the second story, the one which made great use of the mechanics jargon. What I want to stress here is that, compared to the other stories, the difficulties encountered derived from an inexperience on my side regarding the world of

mechanics. The other three narrations all dealt with more understandable matters, especially the last one, which dealt with the life of a university student. However, in this case, I made a great use of dictionaries and online research to better understand the different characteristics of the bikes described in the story. As is often the case with very technical and scientific terminology, most terms were easily translatable, in that both the original and the English spelling were very similar.

A few examples of this complex terminology are:

“Freno anteriore a disco, freno posteriore a tamburo. Ammortizzatori idraulici. Velocità cinquanta chilometri orari.”

“su di giri”

“guarnizioni”

“ammortizzatori”

“compresso”

In English:

“Front disc brake, back drum brake. Hydraulic shock absorbers. Speed 50 km/h.”

“revved up”

“gaskets”

“shock absorber”

“compact”

Most of these terms are quite intuitive. The “brakes” are translated literally, the “shock absorber” is a literal translation of what the “ammortizzatori” do, “compresso” becomes “compact”. These terms then, can be easily understood and almost as easily translated, but the fact that they seemed like an obstacle to me highlighted the importance that every type of knowledge has when it comes to the process of translation.

3.1 NOTES

IT HURTS A BIT

¹ “Best friend” is used for the term “amica del cuore”. In the source text this expression is used to refer to Verdiana who is a really close friend of Angela, but since a person does not usually have more than a few “amici del cuore”, using “best friend” well suits the effect of the original and accurately represents the affection between the two.

² “Exhibiting her oral skills” is not a literal translation. In Italian, “antica pratica orale” is written with a distinct humorous intent and it uses a formal register. This creates a contrast with the actual subject and to maintain the tone the act was described as a skill to be proud of.

³ “A quei tempi”: for this expression there were multiple options available. It could have been translated with “At those times”, but I thought it sounded too Italian and literal. Instead, the option “during that period” was chosen because it is not as literal and gives the idea that the scene is happening in a previous time compared to the present of the narration.

⁴ In Italian, the section in brackets has a highly comical effect. There is no punctuation and it is supposed to resemble a flat advertisement that Angela has found while choosing an apartment. Since it may not be clear for an English audience, I added some information regarding the location of the flat, that is the “area romanica”. In order not to translate it with “Romanesque area”, I instead chose a more explicative “Romanesque architecture area”. This is not a specific area in the city, so there was not any indication on its location, and in fact it indicates multiple spots where this type of architecture can be found.

⁵ In the fourth paragraph, the past perfect was used to give an idea of narration before the narration, because it is in a past time when compared with the rest of the story.

⁶ “Tutta trafelata”: It is a saying which has a precise meaning in Italian and it is not so easily transposed into English. So, to be able to give the same effect I used the expression “all in a rush”, which includes the heavy breathing and the confusion conveyed by the original text

⁷ “Voce” is a term literally translatable as “rumour”. This word may seem like a false cognate, in that “voce” may be mistaken for “voice”. However, in this case it is a synonym for “pettegolezzo”, whose literal translation is actually “rumour”.

⁸ “Facoltà” had to be adapted to the English/American school system, so instead of an unprecise “degree”, the literal substitute was “campus”.

⁹ “Levando il naso” literally means to “lift up one’s nose”. This expression refers to someone who is deeply focused on something, so much that they stuck their nose in it. In this case “shifted her attention” I think can properly explain that the girl was very intent on reading the book, and now has to concentrate on something else.

¹⁰ “Agenda” could not be translated with the same term in English, because in this case it is a much more private and personal thing. Among the multiple appropriate words for “agenda”, I chose “journal” because “diary” seemed a bit too childish, while “organizer” or “planner” would have been too serious.

¹¹ “Immaneabilmente” is quite an uncommon word in Italian, thus “inevitably” was appropriate for its frequency in the English language and the length too.

¹² “Pompa” is another term for “pompino”, so I simply used the word “blowjob” again.

¹³ “Pointed out” is used for the expression “aveva fatto notare”. It is the most faithful expression and also, “pointed out” sounded more like how a teacher would make his/her students notice an error. This is made to give Verdiana a know-it-all attitude, which is kind of how she acted with Angela.

¹⁴ “pizzeria”, like “trattoria”, was one of those cases where the original worked perfectly in the translated text because it is used by English speaking people too.

¹⁵ “to eat Chinese” used for the term “a cinesi”. This time, an Italian readership would understand the expression, while to an English one “to Chinese” would probably seem a little incomprehensible. I did not choose “Chinese restaurant” to avoid repetition.

¹⁶ “To add salt to the wound” is not the literal translation for “crudele”, but it was more explanatory than a normal “cruelly” or “evil”. What I chose to do was exchange the “cruel” connotation given to Verdiana by the original text for a term which was clearer as to the effect that the action had on Angela. She is willingly making her friend feel bad.

¹⁷ “Idrovora” was a unique term for me in terms of difficulty. “Water pump” might have worked, but in Italian the original term indicates something very powerful, and it is not easily expressed by the direct translation in English. “Vacuum cleaner” is then a valid alternative, because it is easily understandable in both languages when used to refer to a girl such as Angela. However, I was challenged by how to deal with the definition in the dictionary. By choosing Vacuum cleaner, I had to change the original, but its dictionary definition is not as impacting as the original one regarding the “idrovora”. So, I chose to modify the definition myself to make it sound as similar to the original as possible while changing the noun.

¹⁸ “Regoline” could be translated as “little rules”, but in order to convey the idea that these rules were supposed to be easy enough to follow, “simple” was a more valid substitute. It also further iterates how Verdiana perceives her friend as a kid.

¹⁹ “A rose bought from an Indian guy”: In bigger cities in Italy, Indian men can be found roaming streets and inside restaurants selling fake roses. Generally, people steer clear of them, both because they don’t want the rose, and because of racist reasons: there are prejudices regarding immigrants and therefore they are not trusted by the majority. Usually the plastic roses sold by them are seen as a tacky and cheap gift and in this specific case, Verdiana is saying that her friend should not sell herself for something as cheap as a pizza and the fake rose.

²⁰ “Proibizionistico” and its direct translation “prohibitionist” gives the idea that Verdiana plays the part of an authoritarian boss over Angela.

²¹ “Rummaging” is here used for the term “trafficare”. In Italian it is a fairly common word but not easily translatable, and it approximately means “to work in a frantic manner”. It is also used, as in this case, to refer to someone who is working on something but it is not clear what they are doing.

²² “gli facevano girare i coglioni”. This means that Robbi is bothered by Angela’s rummaging. Since “coglioni” would not have worked with “balls/morons” in English, the adverb “really” conveyed the intensity of the boy’s emotion while “got on his nerves” had the same meaning of the original.

²³ The adjective “silenzioso” works fine with “silent”, but instead of declaring that “he is silent”, the structure “silent type”, that is “adjective+noun” seemed more appropriate in the English language.

²⁴ Here we find a rhetorical device, which is an anaphora created by the repetition of “like” (“piacciono”). It seems to be employed to give a childish tone to Angela, iterating the idea that she is immature.

²⁵ “So tutto io” and “prima della classe” can be literally translated as “know-it-all” and “teacher’s pet”.

²⁶ Angela in “questa risposta...” is judging Robbi, so she acts as if she had a hold on him and he had to be careful about what to answer. Also, to stick with the semantic idea of the “tv host” present in “ritenta e sarai più fortunato”, “try your luck again” suited the Italian meaning.

²⁷ “Manica di frocioni” is a dialect expression, which could be translated as “group of faggots”. However, since there is no literal term for “manica”, in order to keep the slang tone of Robbi I chose “bunch”.

²⁸ “si sente pure ‘sto cazzo” is again a dialect phrase, so not literally translatable. To better convey the anger that Robbi feels towards Supertramp, the word “fucking” was used. It also relates to the semantic area of sex just like “cazzo”, and here both of them are not sexualized, they work instead as exclamations.

²⁹ “meno male” is an exclamation which conveys a feeling of relief. Considering this, “thank god” was a suitable expression.

³⁰ “che faccio?”, since it was something that Robbi said trying to act cool and nonchalantly, I chose not to translate it with an eager “what now?” or a clueless “what should I do?”. Instead, a more neuter “what’s the plan?” made Robbi look at ease.

³¹ “sensibilità da artigiano fiorentino” = “like a florentine artisan”. Here again we see a more noble description of the blowjob: the contrast created by Ammaniti helps to underline the degradation in which the whole situation is. The term artisan was used because it is proper of romance languages, making it a more pompous term for such a setting, and also because the word closely resembles the original.

³² The repetition of “vado a dormire” creates an anaphora, which is directly translated into “I’m going to sleep”.

³³ “Luna park” was close to a false cognate, even if not entirely so; though it may seem an English word, it is not present in monolingual English dictionaries. Instead, the alternative “amusement park” was more appropriate.

³⁴ “Smozzicò”: In Italian, the term would mean “to say something unwillingly, under one’s breath”. “Mutter” is a good translation in that it refers to the act of not talking in a direct, straightforward way, exactly how Robbi was speaking.

³⁵ 120.000 liras: in Italy, just like in the rest of Europe, the “euro” was introduced in 2002. This story is set more or less one year before, and so the characters are still using liras. As a general rule, to convert liras to euro you have to divide the liras by 2000. The result is not always precise, but it can help in giving an idea as to the value of the lira. In this case, $120.000 : 2000 = 60$ euros.

³⁶ “cena di merda” is not precisely a “shitty dinner” in this case. Robbi here is not angry towards an awful dinner, but towards Angela. Because of this, “fucking dinner” does not direct the insult against the meal, but it works on an exclamative level.

³⁷ To better express the idea of the original text, instead of translating “era molto più in regola degli altri” as “he worked harder than the rest”, the English expression “go the extra mile” conveys the same idea and feeling leaving the tone unaltered.

³⁸ “Cat got your tongue” is a saying that I chose to translate “non sai che rispondere?”. I chose it to better give the idea of Robbi not being able to answer in a situation where he is under pressure.

³⁹ “Sai quando stai in grazia di Dio?”. This is not a sentence commonly heard throughout Italy, and it is proper to slang rather than standard language. Here I chose “feels like home” because it seemed to deliver the same feeling of well-being and love that Robbi wanted to express.

⁴⁰ The addition of the word “yep” serves the purpose of reinforcing the idea that Robbi auto-convinces himself of the feelings he says he feels for Angela. It is not present in the original text, but it helps in conveying the same effect of “proprio così”.

⁴¹ “Cacciarsi in un gineprajo”: The one to one alternative could be “getting oneself into a bramble”, but a better option was “kick a hornet’s nest”, in that it is a more widely known proverb and better explanatory. This also works on another level: in both sayings, Robbi is actively getting himself in an unpleasant situation, while the one to one transposition would have made him a more passive character.

⁴² “Affranto” means “to be really upset”, and other synonyms for the word in English may have been “broken” and “overcome”. All of them might have worked, but in the end, I chose “distracted” because its effect most resembles the one in the original text.

⁴³ “strizzando” literally means “squeezing” and it is commonly used together with “sponge” in Italian. However, in this case Angela was gripping the handles really tight out of sadness and anger, so “to grip” was more accurate.

⁴⁴ “Cretina” can be translated with a number of alternatives in English: moron, imbecile, stupid, jerk, asshole and idiot. “Jerk” however, seemed the most literal and the one with the best onomatopoeic effect.

⁴⁵ “Parola” is an expression resembling “voce” at the beginning of the story. It seems a false cognate, but it is actually a way of saying “I swear” or “you have my word”. I chose the former in that it is the shorter of the two, making it more similar to the original.

⁴⁶ “Uccello” is a slang term commonly used to refer to a penis. Considering the frequency with which it is used in the Italian language I opted for a term as common, that is “dick”.

⁴⁷ “ragliare” has been a problematic term for the translation. The direct transposition would be “to bray”, but since it is only proper to donkeys, it would not have made sense. In Italian, it indicated that Robbi was speaking with a constrained voice, because he was in pain, so to

deliver the same effect I decided to add a few explanatory words in the text, to convey the same sensation and to keep the animal world reference.

⁴⁸ It is important to notice that in the text there are many references to the animal world, and that they are present when the mood becomes more sexual. The whole story revolves around sex and when the characters are overcome by instinct, they become more and more animal-like. “Farlo arrappare come un babbuino” is a clear example of this.

⁴⁹ “Robbi si era fissato sul concetto di normalità”: instead of translating it literally, I preferred to use the term “let go”. Also “concetto” here can be said to be an “argument” in that Robbi is making a case as to why Angela should give him what he wants.

⁵⁰ “che cazzo” is an exclamation and not a direct reference to a penis, so “goddammit” was used both because it had the same effect and it did not need to be related to the semantic field of sex.

⁵¹ “che ti costa”: this is not an expression referring to money and it is a plea from Robbi to come upstairs. Since it is a figurative phrase, what was important here was to show that the act of going upstairs was not a big deal. “I don’t bite” expressed that idea well enough.

⁵² “con una mossa abile” becomes “skilfully”, so the expression is converged into one word.

⁵³ Here we meet Robbi’s friend Tenaglia. His nickname is in Italian and was not translated in order to maintain its original meaning. In Roman dialect it probably means more than just a cheap person, so any attempt at finding a suitable replacement would have resulted in an incomplete definition.

⁵⁴ “cento e dispari” was translated using the most faithful expression possible: “100 kilos and counting”.

⁵⁵ “random things” was used for “roba” to better express how Aldo’s room is messy and full of things. “Stuff” could have been a good synonym, but with the verb “stuffed” it would have created a repetition.

⁵⁶ “cluster” for the word “ammucchiati”, just like “random things”, was not the most literal translation, but it described how the magazines were piled up in a disorderly manner.

⁵⁷ “vip” and “scoop” are real Italian magazines. Their names are English words, so there was no need to translate them.

⁵⁸ “Luce fioca”: from a subject+adjective structure it was changed into an adverb+verb one. The word “fioca” means “low”, referring to light, so “dimly lit” converged the sentence “illuminata solo da una luce fioca” into a more fluid expression.

⁵⁹ In the original text, the “telethon” was specified to be a “marathon”; however, this is not needed in English, and so “maratona” was not translated.

⁶⁰ When writing about the effects of Lorella on Pincer, I had to change the sentence to give it the same comical effect. In Italian, instead of “effects”, the word “forme” is used, because it fits both the “consequences” of muscular dystrophy on people, and the “curves” of the showgirl. Since “shapes” in English would not have worked, in order to convey the same meaning I used “effects”, because the disease has certain consequences on those who suffer from it, just like Lorella has on Tenaglia.

⁶¹ “glielo faceva tirare” is a colloquial term. The meaning here is that now Lorella made Aldo “harder than ever”.

⁶² “porca... di quelle della specie superiore”: in order to keep the sentence short, I converged into “the dirtiest kind of woman” which has the same tone.

⁶³ The period starting with “She may have been acting...” did not have this same structure in the original. In Italian the sentence begins with the “in my opinion” segment to then talk about Lorella “mother-like” traits. However, I divided the period in two separate segments: the first one being where Aldo compares the girl to an Italian mother, the second one where Aldo voices his opinion on her and talks about actual pornstars. This sequence becomes then a climactic process of the boy’s perversion, ending in the description of his wet dream.

⁶⁴ “per ogni miliardo che totalizzavano” means “for every billion added to the total amount”. In order to make the sentence more fluid, “donated” was used as an adjective before “Billion”.

⁶⁵ “chi scassa?” is a dialectic way of saying “who is calling me and bothering me?”. This translation would have been too long and unfit for the character. To keep Aldo’s tone the same, while being rude enough, “fucker” seemed the most suitable word.

⁶⁶ “Imbrattate” indicates that the shutters are almost completely covered by the graffiti, drawn without any respect, making them look dirty and untended.

⁶⁷ “Film a luci rosse” is a sentence used to refer to a generic sexual movie. Since in English there is no literal translation, the alternative “soft porn” delivered the same idea. I wanted to specify that it was “soft” because the Italian term was not as direct and dirty as an actual porn.

⁶⁸ “aho” is a greeting in Roman dialect. To maintain Aldo’s character and tone I chose to write it in the original language.

⁶⁹ “Piantala” is best translated with the expression “knock it off”. It described the irritation that Robbi felt when his friend reacted stupidly at his confession.

⁷⁰ “fammi sfogare” was not an easy term to translate. A valid option was “let me have it”, but it resulted too ambiguous because there is the object “it”. A more paraphrased “let me celebrate” may have generated a misunderstanding regarding how Aldo felt. He is happy for himself and not for Robbi because he now believes more than ever that he will get a blowjob,

moreover he is not really celebrating anything. Finally, the more literal and direct “let me vent” worked better, because it seemed the least ambiguous in meaning.

⁷¹ “Salt warehouse” in Italian is “Magazzino del sale”. I thought it would not have changed the original meaning of the text to translate it in English since the restaurant does not really exist and it sounded nice in both versions.

⁷² The term “cobble” is the closest synonym to the Italian word “sampietrino”. Sampietrinos are a kind of rocks used to pave some historical centres in Rome. This makes them a unique kind of construction material which does not have an equivalent outside of Italy. Therefore, considering the English readership I opted for a more general “cobble”, which is as big in size to convey the same effect of a sampietrino stuck in Robbi’s throat.

⁷³ “porco zio” is a softer version of a swear word in Italian, but since there are not perfect equivalents in English “Holy moly” had a similar intensity.

⁷⁴ “Laziale”, unlike “Salt warehouse” does not have a direct equivalent in English, so I decided to leave it untranslated.

⁷⁵ “le piace mangia’ bene all’idrovora” is a sentence easily understandable by an Italian native, but the term “mangia’ “ is proper to roman dialect. In this case everything was translated almost literally, while “gourmet” was added for an ironical effect: Aldo is not at all a gourmet kind of person but making him say it added to the comic tone of the scene.

⁷⁶ Just like the term pizza is universal, I thought that the classic pizza flavours would be recognized by the majority of readers, so I kept the original term.

⁷⁷ “portarla all’economica”: this was an ambiguous phrase. It could mean that Aldo simply wants to take Angela to a cheap place, since “economica” does not have a capital letter and it is not the name of an actual bar or restaurant. However, Aldo refers to it as if he had a specific place in mind, one where he is certain he can find bruschettas. Then, in order to try and keep the same meaning that Aldo gives to the place, I chose to write “Cheapo” with the capital letter to unite both the specificity of the place and its most important feature.

⁷⁸ An ironical effect is created with the obese boy tiptoeing out of the room, trying to be as stealth as possible.

⁷⁹ “Pancetta” is a term which does not correspond completely to the English “bacon”, however unlike “mortadella”, which is more unique and does not have any term which comes close to its original counterpart, “bacon” is still faithful enough to be used here.

⁸⁰ Report-like language: the translation here needed to be as literal as possible. Because of this the structure may not be as fluid as other periods.

⁸¹ “poveraccio” is term which carries an affective connotation. To translate it with words such as “loser” or “the poor kid” would have meant choosing one extreme or the other, so “unfortunately for him” worked best for its affective tone, while keeping a neutrality to it.

⁸² “Sacchi”: this term is similar to the American “grands”, because it means “thousands”. Here I decided to convert the number of liras into its actual quantity, as I did before, which is 30.000 (roughly 15 euros).

⁸³ “era incanalato”: “He was channelled” does not mean the same thing. Here Robbi means that he cannot move from where he is because of the traffic, so “stuck” worked fine.

⁸⁴ “balordi” is yet another informal term with no straightforward definition in English. It is used to refer to people, in this case some boys, who are rude and create a disturbance wherever they go.

⁸⁵ “Marchettari” in the original text is another term for “faggot”. It is another word proper to the Roman dialect.

⁸⁶ I was a bit conflicted when it came to the Italian word “negra/e”. Certainly, the most obvious choice would have been “nigger”, but since it seems to carry a much heavier and pejorative meaning compared to the source text, I thought it best to keep it less explicit, writing then “ni**a”.

⁸⁷ “rimediava” = tricky word. “Remedy”, just like “rimedio” stands for something which is done in order to correct an error. In this case the verb is used to indicate that Robbi would have been able, one way or another, to get a blowjob from a black woman. “He could have managed” gives the idea that the boy had a good chance of buying a blowjob there, if he had wanted to.

⁸⁸ I chose the term “burnt” because it is the one to one translation of “bruciavano”.

Considering the setting it would not seem out of context if the sandwich truck owner were to actually burn the meat, serving his clients low-quality food.

⁸⁹ “sculettando”: it means to walk in a sensual way, exposing one’s butt. “Waddling” conveys a comical effect and it also helps in describing the transsexuals as Robbi would see them: sexual, but embarrassingly so, because they are men.

⁹⁰ These sections with long descriptions in Ammaniti’s stories have probably been some of the hardest parts for me. In Italian the coordinates and the subordinates describe clearly the setting and the characters. However, in the translated text this structure seemed to be a little more rigid. I preferred not to repeat the “she”+verb structure for every sentence, although these multiple phrases may still feel a bit repetitive. In any case, I tried to translate in the most

accurate way possible every single term without paraphrasing or changing the original too much, compromising the final text.

⁹¹ “Cross-dresser” and “transsexual” do not mean the same thing. However, for the sake of avoiding repetition, especially in this part I decided to use them interchangeably, also because Robbi himself uses either “trans” or “travestiti”, which are not synonyms.

⁹² “che minchia ci posso fare?”: “Minchia” is a common word in Italian, but untranslatable. To retain the colloquial tone and the desperation of Robbi I used “what the hell”.

⁹³ “figurati”: since no direct translation was found, “as if” was chosen because it expressed the arrogance with which Robbi treated the people in the Village.

⁹⁴ “bestemmiò”: in Italian it refers to someone who uses an offensive term against God, and the equivalent in English would be “blasphemy”. However, because of its frequency, it would not properly substitute “to curse”, which seemed the best compromise.

⁹⁵ “chop chop” is informal and more comic compared to a possible “go on” or “move up”. It was also used because the trans saying this sentence did not sound too threatening or serious.

⁹⁶ “consigli balordi” here the word “balordi” is seen again, but this time with a different connotation. Now we have “balorde” suggestions, meaning that they are idiotic and unhelpful. Thus, “idiotic suggestions” accurately described them.

⁹⁷ “come un boia” could be translated as “like an executioner”, but it would not mean the same thing. In this case Robbi is pushing really hard to get the car out of the way, using all his strength, and to explain that, I used “might”.

⁹⁸ Here an interesting Italian saying is used. Literally transposed, Robbi thinks that if he were to leave the car in that area, the next day he would find 5 of them. There is no clear English equivalent for such an expression, and I translated the actual meaning it possesses. The saying is a kind of ironical consideration on the situation. For example, in my younger years whenever I left my bike outside my property, I often heard my mom warning me that the next day I would find two bikes instead of one, meaning that someone would steal it. In Robbi’s case he is so sure that he would get his Micra stolen, that he thinks he will find 5 of them the next day, and not only 2.

⁹⁹ “proprio sul più bello”: since the board almost counted 8 billion, Aldo was about to start his routine. Since a literal translation was hard to find, it seemed appropriate to focus on the fact that the time when Robbi called was relevant, and to maintain the focus on that aspect “timing” was included.

¹⁰⁰ “Maialissima”: to remain faithful to the boy’s imagination, “slutty” had the same effect.

¹⁰¹ “abbaiò”: “bark” is a good translation in this case, in that it is more common than “bray”. Once more we are shown that Aldo closely resembles an animal, reinforcing the idea that he is naughtier than Robbi.

¹⁰² “I’m knee deep in shit” is an English saying that delivers very well the idea that Robbi does not know what to do and is desperate. Moreover, it also literally translated the “merda” of the original.

¹⁰³ In the original text, the only information given is “Totti”. While in Italy this football player name is virtually known by everyone, it may not be the same for non-Italian people. Therefore, I added some words to make the information clearer for all readers.

¹⁰⁴ I had to add “football team” next to “Rome” because in Italy it is clear to everyone what someone means by talking about “il Roma”. However, to an English readership it will not sound as familiar, so I had to explicitly write what Robbi was referring to.

¹⁰⁵ “a cazzo” here again “cazzo” does not have a sexual connotation, but it is used to describe something done in a messy way. This is also the case with Robbi and the distributor, where “aimlessly” conveys precisely enough how he is dealing with it.

¹⁰⁶ “Gonfio come un galletto amburghese” is an uncommon expression in standard Italian. Since there is no direct translation, I paraphrased it and instead wrote “ridiculously full of himself”.

¹⁰⁷ “avrebbe lenito”. “lenire” means “to soothe”, and also the synonym “to ease” was a valid alternative. However, the former best conveyed the meaning of the Italian text because the idea was that Robbi needed to heal, as if he was wounded.

¹⁰⁸ “videobancomat” is a term with which I am not acquainted, in that it is an object that is now rarely found and used. I chose the most literal word for it, that is “video renting machine”.

¹⁰⁹ “non passa un culo di qui” is colloquial and literally means that almost nobody passes through that road. A good English equivalent was “not a soul”.

¹¹⁰ “rovinate dai postumi di un’acne antica”: since the sentence here sounded more formal with the use “antica”, I opted for the term “acne-survivor” to keep the solemn tone used in the original.

¹¹¹ “nel complesso”: here Robbi seems to be giving a score to the girl, and so it was appropriate to render it with “overall grade”.

¹¹² Here “stronza” became ambiguous when translated with “asshole”, because its gender seemed neuter, while in Italian it is clearly directed against Angela. To avoid misunderstandings I instead chose to explicitly write “bitch”.

¹¹³ “non mi ha fatto niente “ translated with “bailed on me” properly conveys the idea that Angela left Robbi hanging. So, it is not literal, but it is still faithful to the original meaning.

¹¹⁴ “interdetto” means that someone is suddenly silenced or does not know what to do or say anymore. The meaning is properly conveyed by the expression “to stop in one’s tracks”.

¹¹⁵ The sentence “he had never realized that behind the garden right in front of the renting machine” was hard to word: I transposed it as close as possible to the original, but the final structure is not too fluid.

¹¹⁶ “vaffanculo” was not directed to anybody in particular, but only to the act of falling. “Fuck you” sounded as if Robbi was mad at the girl, but that is not the case, so a more general “for fuck’s sake” was more suitable.

¹¹⁷ “del cazzo”: as before, to maintain the sexual undertone in a non-sexual sentence, I wrote “fucking night”.

¹¹⁸ “pericolante” means “dangerous” but this term would not be 100% accurate. In fact, the Italian word refers to the fact that the ladder is badly made, so it is shaky and seems dangerous. “shaky” then best described the ladder and implied that it was not safe.

¹¹⁹ “Rom” is the Italian term used to denote the gypsies among which Robbi finds himself. It is important not to be mistaken by the term “rom”: it is not the short version for Romanian, but instead it denotes a specific ethnic group which originated in northern India and which had to migrate because of conflicts raging in their homeland. They are mainly known by the pejorative term “zingari” as we can see in the story, literally translated as “gipsy”, and are usually found in such campsites inside some cities. Even though they settled in big living centres, they are not too easily seen and because of that they are considered to be a group living at the margin of society.

¹²⁰ “Pischello” is a person who has no experience in a specific field, just like a “rookie”.

¹²¹ In this section of the story, we have Robbi dealing with gypsies and the setting seems to be described as a sort of fantasy/medieval location. This story employs many aspects which are proper to the fantasy genre, the only difference here being that they are all inscribed in a darker setting, where Robbi has to deal not with fairies and princesses, but with a degraded environment, violent people and the risk of losing his life. Some representative elements are: “Django” resembling an ogre defending his princess, where “ogre” is a term present in the original too; the girl representing a princess of sorts, living in a castle, guarded by her dog; the fighting scene, where Robbi himself becomes a knight that has to fight the ogre to the death. Moreover, we can think of the moment when Robbi jumps in the dumpster as a way of escaping the twisted reality of the gypsy camp, as if his leap in the dark teleported him back

to reality. One last note: it is important to notice also how Robbi describes the gypsies when he sees them for the last time, as he is fleeing in the Mercedes, in that he calls them “swamp warriors”, as if they belonged to a fantasy world.

¹²² “laminati” is another specific term with which I was not acquainted. It is one of the construction material of the caravan porch, and since its purpose is to keep it together and standing, “supports” worked well.

¹²³ “tende” in this case is another quasi-false cognate. Here they are not “tents” used for camping, instead they are “curtains” because they hang in front of the windows.

¹²⁴ “be surprised, scream, get up, move away, try anything at all” since this was a list not easily translatable in a fluid way, I inverted the order of the words and put said list in the first place, to then explain what they meant.

¹²⁵ “fucile” was tricky: it can mean “rifle”, but it is later specified that it is a shotgun. Because of this, the general term “gun” was chosen.

¹²⁶ “tritone albino”. I did not know whether this animal trembled in fear, but I remained faithful to the original and translated it as “axolotl”. Here the animal metaphor is present once again, now mocking Robbi by saying he is a defenceless and scared animal.

¹²⁷ Here Ammaniti seems to have used a made-up language, because even though I have looked through many dictionaries I could not understand precisely what the sentences written in this language meant. The most accurate meaning I could find was “household services” which in this case would indicate that the girl is mocking “Franco Nero” with an excuse that he often uses when he is found cheating.

¹²⁸ “Povecava” should mean “get up”, but yet again the dictionaries I consulted were not too precise.

¹²⁹ “a gong sound was the cue” is not the literal meaning of the original. The narrator says that after the gong, Django rose up and Robbi started running away. To give the scene a more comical effect I linked the actions of Robbi and the ogre to the signal sent by the gong, which created a stark contrast between the two: for the gipsy that sound meant war, while for Robbi it meant escape.

¹³⁰ “sollevò” does not exactly mean “to lift”: here it indicates that Robbi is trying to fight and defend himself. “Take up” was a more fitting choice because it is also used in military language, as in “take up arms”.

¹³¹ “That’s it! I’m done with you!” in the original text, the Italian-Roman “e mo’ basta! Hai rotto il cazzo!” is virtually untranslatable, so I focused on how to best deliver the same angry reaction that Robbi has towards the bald guy.

¹³² “insospettabile” is here used to denote the prowess demonstrated by Robbi with his jump. “Incredible” conveys the effect that the jump must have had on the crowd.

¹³³ “caraccolare” is another peculiar term. It means “to jump forward”, or “to perform an acrobatic jump”. In this case Robbi probably stumbled on the dwarf and walked on him by trying to avoid stomping him too much. This means that Robbi fell, zigzagged the body and then started to run away. In order to keep the sentence short enough, the word “stumbled” expressed what happened in the clearest way.

¹³⁴ “grossa arteria” is a term used to talk about important roads which cut through cities. Here then it means “big road”, and not “highway”, which would be wrong.

¹³⁵ “occupanti” is close to a false cognate. It refers to the three men sitting in the car. “Occupiers” is a literal translation, but it does not mean the same thing and instead “passengers” is more accurate.

¹³⁶ “buontemponi” literally means “good timers”. Since it did not seem too accurate, instead of choosing the literal translation, “funny bunch” seemed more appropriate for two reasons: it managed to keep the same comic effect of the original, and it should be more understandable to an English-speaking readership.

¹³⁷ “storcere il naso” means to move your nose in a disgusted way, so as to indicate that there is a bad smell in the air. “storcere” means to “twist”, but this word would describe a movement that the nose cannot do. In order to keep the figurative sense of the sentence I opted for “to turn one’s nose”.

¹³⁸ “non si capisce una sega” is a slang saying, literally meaning that the mobster was not understanding anything. Since “sega” is vulgar, I translated it with “shit”.

¹³⁹ “hai cacato il cazzo!” is untranslatable in Italian without some paraphrasing. To convey the emotion with which it was said and also its vulgar tone, the most appropriate expression was “I’m sick of your shit”.

¹⁴⁰ “Criccata”: this word is proper to slang and refers to a strong blow dealt to someone or something. In this case I changed it into a verb to make it more fluid, and so I chose “hit”.

FROGS AND TADPOLES

1.

¹⁴¹ “un po’ tutto”: this is the first instance where we can see how “tutto” is used in this story. What I mean is that throughout this narration, “tutto” is not solely used to mean “everything”, and in this case, together with “un po’” it becomes an expression. Here in fact, the narrator is telling us that Michele is hitting the furniture in the room, but it is unclear whether he is hitting every single piece, or just a few of them. “Every other piece” seemed accurate to me in that it kept the imprecise trait of the action, while still including almost every piece of furniture, as it was done in the original.

¹⁴² “di tutto”: another expression which does not literally mean “everything”. It is used to indicate that the inventions made by Michele differ in a wide range. To keep the comical tone and the randomness of the different inventions, I chose “bunch”.

¹⁴³ “Spara-batterie”: this is literally a “battery-shooter”, but since it made sense neither in English nor in Italian, I chose to make the sentence more explanatory, clearly writing that the hose “shot batteries”. It is still a mystery as to how it could do that.

¹⁴⁴ “fatto secco”: this is an interesting saying. It means that Michele almost killed his sister, but here it is written in such a way as to make it comical and light-hearted. Since there is no proper term in English, I kept “Kill”.

¹⁴⁵ “annosa e lunga”: here Filippo is referring to the purchase of a new tv being long overdue. The expression literally means “years old and long”, indicating that they had been having the same tv since forever. However, this is a hyperbole, which means that the tv had not been there for as long as we are made to believe. Thus, here I did not use “years”, but instead I remained faithful to the time span by using “a long while”.

¹⁴⁶ “da tempo immemorabile”: this is a hyperbole indicating that Filippo’s family had had the tv for a long time. In order to use the same solemn tone employed by Ammaniti, I decided to write “from time immemorial”, also because it is the most literal version.

¹⁴⁷ “scassato”: for this word there were multiple synonyms available for translation. “Broken”, “malfunctioning”, “busted” might have all worked, however, all of them seem to state that the device was almost completely broken, and that it should have been thrown away. While this is not entirely false, the tv still works properly, except for the “snow” effect. Thus, I chose

“beat-up”, both because it best conveyed how the tv is old but still working, and because it was more faithful to the original comical tone.

¹⁴⁸ “l’acquisto di un televisore...”: in the original text the sentence makes use of a passive verb. While in Italian the passive form is quite common, it is not so in English, therefore I changed the structure into an active one, where “Filippo’s dad would postpone...”.

¹⁴⁹ “spuntavano fuori” is another colloquial expression, which means that something appears suddenly, almost out of thin air. Because of its tone, I decided to translate it using the phrasal verb that most resembled this meaning, that is “pop up”.

¹⁵⁰ “scatolone americano”: I was not sure whether the literal translation of “big American box” would have worked, because here “una specie di” helps the reader in understanding that “scatolone” is figurative and refers to the tv. I first thought of using “resembling” or “like”, but both alternatives removed the figurative aspect of the original, and to highlight this trait I then used “one of those”.

¹⁵¹ “facendo un baccano infernale”: in order to keep the “inferno” reference, I wrote a “hell of a noise” instead of just stating that he was being noisy. Also, “baccano” is simply a synonym for “noise”.

¹⁵² “Furia, cavallo del west”: unlike “Sandokan”, which is found later in the story, this tv series is American. Since it belongs to an English-speaking culture, the safest option was to write it using its actual name. In Italian, the series is subtitled “cavallo del west”, but this seemed to be more of a clarification for Italian readers who might not have known the series, in that the original title does not contain that phrase. In the end, I chose to add the second name by which the series is known, that is “brave stallion”, in order to clarify it for those readers who might not know it from its original name.

¹⁵³ “deformava”: this is a figurative expression meaning that the smile on Michele’s face was changing his traits, implying that he was really happy for his invention. Since it is not used in its literal connotation, I did not use the literal translation, and instead opted for “spreading”, which seemed to convey the idea of the smile being big and visible on the kid’s face.

¹⁵⁴ “rimise su” is a phrasal verb which literally means “to put back on”. In this case however, it has a different meaning because it refers to the bangs, so “adjust” was more faithful.

¹⁵⁵ “steel framed”: given the context, it was quite clear that the object of “steel” were the “eyeglasses”. Nonetheless, since there may be misunderstandings concerning what the “steel glasses” are, I chose to add “framed” to avoid any doubt.

¹⁵⁶ “com’è questa invenzione”: this is a tricky expression. The Italian word “come” means “how”, and if I were to use it, the sentence would have been like this: “how do you like this invention?”. However, this sentence conveys a tone of excessive confidence for Michele, who is just a kid and is probably asking his brother for an honest opinion. Therefore, to keep the same tone as the original, instead of writing “How”, I changed it into: “what do you think”, so that Michele seems to be innocently asking whether Filippo likes the invention or not.

¹⁵⁷ “asstò”: this verb is used when a hit or blow is delivered with precision, as if the person doing it aimed before striking. This is more or less what happened when Filippo used the stick himself. “Hitting” therefore, would not have worked because it lacked the “precise” connotation of the original, while on the other hand, “landed” best described the act.

¹⁵⁸ “sai che facciamo?”: this could have been translated literally as “you know what we’re going to do?”, but it sounded too unnecessarily long, and it seemed like an actual question instead of an exclamation. In order to write it as a rhetorical question and to keep its exhortative value, “you know what?” was more accurate.

¹⁵⁹ “particolare” did not convey the same thing as “particular” in the translated text. It is true that both terms refer to something specific, and in that sense “particular” would have been correct. However, in this case, the Italian text and its context tell us that this day is a happy one, one which should make Mario D’Antoni less grumpy and more accommodating. Because of this, I used “special” to convey the positive aspect of “Particolare”.

¹⁶⁰ “conciliante”: this means that Mario will probably be in a good mood and will also be less grumpy. There is no direct translation in English which may convey this meaning, therefore a few more words had to be added to explain the sentence properly.

¹⁶¹ “contava i giorni”: in Italian this expression denotes a person who is excited and looks forward to something. However, since I thought that a dry “he would count the days” might have sounded too neutral and not enthusiastic enough to an English audience, I decided to add “was so excited” to better convey that feeling.

¹⁶² “posto”: for this word, “place” was the most literal possibility in English, together with “location”. However, in the original, the idea expressed by the narrator is that the place the family is looking for is the perfect one for a picnic. Since this idea of “perfection” seemed the most important for the narrator, I thought it was paramount to keep it also in the translation, and thus I chose “spot”.

¹⁶³ “smentito”: this term is usually found when talking about an argument. For example, some theories may be “smentite”, meaning that they were “discredited”, however in this case the

meaning is different because it refers to the trips being cancelled by rain or cold. Therefore, in order to use a term faithful to the original and that had the same connotation, I used “denied”.

¹⁶⁴ “avanguardia”: this is a false cognate. What Filippo means here, is that he likes to stay in front of all his parents to scout and look for the perfect spots to set camp. “Vanguard” did not have the same meaning, and instead, I chose to use “frontline”, also because it introduces the topic of war later iterated by words such as “landmine” and “Hand grenades”.

¹⁶⁵ “drappello”: this is another term related to the war topic introduced by Filippo. Literally, this is used to indicate a group of armed man. A “drappello” may be defined also as a group of people united by a common purpose such as may be the group of Filippo’s relatives which is looking for a picnic spot. Since in Italian the term is unusual, I decided to use an English word which I had almost never used myself, that is “Posse”.

¹⁶⁶ “alle costole”: the expression that Filippo uses means that his brother stays really close to him whenever they are on their trips looking for the camping spot. It is figurative, and I chose to translate it with “closely followed” because it is the most literal meaning.

¹⁶⁷ “risalire”. In this context, this term used by Mario means that the family will be following the river upwards, so going in the opposite direction of the current. In English though, the one to one term would be “to go back up”, implying that the family would have to backtrack the way they came from. In this case they would not go back, on the contrary, they would be moving forward on their path. Because of this, the Italian term was translated with “we’ll go up following the river”: it is longer and may risk losing some of the original “adventurous” tone, but it better explains the path they are going to take.

¹⁶⁸ “si gettò”: this is another example of a figurative expression. In this case, we can use a corresponding saying in English, “flung himself”, which works on the figurative level, as well as on the accuracy one.

¹⁶⁹ “io non capisco come mai sei così maleducato”: here Filippo’s mom is annoyed by his rude behaviour, and in Italian she says. “I don’t understand/get why...”. This is the one to one alternative, but since I wanted to convey a more annoyed reaction, I chose “I can’t believe...”.

¹⁷⁰ “poco convinto”: the literal translation would have been “unconvinced”, which is not the meaning of the original. While “unconvinced” is a synonym for “sceptical”, here in fact, we have a saying used to indicate how someone is either perplexed or confused when seeing or doing something, as if they did not fully understand what they have in front of them. This fits the expression Mario must have had when he saw the gift, and so he was neither “unconvinced” nor “unsure”, but instead “confused”.

¹⁷¹ “cristo”: in English “Christ” is not commonly used as an exclamation as in the original text. To remain as faithful as possible to the Italian version I used “for christ’s sake” because it had the same effect and included the word “Christ”.

¹⁷² “a bocca aperta”: Instead of translating it literally with “had her mouth open”, which might have sounded ambiguous, I chose to convey the actual emotion that the mom had felt. Among the different options, such as “astonished” and “petrified”, I chose “aghast” because it seemed the most intense.

¹⁷³ “sei il solito deficiente”: it is one of many insults that are proper to the Italian language, but that are also untranslatable. The way in which Filippo’s sister says it is very emphatic, and to try and convey Roberta’s drive I chose “idiot”. Furthermore, I changed the structure of the sentence a little to best maintain the same fluidity of the insult: if I were to translate it literally with: “Michele, you’re an idiot, you never change” it would have sounded as if Roberta was scolding him, but that is not her only intent, in that she mainly wanted to insult him. The intention of Roberta’s sentence is then conveyed thanks to the fluidity of the structure, and it was important to keep that in the translation.

¹⁷⁴ “ragliò”: if we consider that the story is narrated and seen through Filippo’s eyes, it is safe to assume that he sees her sister as an obnoxious person, as is normally the case between brothers and sisters. If this is true, then we could also believe that the narrator is describing how Filippo hears his sister’s voice, comparing it to a donkey bray to make her look like an animal, which we saw earlier in “it hurts a bit” as a metaphor proper to ruder and less refined people.

¹⁷⁵ “miagolò”: this is another example of an animal metaphor. Here we see Michele becoming almost a cat because his fear and guilt prevailed on his rational thoughts.

¹⁷⁶ “dall’orrore era passata al riso”: this phrase makes use of the nouns “horror” and “laughter” instead of the more common adjective “horrified” and verb “laughing”. In Italian the two terms are represented as something that Roberta possesses: she first “has” horror, which then becomes, or is exchanged with laughter. In order to keep this peculiarity of the original, the best option was to translate the two emotions as nouns and connecting them to Roberta through the possessive form.

¹⁷⁷ “posto”: Similarly to the “posto” that we found when Filippo was thinking about the camping trip, here the word has its own precise connotation. “Place” would have been an appropriate translation, but it risked being too neutral and ambiguous in English, mainly because to an Italian reader, the word would have clearly meant “chair”. Thus, while “place” was a valid alternative, I opted for the more precise “chair”.

¹⁷⁸ “è da buttare”: Mario says this sentence while he is very upset for what happened. This means that it is something he says off the top of his head, which makes his judgment harsh and emotion driven. Considering the context, I could not have translated the sentence literally, because it would have been too long and not as intense: “I can throw it away now/I might as well throw it away”. Instead, I focused on the best way to deliver his anger and I used “garbage”, thus using a word with a harsher and more emphatic effect.

¹⁷⁹ “non dirmi che non si può lavare”: double negatives are quite common in Italian, and they are not grammatically incorrect. It is possible to find them both in informal and formal speech, but this is not the case in English. Usually, for the sake of formality, a double negative is translated or structured as a positive sentence, making it less convoluted and more direct in meaning. Even though there may be examples in dialect English where this form would be deemed correct and acceptable, I chose to translate the double negative as a positive.

¹⁸⁰ “diluviali”: What Filippo means by using this term, is that his brother’s cries are both endless and full of tears, resembling a flood. The Italian term expresses both meanings, but there is no direct translation for it in English. In order to unite these concepts in one word, I linked the cry of Michele to the universal flood, which worked well as a hyperbole considering the others present in the text, and in the end, I translated it as “apocalyptic”.

¹⁸¹ “mitico” is another hyperbole. Filippo tries to console his brother, and since he is a kid, he tends to exaggerate things. However, “mitico” is also a false cognate: “mythical” is most heard in epic poems, referring to legends or myths, (meaning also “imaginary” or “unreal”) and it is not a common adjective for ordinary things in English. Because of this, I chose to avoid using “mythical” or even “legendary” and instead opted for “incredible”, which is exaggerated enough to describe Michele’s broomstick.

¹⁸² “il nero che aveva dentro”: in the original text, “nero” comprises of different emotions that Mario might be feeling inside of him: anger, sadness, disappointment. Using “black” would have been misleading, in that it is never used with this meaning in English. “upset” is the best term that came to me when thinking about a word with more than one feeling connected to it. However, in the end, I decided that the best option was to describe what was the result Filippo had to wait for, and I chose “to cool down”.

¹⁸³ “farci caso”: it may mean both “notice” and “care about”. In this context, where the whole family is upset and they are all focusing on what had just happened, the most appropriate option was “care about”. “notice” would have been suitable, but here they seem to be actively ignoring the tv because of what happened, and while “Notice” indicates a more passive action, “care about” is something that you decide to do out of your own will.

¹⁸⁴ “rimase un po’ così”: this expression refers to how Filippo stopped in his tracks after his father made him go to his room. Since there is no literal translation, I used the word which most closely resembled it, that is “dumbstruck”.

¹⁸⁵ “c’mon”: when the mom is trying to go into the boys’ room, she uses words such as “dài, dài su, forza”. In the original text they all mean the same thing, however, in English the only expressions that might help in translating these are “c’mon”, “let’s go” and “hurry/move up”. The first one is the most accurate for all the different terms present in the original, while the second is usually heard when someone exhorts someone else to come with them. For what concerns the last two, they would not have worked because they are normally used to push someone to go faster, for example because this person might be late at an appointment. Therefore, almost none of these alternatives would have conveyed the same idea, making “c’mon” the only one with the accurate exhortative value.

¹⁸⁶ “accucciarsi” is a complicated word. I did not find a direct translation, so I had to work with a synonym. Here Filippo lies on his bed in a position that shows how he wants to be left alone, so “curl up” seemed to best describe it.

¹⁸⁷ “bava di luce”: this is a term that we encountered also in the previous story, when Robbi was looking for some clothes after he had escaped from the gypsies. Here it is interesting to notice how the same element can be present in such different contexts, and how it can convey two different feelings. In the first story, the light coming through the blinds may indicate that there are other gypsies waiting for Robbi, making it an ominous sign. On the other hand, in this story it simply means that Filippo’s parents are going to sleep. In this instance, I did not translate “bava” using a sentence with “slit” and instead, I chose to describe how the light was getting into the room, that is from under the door.

¹⁸⁸ “non riusciva a non abbassare il capo”: here we have another double negative. Like the previous example, here too I chose not to translate it literally using “keep his head down”, and instead, I used a single negative structure that conveyed the same image of the original just as well.

¹⁸⁹ “infame”: the most literal and similar translation for this term would be “infamous”. However, “infamous” is an adjective which is normally put before a noun and does not stand on its own, as is the case with “infame”. Therefore, I had to find an alternative which conveyed the same meaning, and considering the context, “traitor” seemed appropriate. Moreover, it is a word that Filippo uses later addressing his brother, making it valid here too.

¹⁹⁰ “beccato” and “sgridata”: I did not translate these words literally. Here Filippo is angry towards his brother because he feels betrayed and remembers that he (literally) “received a scolding”. This would be a proper translation, but to me it sounded too Italian and not as appropriate as the phrase “to be shouted at”. So, I merged the meaning of “beccato” and “sgridata” in the sentence “he was shouted at”, which is shorter, more fluid and conveys the same feelings.

¹⁹¹ “Mi ha detto tuo fratello”: the structure of this sentence cannot be transposed in the same way as the original. Here we have the pronoun before the subject and the verb, making it impossible for the English language to find an equivalent. The easiest way to deal with this was to place the subject before the verb, thus making this sentence a more straightforward one for English-speaking readers.

¹⁹² “rimanerci male”: this expression cannot be translated literally in English. In Italian it is used to indicate a person who may feel sad, upset or disappointed. The best way to deal with it is to understand the context in which it is found, to best convey the emotion that it refers to. In this case, the mom is trying to convince Filippo to go with the family, and to do so she tries to leverage on how Mario would feel. To make the kid more compassionate and to convince him, it is safe to assume that she is probably focusing on sadness, because it is an emotion easily understandable also by kids, and thus I chose “sad”.

¹⁹³ “mamma cara”: here the most important thing was to keep the ironic tone used by Filippo. To do so, using a simple “dear mom” would have risked sounding ambiguous, as if Filippo was sad, rather than angry. Therefore, to maintain the same tone, I wrote “my dear mommy”, using an expression as emphatic as the original.

¹⁹⁴ “Ti sbagli da morire”: the most suitable translation here was “dead wrong”. This not only conveys the same intensity with which Filippo is thinking about the situation, but it also translates the word “da morire”, keeping it as similar to the original as possible.

¹⁹⁵ “tutto nero”: unlike the previous instance where we have found “nero”, in this case I think it is safe to assume that Filippo is actually imagining his father “all black”. Here then, the “black” did not need to be interpreted, and I chose to translate it literally.

¹⁹⁶ “grifagni”: this is a term with which I am not acquainted. By looking in different dictionaries, I found that it is an adjective referring to those birds whose claws resemble a hook, meaning also that they look quite scary in Filippo’s eyes. In this case, I wanted to use a similar word in the translated text, both because using “claws” would have been a repetition, and because I believe that the creature which Mario resembles can be defined as a griffin of

sort. Thus, my choice of “griffin feet” seemed the best one, also because it is very similar to the original.

¹⁹⁷ “ci si metteva pure lei”: this phrase is common in Italian, but it does not have a one to one equivalent. In this case, Filippo mentally complains that his sister will now “add salt to the wound” or “rub it in” regarding the matter of him not going to the countryside. In order to convey this feeling of Filippo, both expressions might have worked. However, I chose the latter because to me it sounded more accurate in representing how siblings treat each other when they are arguing: his sister is voluntarily making him feel bad and taking advantage of the situation, which means she is actively “rubbing it in”.

¹⁹⁸ “carino!”: another example of an ironic statement. Roberta mocks his brother, and to deliver the same effect I chose “nice!”.

¹⁹⁹ “insopportabile”: there are many synonyms for this word in English. What helped me in choosing the right term, was the tone that Filippo used when he thought about his sister: he is of course mad at her for being so annoying, and here it seems as if he could not stand her and wanted her to disappear. In the end, I chose “insufferable” because it best conveyed the anger Filippo felt towards her.

²⁰⁰ “solo e deciso”: these two terms seemed a little contradictory. If one feels alone, he probably also feels defenceless, but in this case, Filippo feels confident in himself and in his decision. Initially, I wanted to make the sentence less ambiguous by using “but” between “alone” and “confident”. However, in order to be as faithful as possible to the original I kept the same words.

²⁰¹ “fa come ti pare”: here we cannot be completely sure whether Mr. D’Antoni is pretending not to care, or if he actually does not care. In any case, the tone here is clearly used to show indifference, and Mario also dismisses Filippo quickly. Therefore, to deliver these two effects, I chose a suitable English expression: “suit yourself”.

²⁰² “chiusa”: this term is tricky. Filippo is checking the house to see if his family left, and we cannot be too certain whether he simply sees that the door is closed, or if he tries opening it, and finds it locked. In this case, I thought that the latter was probably the most accurate, in that it also makes sense for his parents to prevent him to leave the house.

2.

²⁰³ Throughout this story the characters and the narrator used many terms proper to the mechanics jargon. The first example can be found in the very first sentence, where there is the description of the motorbike that Francesco yearns for. Most of these terms I had to check in the dictionary and fortunately for me, since these are specific words, the translations were literal and could be easily found. Nonetheless, this text has probably been the most cryptic during the process of translation, and due to my own inexperience in the mechanics field, some sections may seem too literal and less fluid than the more narrative parts.

²⁰⁴ Motorino: in Italy, a “motorino” is a term which refers to a specific type of two-wheeled vehicle, and there is no other definition for it, except sometimes the word “scooter”, which is used interchangeably. However, in English, the division between “scooter” and “moped” is important, and I had to be careful to best describe the bike Francesco was talking about. In this case, considering the characteristics of this bike, I chose to use “scooter”, mainly because it seems to have a more powerful engine compared to a moped.

²⁰⁵ There have been some instances where I had to be careful and remain constant in my choice of American English. “Carburetor” is an example, in that this is the US spelling, while the UK one would have been “Carburettor”. A similar case was “motorbike”: in American English it is commonly spelled as “motorbike”, whereas if I were to use the English spelling, it would have been “Motorcycle”.

²⁰⁶ “belve” is a term used very frequently in this story. It is a synonym of “bestia”, which is literally “beast” and therefore, I chose this word.

²⁰⁷ “ripresa”: I was not sure whether this term was proper to dialect or standard Italian. In some Italian dictionaries it seemed to be described as a term commonly used in standard language, however, there is no direct translation for it in English. This word refers to how fast a car can gain speed again once it has stopped. Since there was no direct term for it in English, I tried to paraphrase it, using “speed recovery”, also because it was short enough to keep the fluidity of the original.

²⁰⁸ “mah, non lo so”: here Francesco really does not know what he is going to do outside, and he expresses that in a very evocative and colloquial way with “mah, non lo so”. To convey the same effect, “dunno” seemed the most accurate option.

²⁰⁹ “affaticarsi”: this definition was tricky. Usually, it means that someone is wearing themselves out, getting tired. However, in this case it meant that Francesco’s mom was putting a lot of effort into preparing the dough. Thus, among the viable options, “strain” seemed the most appropriate one.

²¹⁰ “sta venendo uno schifo”: this expression is colloquial, and its literal meaning is not that of “coming out bad”. Here in fact, the mom is saying that the dough will end up or turn out to be horrible, a failure, and so the expression was translated with “turn out”.

²¹¹ “da cross”: here the noun “Bike” is not clarified. It may seem like an unnecessary addition, but I thought that writing the noun would have helped in better understanding what Francesco was referring to. “Da cross”, in Italian, is a term that clearly implies the bike, but in the English language it is a structure which would not have made sense.

²¹² “3 million and 800 thousand liras”: in this story this is the only example where we talk about money in such a direct way. As in “It hurts a bit”, liras may seem a strange currency to many English readers, in that it was only present in Italy and it disappeared in 2002, when the Euro was introduced. For the sake of clarity, here the value in Euro would be around 2000.

²¹³ “chiavi in mano”: I was not sure whether this expression existed in English or not. Here Francesco means to say that the price of 2000 euros is the total amount that his mom would have to pay for the bike, including insurance and other expenses. Moreover, it literally means that once you have paid that price, you immediately get the keys of the vehicle, meaning it is all yours. Fortunately, the expression I found was almost literal, and thus I chose “key-in-hand”.

²¹⁴ “ricominci”: Francesco’s mom is annoyed because his son will once again try to convince her to buy him a scooter. This expression then, does not literally mean “to start over” or “restart”, instead it was important to express how the mom does not want to hear the same argument again. So, to convey this effect, “are you starting with me again?” fit better in the situation.

²¹⁵ “crollò”: the meaning of “crollare” would be to crumble or fall heavily. Since it is used in a figurative way, I chose to use a similar term, “collapse”, which expressed the idea of Francesco falling like a defeated man on the chair.

²¹⁶ “ma’ “: since this is a nickname used only in Italy to refer to one’s own mom, I chose to leave it unaltered.

²¹⁷ “sto malissimo senza”: here Francesco is not saying that he is in any real pain because he is lacking the scooter, but instead he feels really bad without it and he is literally begging his mom to buy him one. In the end, I chose to convey the effect of the expression, rather than translating it one to one, and for this I thought that the best alternative was “I need it really bad”.

²¹⁸ “rantolò”: this literally means “to wheeze”. However, the situation in which this is present is ambiguous, because the words “sulla sedia”, conveys a different effect compared to the “rantolare” alone. Out of context, “rantolare” means “to be in agony”, on the verge of death, and here it is used as a hyperbole. It seems as if Francesco was doing something similar to the “collapsing” he did earlier, sinking in the chair while wheezing. In the end, in order to be as faithful as possible, I translated it one to one, using “wheeze”.

²¹⁹ “vabbè” is an expression which mixes both annoyance and carelessness. What I mean is that Francesco says this word to both make his mom understand that he is mad at her decision, and to take leave to go out. Therefore, “fine”, which can be used in a harsh way and is the literal translation for “vabbè”, worked well in this case.

²²⁰ “Un soggetto”: synonym of “personaggio”, which is used to describe a person that stands out in a peculiar way. “character” is the literal translation and was suitable in this case.

²²¹ “fosforescente”: the term “Phosphorescent” here was accurate. However, Francesco is probably saying that his bike is very colourful and flashy, implying that this characteristic is the only good thing left in it. Since he is not actually saying that its color is phosphorescent, I decided to convey the meaning of the sentence by using “flashy junk”, which also created a contrast similar to the original.

²²² “fare un po’ di cross”: “doing cross”, which would be the literal translation of this sentence, would not mean the same thing in English. In Italian, “fare cross” means “driving the cross bike” and it is used by those bikers who drive on motocross tracks. The same thing can be said by those who own a bike instead of a motorbike, as is the case with Francesco. Since a motocross bike can also be called a “dirt bike”, I chose to use this term in its verb form, making it “go dirt biking”.

²²³ “scoscesa sterrata”: I had never heard of the term “scoscesa” as a synonym for the word “path” or “road”. In this case, since there is no one to one term in English, I chose to write both words as adjectives for “path”.

²²⁴ “campo”: in this case this is a general term, which means that it may refer to a “field”, a “park” or a “court”. In order to go dirt biking, bikers usually look for a place with some hills and some twists and turns, making a plain field an unsuitable space for their tricks. Because of this, I chose the term “court”, even though, since the term is so general, other alternatives might have been valid.

²²⁵ “in sella”: What Francesco does, is simply mount his bike. Literally, he “got back up on his seat”, but since he compared the older boys to knights in shining armour, who all had a trusted stallion, I decided to keep the metaphor here too and instead of “seat” I chose to translate “sella” with “saddle”.

²²⁶ “su di giri/al massimo dei giri”: both expressions mean that the engines they refer to are being brought to their limit, making a lot of noise. I had never heard of a term or expression with the exact same meaning in English, and by looking in the dictionary, I found “revved up”, which is the expression that I used in all the cases where “su di giri” was present.

²²⁷ “finire lungo”: it means that Francesco lays flat on the ground after having avoided the motorbike. It is a figurative expression, so I did not translate it literally, but with a phrase which conveyed the same idea.

²²⁸ “centauro” is a noun commonly used to refer to bikers in Italy. The translation which seemed most accurate was simply “biker”.

²²⁹ “cretino”: we have seen this word being used multiple times in the previous stories, but its connotation here is a little different. In this case, the biker who yells “cretino” at Francesco for being in the way is not really trying to insult him, instead he seems to be reacting out of anger or surprise, because he suddenly found the boy in the middle of the road. Therefore, I did not want to use a harsh term, such as “jerk”, and I thought it was more appropriate to convey the fact that the term in the original is more of an exclamation. In the end, I opted for “moron”, which is still an insult, but not as onomatopoeically strong as “jerk” or “asshole”.

²³⁰ “fece un po’ di giri”: literally this would mean that Francesco had been “going in circles”. This phrase would not make sense in this context, and what is meant here is that the boy is playing with the Formula 1 arcade game. Since the actual meaning of this sentence is that he is driving on some tracks in the game, I chose to change the wording a little, in order to better explain what he was doing, without translating it one to one.

²³¹ “centro”: the problem with this term was similar to the one concerning “motorbike”. In order to be as coherent as possible and use the American variety of English, I wrote “center”, instead of “centre”.

²³² “che palle!”: the expression Francesco uses is very common in Italian, and it is a colloquial way of expressing how annoyed or bored you are. Literally, these two words refer to male genitalia, but since there is no direct translation in English, I used a more known “This sucks!”. On the other hand, using an expression such as “what a drag!” would not have worked, because it refers to something boring, while here Francesco is in fact annoyed by something, namely his lack of a bike.

²³³ “grossa cilindrata”: again, we have a specific term related to mechanics. What the narrator is describing here are motorbikes with a great horse and engine power. However, I preferred not to make the sentence too long, and I decided to go with “heavy motorbikes”, which does not refer to the actual weight of the vehicle, but to its power.

²³⁴ “mollò”: Francesco drops off his bike onto a pole, to then go inside the garage. The word is proper to slang, and here it conveys a feeling of carelessness coming from Francesco for his bike. In order to maintain the colloquiality in which the act is described, a phrasal verb seemed the most appropriate choice.

²³⁵ “strisciata” has many different meanings in Italian, and it is important to understand the context in which it is used. It may refer to scratches left on a car by accident, or even a scrape left by a car burning rubber. Here it is quite clear that the “strisciata” is a smeared mark of grease, thus “smear” was the best option.

²³⁶ “infilando” is another colloquial term, commonly used in Italian language. It simply means “to put in” or “to insert”, however, in order to respect the colloquiality of the original, a phrasal verb seemed more appropriate rather than a more formal “insert”.

²³⁷ “guarnizione”: this is another example of a precise term. Initially “seal” seemed the most suitable option, because it is general and works in many cases. However, it was because of its “general” aspect that in the end, “gasket” was chosen, which best fitted the mechanical jargon that we are dealing with in the story.

²³⁸ “rifarti gli occhi?”: since this is an expression with a corresponding translation in English, it was not translated literally.

²³⁹ “spicciarsi”: the verb used in the original text is proper to a dialect present in Southern Italy. However, as is the case with this story, this term has migrated and was taken by other dialects as well. Its original meaning was not changed in the process of borrowing, and it is used to push someone to “hurry up”. It is probably used by the majority of Italians also because of its onomatopoeic effect.

²⁴⁰ “compresso”: unfortunately, I did not manage to find a proper description for this term in Italian. It can mean two things: that the KTM is smaller and a better fit for Francesco, or that the engine is small, making it a more suitable bike for beginners. However, I cannot be completely sure of these meanings, thus the safest option seemed to be the literal translation, that is “compact”.

²⁴¹ “ne capisce”: here instead of translating with “I understand”, which would not have been completely accurate, I chose to use an expression with a similar meaning, that is “to know a thing or two”.

²⁴² “stimava”: this term can be translated in different ways, the most straightforward being “to respect”. However, since it does not mean the same thing as “respect”, and since the author has used an altogether different term, I wanted to be as precise as possible, and “to think highly of” was a better option.

²⁴³ “campetto”: in this case, the Italian term is a synonym of “campo”, which we encountered previously. Because of this, “court” was once again a suitable option.

²⁴⁴ “la sapeva portare la moto”: Marco does not know how to “bring the bike”, which would be the literal translation of this sentence, instead, he knows how to ride the bike, or how to manoeuvre it. Thus, in order not to create any misunderstanding, I translated the actual meaning of the sentence.

²⁴⁵ “scaricato”: the “neon” this term refers to cannot be “out of battery” as a phone could be. In this case, the neon bulb emits a low light, barely clearing the darkness of the garage. We do not know whether the light bulb is disconnected from the electricity wires or is old and does not work anymore. We do know that there is not much power running through it and so, initially, I thought of using terms either “discharged” or “drained”, however, since the latter refers to liquid, I chose to use the former.

²⁴⁶ “bancone”: in this case, “Bar” might have been a proper translation, but by taking the context into account, it would not have made much sense. Here we soon understand that the “bancone” is simply a table where all sorts of tools can be found, and in Italian it is rather common to use this term to indicate a big table. Thus, in order to avoid ambiguities, the “bancone” was defined as a “big table”.

²⁴⁷ “gabbiotto”: here “gabbiotto” would literally mean “big cage”. It is not used in this sense, in that it is a synonym for “Guardiola”, a term used in the past to indicate the “guardhouses”. In this instance however, it refers to a private space used as an office. Since we also have the word “ufficio” that helps us in contextualizing the “gabbiotto”, “bullpen” was the term which came closest to this meaning.

²⁴⁸ “una mille e tre...”: in Italian, by seeing the article before the number we can understand that he is referring to the engine power of the Harley Davidson that he is working on. I am not sure whether a motorbike can be described in the same way in English, thus, to avoid ambiguities, I added “cc”, which mean the same thing both in English and Italian.

²⁴⁹ “boh”: like “mah, non lo so” at the beginning of the story, here “dunno” works well as a translation for “boh”. Both terms are colloquial, and “dunno” is almost as onomatopoeic as “Boh”.

²⁵⁰ “snodabile” was not easy to translate. One possibility was “articulated”, in that, just like our own articulations, they can be moved in many different ways. On the other hand, “jointed” seemed appropriate too, because it refers to body parts as well. In the end, the term which best described how the signal arrows can freely move was “articulated”.

²⁵¹ “baci perugina”: these chocolates are very popular in Italy. They are composed of a nut covered in layers of chocolate, and the brand is completely Italian. I am not sure if they are as popular abroad, but since they are such an important cultural reference, I decided to leave the name unaltered.

²⁵² In this sequence where Francesco lists the characteristics of his beloved bike, the author did not use any verb. Since I did not want to change the structure too much, mainly because the pace is set by these verbless small sentences, I kept them as in the original.

²⁵³ “garzone”: originally, this word was used to indicate someone who would work in stables or perform some of the least important jobs. In this case, Pagnotta is not a stable boy, but an assistant at a bar. Since we do not receive any other information regarding his job, “assistant” seemed to be modern enough to best describe Pagnotta’s position.

²⁵⁴ “uno di quelli che menano”: “menare”, as we have seen in the previous story, is a colloquial term for the act of brawling, or hitting someone. Here Pagnotta is literally “one of those who hits you”, but this structure would have sounded odd. Thus, instead of focusing on the word “menare” I opted to translate the meaning of the sentence, paraphrasing it into “one of the violent kind”.

²⁵⁵ “massacrato di botte”: like the previous example, here this expression could not have been translated literally. Instead, I thought it would have worked just as well with an expression with the same meaning, that is “to beat to a pulp”.

²⁵⁶ “a fare il coglione”: “acting like an asshole” is the literal translation, but the real meaning is subtle. What Francesco imagines is Pagnotta running around with his bike, but since he hates

him so much, he sees him as an asshole no matter what he does. The most faithful translation for this is “to dick around”, which also includes the offensive connotation of “coglione”.

²⁵⁷ “a fare le pinne”: this is a slang expression which means “to go on one wheel”. Since the term is proper to dialect, I wanted to translate with an expression which resembled the tone of the original. Therefore, instead of the standard “on one wheel”, I used “wheelies”.

²⁵⁸ “lo emozionò”: the English expression “emotional” is not 100% correct, however, the fact that the bike stirs something inside Francesco is the main concept of this sentence, and thus I expressed it with “made him emotional”.

²⁵⁹ “spavaldo”: among the various possible interpretations, “cocky” was a good one. However, it sounded too harsh for the context, and the original is not vulgar in this case. In order to keep the more family friendly tone, I opted for “smug”.

²⁶⁰ “piano”: here, “plan” would have worked for the translation, however, Francesco came up with this plan at the last second and is then implied that he is not sure of what he is doing. This time, I preferred to deliver the idea that the boy’s idea is not the most brilliant, and instead of “plan”, I wrote “big idea”.

²⁶¹ “pianto Greco”: I have never heard this saying myself, but I am acquainted with the “tragedia greca”, which is used to indicate someone who makes “much ado about nothing”. What is meant here, is that Francesco will begin whining and begging in an exaggerated way, so that he will wear out his parents, who will buy the bike out of desperation. Since it does not seem to exist a similar expression involving “Greeks” in English, I translated the actual meaning conveyed by the original with “whining with his parents”.

²⁶² “sette e otto”: in the Italian school system, from the first elementary class, to the final grade of high school, the grading system ranges from 1 (in some cases 0) to 10, 1 being the minimum and 10 the maximum. 7 and 8 are considered to be average/good grades.

²⁶³ “questo no”: the sentence here does not repeat “never”, that is “mai”, three times. “Mai” is used once in the period, while “questo no” is present afterwards. Since the tone which Francesco uses is very categorical, one which does not accept no for an answer, I thought that using the direct translation of “not this”, would not have sounded as determined as the original. Because of this, I instead used “never”, which created a repetition and gave more emphasis.

²⁶⁴ “grinfie”: among the different possibilities for this term, “clutches” seemed to best suit what Francesco meant here. Initially, “claws” seemed also a valid alternative, but the idea of Pagnotta snatching away the bike was best conveyed by using the former.

²⁶⁵ “non si fida”: literally, Francesco is saying that his father does not really trust anything without seeing it first. He needs proof. In English, leaving “trust” without a noun, as is in the original, would have sounded off, and instead of using this term, I preferred not to add any unnecessary word. Then, I changed the original into “needs proof”, which does not subvert the actual meaning of the sentence.

²⁶⁶ “farsi forza”: Francesco does not need to “be strong” here, in that this is a figurative saying meaning that he mustered up some courage. Since using the former option would have seemed too literal and inaccurate, I chose to write “muster up courage”, to indicate that Francesco is trying to be brave.

²⁶⁷ “impaziente”: literally this means “impatient” and there are other alternatives which work as well. In this case, I wanted to express how Francesco cannot wait for his bike any longer, because he wants it really bad. To best convey this effect, “Impatient” did not seem strong enough and instead I used “eager”, which has a stress on the fact that the boy waits for an object that he absolutely wants.

²⁶⁸ “mastodonte”: in Italian, this term is used to refer to something humongous. It is related to the ancient animal known as “mastodon”, which was huge. In English however, this name is not used in the same way as in Italian, in that it is only found as a noun and not an adjective. Thus, I had to describe the size of the bike by using a similar expression.

²⁶⁹ “Benelli”: unlike the Aprilia, this one can be defined as “moped”. The fact that Francesco adds the information regarding gears means that this vehicle can also be found without them. In my life, I have seen some mopeds similar to the Benelli and I can safely assume that it is not as powerful as a scooter, especially in its gearless variant.

²⁷⁰ “al mare”: in Italian, Francesco uses a common expression which means that his family owns a house near the sea. This information can be derived by the fact that since the boy owns a Benelli, and he keeps it “al mare”, he must have a place where he usually goes to spend his summers. So, while all this information can be easily understood by an Italian audience, I was not sure whether it was the same for an English one, therefore I added the word “House” to better explain its meaning.

²⁷¹ “rovini”: the one to one translation here, that is “ruin”, did not properly express what Romano meant. The bike might get “ruined” if it fell, but what he refers to are the “damages” that it could take and could make it worse. Because of this I decided to substitute the term with “damage.”

²⁷² “tricheco”: simply another animal metaphor.

²⁷³ “uno scherzo da niente”: again, an expression of the original text can be translated with a corresponding one in English “child’s play”, without changing its meaning.

²⁷⁴ “voleva solo andarsene..”: for the purpose of fluidity, instead of leaving the full stop after “leave”, I transformed the second sentence into a coordinate.

²⁷⁵ “prenderci la mano”: this saying is another common one in Italian. Just like when you become more experienced when you try your hands on something, in Italian you have to “take your hand with it”, while in English you “get the hang of it”.

²⁷⁶ “aria sempre più dubbiosa”: the sentence was not too complicated, but I had to be careful with “dubbiosa”. A false cognate for this term is “dubious”, but it actually indicates that something seems “ambiguous” or “weird”, and it did not work in this case. Instead, the correct alternative was “doubtful”, which expressed how Romano trusts Francesco’s skills with the bike less and less.

²⁷⁷ “cretino”: here we see another example of how “cretino” can be used. Unlike the previous example, here Francesco is saying this to himself. Synonyms such as “jerk” or “asshole” would have sounded too harsh, while “idiot” would have created an unnecessary repetition with the following “idiota”. Thus, I chose another term, “dumbass”, which still delivered how Francesco felt because of his action.

²⁷⁸ “fantastico”: we cannot be too sure what this exclamation conveys in the original. We can assume that Francesco here feels relieved, excited and a bit disappointed in himself. Since these emotions are mainly conveyed by the context, rather than by the word in itself, I simply translated it with a one to one term.

²⁷⁹ “Ciao”: this has been the most popular moped for a while in Italy. Nowadays it is not as present, and it can be found mainly in countryside towns. It was a hybrid between a bike and a moped, making it ideal for beginners.

²⁸⁰ “lisciare”: this term is colloquial and proper to slang. It probably refers to the act of smoothing out with a hand, which involves a light touch. Here the word is used as a synonym for “graze”, meaning that the bike had a minor contact with the bus, leaving Francesco unharmed by some miracle. Since “lisciare” is quite specific, and it delivers the idea of two things barely touching, I wanted to make it as accurate as possible, I added a few words to convey the same effect.

²⁸¹ “un numero imprecisato”: here the author means to say that the motorbike has turned off many times. However, since the term used was not “molte volte”, I wanted to use another expression, in order to be as accurate as possible. In this case, “more times than he could

count” seemed to me to give the idea of the bike dying many times, so many that Francesco was not keeping tracks of them anymore.

²⁸² “fare un salto” is an expression which does not have a direct translation in English. It literally means “to do a jump”, and in Italian it is used when someone wants to go somewhere, without knowing how long they will stay there for. It can also be seen as another way of saying “pay a visit”, but since it is more colloquial, I opted for “swing by”.

²⁸³ “paraculo”: I am not acquainted with this term myself. By looking in the dictionary, I learned that it refers to someone who thinks that they are very smart, but in a sly way. The most literal translation was “smartass”, and since I am more familiar with this term rather than its Italian counterpart, I thought it was suitable enough.

²⁸⁴ “Magro come un Chiodo”: this expression indicates that the person it refers to is very lean, almost too thin. In English, “as lean as a nail” did not make sense, and I had never heard of this saying before. Instead, by looking in some dictionaries, an equivalent saying was “as lean as a rail”, and since it conveyed the same effect, I used it.

²⁸⁵ “bugia gratis”: literally “free lie”, this expression however is used to underline how the lie Francesco said was without any foundation whatsoever. It is not an elaborate or a half-true lie, and since I did not find any equivalent expression in English, I decided to translate it literally. The adjective I used was not “free”, but instead “gratuitos” because it helped in conveying the idea that the lie was unnecessary.

²⁸⁶ “ci giravano intorno”: the expression here means that Francesco’s friends are literally circling around the bike, and also that they are making compliments for it. Given the context, I thought that translating this expression with “circling around” was enough to convey both meanings without explicitly writing that the other guys were complimenting him.

²⁸⁷ “I commenti si sprecavano”: here Francesco is thinking that people were making so many appreciative comments that they became unnecessary. It is a common expression in Italy, but not so in English, for which I did not find any proper translation. In the end, I decided to describe how the comments were abundant, and I used “overflowing”, to give the idea that they were becoming almost superfluous.

²⁸⁸ “girarono intorno”: in this case, the older boys are actually circling around the other, which meant this worked well with the literal translation.

²⁸⁹ “occhiali da mosca”: there is no translation for this type of glasses. The term is proper only to Italian, because of which I had to try and explain how the glasses looked like instead of using a term which might have been misunderstood.

²⁹⁰ “pacca sulla spalla”: “a pat on the shoulder” would have meant something too light and not as energetic as the “slap”. However, the “pacca” is not really a slap either, but since Enrico hit Francesco to encourage him, I thought it was accurate in order to express the way in which he did it.

²⁹¹ “montò”: previously in this story I translated “montare” with “to mount”. However, this situation is a little different from the previous ones, in that here I wanted to express how Francesco has become more used to the bike. So much so, that he now “hops” on it with agility, instead of mounting ungracefully.

²⁹² “fatso”: this term may seem harsh, but in this section, we are dealing with Francesco’s thoughts rather than an impersonal narrator. Thus, it seemed to make more sense to depict Danilo as a “bad” guy, using a pejorative word, instead of a more neutral and even more comical “fatty”.

²⁹³ “shark”: here again a character becomes an animal through the use of a metaphor.

²⁹⁴ “sfortunato da morire”: while in Italian it is possible to strengthen the meaning of an expression by adding “da morire”, the same cannot be said for English. As we can see here, Francesco believes that he is extremely unlucky, but the translation for this must have a resigned tone to it, because the boy realizes this in a desperate moment. Because of this, I did not choose “extremely unlucky” or “hella unlucky” because they did not seem to convey his resignation. Instead, “unluckiest boy in the world” seemed to be more accurate because it possesses a whiny tone which fits the character of Francesco, who got himself in this situation on a whim.

²⁹⁵ “ants”: here Francesco’s friends become ants because of their impossibility to act in front of a group of sharks.

²⁹⁶ “balzo”: this term is used figuratively to indicate that Piero blocks Francesco’s way at light speed. Since he cannot be literally “Jumping”, I chose to deliver the effect by translating this expression with a similar one in English, that is “in a single bound”.

²⁹⁷ “barracuda”: again, animal metaphor, still related to sea animals.

²⁹⁸ “soltanto”: there were various alternatives for this term. Initially, I chose “simple”, but then I opted for “mere”. This because in the original text the image is that of four older boys who seem like normal bikers, but in fact are executioners: “mere” then, was more accurate because it gave the idea of them hiding something, while “simple” did not convey the same thing.

²⁹⁹ “cazzo”: instead of “fuck” or “I can fucking do this”, I decided to keep the original structure of the sentence, with the swear word at the end. Because of this, using “fuck” would not have worked, in that I needed a word which could stand alone and still have a strong

sound and meaning. For these reasons, “goddamit” was more appropriate, also because the most important thing here seemed to be the onomatopoeic effect of the word, rather than its actual meaning.

³⁰⁰ “giù per la discesa”: literally, this sentence means “go down the descent”, however, using both “down” and “descent” seemed to form a repetition. To avoid that, I chose to use the word “hill”, which together with “down” make up the word “downhill”, which is exactly what the guys are doing.

³⁰¹ “melma”: this term is a synonym of “fango”, that is “Mud”. However, in order to avoid a repetition with the following “mud clumps” I chose to use “marsh”. It worked well also because the whole terrain where Francesco is running is muddy, and since “marsh” refers to an extended area of ground, it made sense in this context.

³⁰² “tiravano su”: phrasal verb which here means “to throw” or “pulling up”. The rotating motion of the bike wheels is throwing these clumps at Francesco, and instead of literally say “pulling up”, I chose “throw” also because it was not as confusing as the former.

³⁰³ Here we see that Francesco is not wearing a helmet. As far as I know, this is something which people living in the southern part of Italy usually do, while it is not as common in the north.

³⁰⁴ “sollevando”: this is similar to “tiravano su”. Here the bike is once again sinking in the mud, and instead of proceeding forward, it sinks in the terrain. “raising” would not have made sense, in that the bike is not raising the level of the mud, but launching it in every direction. Since this is its core meaning, I decided to explain that the bike is doing so, adding “everywhere”.

³⁰⁵ “a palla” is a colloquial expression meaning “to the maximum”. In English, there is not a direct translation for it, which also conveys its informal tone. In this case then, I used a similar slang term, which is “all the way”, to indicate how Francesco is using all the engine power to make the bike move.

³⁰⁶ “forza bella”: instead of translating “bella” with “beautiful”, I chose “girl”. Firstly, because I thought that saying: “c’mon beauty” was not as good as “girl”, and secondly, because I wanted to make clear that Francesco refers to the bike as if it was a girl, thus remaining faithful to the original gender choice.

³⁰⁷ “a duemila”: here the story refers to the rpm of the bike. Since I have never heard an expression like the Italian one, that is one without “rpm”, I chose to add it to make it clearer and be safer.

³⁰⁸ “dare graduatorie”: Francesco is here trying to “give grades” to his pain, as if he was thinking of a proper scale with which to measure his pain. Since the tone of this sentence is somewhat scientific, I decided to use a term with a similar connotation, that is “assess”.

³⁰⁹ “poveraccio”: not literally “poor”. Here Francesco is thinking about what his mother is going to say, and the Italian term may be misleading. In fact, by looking at the context, we can understand that the fake mom feels ashamed for his son’s actions, and so “Pathetic” is more fitting.

³¹⁰ “arrivavano” refers to the “inhuman screams” produced by Pagnotta. The one to one translation for this word would be “got closer/approached”, but I thought that both terms related more to a person moving closer to something or someone, rather than an abstract entity coming into reach. In this case, writing “could be heard” delivered the same idea and resulted less ambiguous than the original version.

³¹¹ “senza senso”: the expression here may mean two things. First, that Pagnotta is hitting the boy without hurting him, pointlessly. Second, which is the case here, that he is hitting Francesco without any real strategy or plan, nonsensically. Thus, in order to avoid ambiguities, I chose “without a logical order”, which seemed the clearest explanation and the most direct.

³¹² “impreparato”: literally “unprepared”. Since this translation did not make too much sense, I opted for “he did not expect it”, because it describes the actual meaning of the word.

³¹³ “botto incredibile”: what Enrico is saying here is that Francesco’s disastrous landing was very loud. This means that it is not only “incredible”, but also noisy. Since “incredible” did not fully convey the meaning of the original, I instead chose to use “loud”, which is the most important meaning of the sentence.

3.

³¹⁴ The most important aspect of this story is the second person “You” used throughout the whole narration. It helps in empathizing with the main character and it separates this type of narration from the ones present in the previous stories of “Frogs and Tadpoles”.

³¹⁵ “tosta da morire”: “tosta” is easily translatable with “tough”, while “da morire” could not have been translated literally. “Tough as death” did not make sense, and to remain faithful to the semantic of afterlife, I chose “as hell”.

³¹⁶ “devi fare”: even though “must” was the most literal choice, I did not use it. In this case, “Must” would have sounded too forced, as if the exam had to be taken that day, or never again. It is true that Carlo must take the exam eventually, but here “devi fare” does not indicate a direct order, and so “have to” seemed a softer and more appropriate term.

³¹⁷ “libri speciali”: as a university student myself, I am not too sure what Carlo refers to when talking about “libri speciali”. In order not to stray from the original meaning, I translated it literally.

³¹⁸ “devi provare”: here Carlo is more resolute, therefore “must” was more fitting to describe how he intends to take the exam at all costs.

³¹⁹ “vai a vedere che ti dice bene”: this is an expression hardly translatable in English. It means that the exam might go well despite Carlo not having studied anything, but I could not find a fitting expression with the same meaning. Instead, I chose not to use an equivalent expression, but simply to translate it in the clearest way, so to deliver the same idea of the original.

³²⁰ “un po’ guardavi fuori..”: this expression “un po’” tells us that Carlo’s actions are done only because he wants to pass time. He didn’t actually focus on what he saw outside, and he didn’t really go to the bathroom because he needed to. To deliver the same effect of “un po’” I used the modal verb “would”, which gives a similar feeling of Carlo being unfocused, with his mind wandering.

³²¹ “cesso”: this term is quite vulgar in Italian, and you would hardly hear it even during an informal conversation. In order to convey a similar effect, I used a term proper to American slang, also to remain faithful to my original choice of using the American English variety.

³²² “Strizza”: as a synonym of “fear”, using “scared” was the most direct option. In Italian, it is a slang term, for which however, there was no direct translation. Its meaning refers to the feeling of “squeeze” which you would normally experience on your stomach when you are scared.

³²³ “I nodi vengono al pettine”: since there is a direct translation for this expression in English, I used it. Literally, this means that “all the knots will be caught by the comb”.

³²⁴ “in maniera microscopica”: what Carlo means here is that the balcony is withdrawing by such a short length every day, that it cannot be easily seen. In order to keep the sentence more fluid, instead of writing “in a microscopical way”, I chose the adverb “imperceptibly.”

³²⁵ “bonazze”: this term is proper to dialect and to avoid translating it with a more standard “hot girls”, I chose “chicks” to maintain the original feeling.

³²⁶ “farsi la barba”: “groom your beard” is a suitable translation here, because it is not specified whether he will shave it or just trim it.

³²⁷ “acchittato”: term proper to a regional dialect. It is a way of saying “to overdress”, “to look elegant” and I chose the former because it expresses the meaning in one word, like in the original.

³²⁸ “cuccia”: this term defines the room as a “cradle”. Here however, it may mean two more things: first, that Carlo feels safe in his room, and he has to leave safety, or second, that the room is his “crib”, rather than a cradle. Since he is not a kid, I preferred to use the latter, also because it is a slang term fitting with the rest of the story.

³²⁹ “Hair”: the fact that Carlo goes through the whole plot of the musical probably means that he feels some connection to it. He may want to be like the main character who in the end does not have to live a military life against his will, but since he plays the final song of the show, the one present when the hippie leader flies away instead of the protagonist, he may resemble the leader more. He probably feels like he is forced into a life which does not suit him and going to the exam resembles a departure for war.

³³⁰ “dai suoi gradi”: this phrase was a little ambiguous. “gradi” is mainly used to refer to military “ranks”, but here, the protagonist of the musical cannot be “going out” of his ranks, in that the scene describes him as physically leaving a place. What is meant here, is that he is leaving the place where he resides, and to be as accurate as possible I chose “lodgings”, also because in barracks soldiers have only a bed as a private space, instead of a whole room.

³³¹ “straziante”: there were various alternatives with which I could have translated this word: heartbreaking, touching, moving... In the end, I chose “heartrending” because it seemed to better describe how deeply Carlo is touched by the scene.

³³² “scattante”: the literal meaning here would have been “sprinty”. Carlo’s father is depicted as an active person, always ready for action we could say. However, “sprinty” would not have expressed the actual meaning thoroughly, and thus, I chose “industrious”, which also relates to the fact that the dad is going to work.

³³³ “rompergli il culo”: while it is clear who the “gli” refers to in Italian, translating it with “his ass” might have resulted ambiguous in English. Instead, since in the translation we do not have a clear object for the “ass kicking”, I changed “Him” to “their”, so that it was not going to be misunderstood as the father’s “ass”.

³³⁴ “bastoni” here is figurative. The hit that Carlo’s father will receive will be of a psychological kind, and considering the strength of that future blow, I instead chose to translate it with “final blow”.

³³⁵ “in bocca al lupo”: this saying does not exist in the English language in this form, but a similar expression was “break a leg”, which is the one I used here.

³³⁶ “si raccomanda”: I could not find a proper translation for this term. Its general meaning is that Carlo’s mom is both encouraging him and hoping that he will pass the exam, making it a mix of encouragement, hope and anxiety. Since there is no perfectly suitable term, I chose to use “encourage” because it is the most important connotation of the verb.

³³⁷ “diciotto”: the Italian university grading system ranges from 18, which is the lowest grade for a pass, to 30 cum laude, which is the highest. Usually, whenever a student desperately wants to pass an exam, the grade he/she hopes for is an eighteen, aiming at passing at any cost.

³³⁸ “incatastando”: this is probably a dialect term, but I have never heard of it before. Even by looking in different dictionaries I could not quite understand what it means. I assumed that Carlo’s mom is making him anxious, maybe burdening him with all the hopes she has for the exam. Since I did not want to stray from the original text too much, I simply used “make you anxious”.

³³⁹ “con che faccia” : while in Italian the phrase with “faccia” does not need an adjective, in English it would not have been correct. Literally, the translation was “with what face”, but it did not sound fluid enough. Instead, I chose to add “straight”, which helped in keeping the original meaning of the sentence, using a less rigid structure.

³⁴⁰ “la porta è intasata”: this sentence began with “door”, however, while in the Italian text we have a passive form, I preferred to change into active, which better fits the translation.

Therefore, the sentence here begins not with “door”, but with “Students”.

³⁴¹ “autonomia operaia”: The most direct translation for this graffiti was “working class autonomy”, however, I thought that it did not resemble the original accurately, in that I believed that the most important thing was to maintain the two-word structure. In order to keep it, I used a term which may not be as precise as “working class”, but that was still faithful to the original.

³⁴² “vaffanculo”: this insult seemed to be directed both at the professor, and at the university in general. Since the actual object is not clear, I chose not to use a direct “fuck you”, but a more general “fuck off”, which is more of an exclamation.

³⁴³ “giri”: this term has more than one meaning in this case. Literally, it means “to turn”, which here fits the action of turning with the scooter. However, in a connotation proper to dialect, “girare” means also to drive around, aimlessly, to drive for the sake of driving. Both meanings might have worked here, but since it seemed that Carlo was wandering aimlessly around the university building, I thought that “drive” was the most suitable translation.

³⁴⁴ “non gli regge”: the meaning of this expression is that Carlo does not have the courage to take the exam, just like many other students. What was important here was to condense this definition into a short term, to keep the fluidity of the text. In order not to make the sentence too long, I used a simple “can’t do it”, which conveys the central meaning of the expression.

³⁴⁵ “bastardi”: since the act described here is that of “gnawing” and we have a “pack”, Carlo probably refers to “mutts”. However, since he may think of these dogs as “bastards”, this term seemed appropriate too. In the end though, the most accurate seemed “Mutts”.

³⁴⁶ The scene of the hallway bears some resemblance to one of the movie *Hair*. Here Carlo is among his colleagues, ready to take the exam, which for him feels like going to war to die (kamikaze). He is about to “board” the airplane just like the hippie leader, but in the end he escapes his fate, making him more similar to the protagonist of the movie.

³⁴⁷ “non ti costa nulla”: since this expression is not related to money, and is figurative, I chose not to translate it literally with “it’s free” or “it doesn’t cost you anything”. The toll on Carlo will be on his psychological wellbeing, which means that trying to take the exam “won’t hurt anybody”, rather than cost anything. Moreover, later in this period he says he does not want to “lose his face”, meaning that his reputation and self-esteem will be hurt. Because of this, putting the stress on the idea that the exam may hurt his feelings seemed the best choice.

³⁴⁸ “arrampicarti sugli specchi”: in this specific case, this expression refers to the possibility on Carlo’s side to come up with some made up answers during the exam. In general, it means that someone is trying to come up with an excuse but fails to do so. There was no direct translation for it in English, and to try and at least convey its general meaning, “scrambling” seemed a fitting choice.

³⁴⁹ “dove ti sbatti”: this is an expression which I had never heard before. However, it was easily understandable: here it means that Carlo is wondering where to spend his time before lunchtime and he does so using a dialect expression. Since I could not find a fitting slang expression, the most direct translation for this was “what are you going to do”, because it is the actual meaning of the sentence.

³⁵⁰ “fai le storie”: another dialect expression. Here Carlo means that he is dating Laura, which is something proved by the fact that they are very close, almost like boyfriend and girlfriend. Since there was no dialect saying in English, I chose the more standard “dating”.

³⁵¹ “stai troppo male”: throughout this story, Carlo feels “male” multiple times. Since it is a condition stemming from his mind, rather than his body, the more appropriate term would be “bad”. However, it is not uncommon to feel physical pain because of stress and in this case, since the anxiety prevents him from breathing, I thought it more fitting to use “sick”, because it clearly affects the body.

³⁵² “curl up”: here we can see how Carlo resembles Filippo, the kid from the previous story. Just like Filippo curls up when he wants to ward off his parents and the rest of the world, here Carlo needs protection from the bustling Rome and the feelings of inferiority he harbours inside.

³⁵³ “come una pietra”: in Italian, we say that someone is sleeping like a stone to indicate that they had a resting sleep. However, the saying in English involves a log, and so it seemed to work better than the literal translation.

³⁵⁴ “non mettere mai i piedi”: this sentence employs a double negative. Since this structure is uncommon in English, I decided to change it into a positive one. Moreover, using the verb “keep your feet off” seemed more suitable than saying “Not to place your feet”.

³⁵⁵ “at traffic lights...game ends”: in the original text this sentence does not have any commas. I thought that this was done on purpose to give the idea that the actions and thoughts are all happening one right after the other, almost simultaneously: because of this, I kept this structure in the translated text too.

³⁵⁶ “sbattere”: this term is used in a figurative sense to indicate that Carlo wants someone who will make him focus on the books. Since the expression delivers a powerful image, I chose to translate it literally, also because the context is clear enough for it to be understood.

³⁵⁷ “Belle Arti”: in this instance, the literal English translation may be a little misleading. In Italian, the narrator says that the bridge that Carlo is crossing, is “of” Fine Arts, which means that it is a bridge close, or leading to, the Fine Arts campus. The bridge itself is anonymous, and it “belongs” to the campus, rather than being named after it. Here I chose to use Fine Arts as an adjective before bridge, and even though it is not wrong, it may seem confusing at first.

³⁵⁸ “gorgi”: I did not know what “gorgi” were. After some research I found that they are small whirlpools created by the water currents in particularly deep waters. Since “whirlpools” was a little too generic, I thought that “eddy” was more suitable in this case.

³⁵⁹ “si pesca”: the sentence used by Carlo to introduce himself is not as straightforward as it may seem. Here he is not really asking whether the man is fishing or not, because it is very clear that he is. Instead, the sentence had more of an exhortative value, lacking the intention of stating the obvious. Because of these reasons, translating it with “are you fishing?” would not have been correct, and instead, I opted for “fishing, huh?” which retains the tone of the original.

³⁶⁰ “rimanete”: while in Italian the verb contains the information on the person performing the action, in English it needs to be specified. If I were to use “you stay”, it might have been misunderstood, and so I added “both”.

³⁶¹ “bendidio”: this term is not related directly to God or religion in general. It simply means that the quantity of fish is big, and that it is something valuable. The stress here is mainly put on the quality, and instead of translating “bendidio”, which does not have a direct translation, I chose to use “good catch”, also because it specifically refers to fish.

³⁶² “lungotevere”: it is quite common for the Italian language to have the word “lungo” as a prefix for words. It is used to indicate the path running along a river, but it can also be found with names of lakes. Interestingly enough, the direct translation of “lungotevere” exist, and it is “Tiber embankment”.

³⁶³ “bloster”: this term, even if it may seem more English than Italian, actually belongs to the latter. The term refers to the big padlock which is used to lock a scooter or even a motorbike, and so using “padlock” seemed suitable.

³⁶⁴ “tu stai male”: here Laura is not telling Carlo that he is actually sick or deranged, but that he should be more responsible, and he cannot go on acting like this. Since I did not want to make the sentence longer than the original, I chose not to explain what she meant, and instead

I used “crazy”. I chose it because it is common to hear this term referring to something which is not actually “crazy” but simply uncommon, or a little out of the ordinary. I chose this word also because here Laura does not mean to say that Carlo is deranged, but just dumb.

³⁶⁵ “li sbatto”: here the term “sbattere” has a yet different connotation compared to the other times we have seen it. In this case Carlo is getting mad at Laura, and he says that he will “throw” the fish in the fountain. Thus, the most accurate term here was “throw”.

³⁶⁶ “ti rendi conto...”: in this case, Laura is using this expression to show her disappointment towards Carlo’s actions. It is a rhetorical question, in that she is not really asking him whether he realizes what he has done or not, but just scolding him. Since this is not actually a question, I chose to convey the emotion which Laura feels, and I used “unbelievable”.

³⁶⁷ “buttarla sul ridere”: the meaning of this expression is that Carlo is trying to make the situation more light-hearted than it actually is. Literally, the sentence would be “throw it into laughter”: obviously, it did not make much sense in English, and thus, I chose a similar expression proper to English, that is “laugh it off”.

³⁶⁸ “storie”: here this term does not mean the same thing as in the sentence “farsi le storie”. This time, as Laura is scolding Carlo, she tells him that he tells himself many lies, that he lives in his own dreams and imagination. This means that Carlo does not have realistic ambitions and is quite immature. In order to keep the sentence short enough I decided to give this idea of “illusion” by defining Carlo’s “storie” as “nonsense”.

³⁶⁹ “dove vuoi andare”: the expression does not literally mean “where do you want to go”. It is figurative, and here Laura is saying to Carlo that he will not get anywhere if he keeps behaving like this. Since she is implying that Carlo is too immature to be able to achieve anything, I tried to convey this idea by using “hopeless”, which seemed to properly describe his condition.

³⁷⁰ “a pezzi”: this expression means that Carlo is both tired and sad, defeated by the whole situation. To best convey both of these ideas, “beat” seemed the most suitable term.

³⁷¹ “Un accidenti”: in order to say that something is very heavy and that it is annoying you at the same time, we use “un accidenti”. The term is general, in that it does not refer to a specific weight, and since there was not a corresponding word with the same effect as the original, I chose to use “a ton”.

³⁷² “slancio d’affetto”: Carlo is saying that during that infamous night he felt strangely more in love with Laura. The “slancio” means that the feeling he felt was temporary and probably due to the alcohol he had been drinking. “burst” and “surge” were two valid options, and I chose

the latter because it seemed to me to describe how the alcohol and the feelings for Laura went to his head for a brief moment.

³⁷³ “I tuoi film”: the “Movies” Carlo is thinking about refer to the “nonsense” that Laura brought up in the argument. To keep the semantic field of “Nonsense” and imagination, I used “fantasies.”

³⁷⁴ “ti voglio bene”: while in Italian there is a distinction between “ti voglio bene” and “ti amo”, it is not so in English. Therefore, the meaning of Carlo’s sentence will probably remain ambiguous.

³⁷⁵ “ti imposti”: this expression refers to the fact that Carlo is good at acting every second of his life, and he feels like he never shows his true self. “Impostarsi” is a complex word, in that it means that Carlo acts, and so is fake on a psychological level, but also that he “poses”, making him fake at a physical level too. This means that the general meaning of this expression is that he pretends all the time, and so “pretending” was chosen.

³⁷⁶ “Eur”: this is an urban complex first built to host the international expo of Rome, to celebrate the first 20 years of Mussolini’s fascist regime. Now, it is home to many important banks and is one of the most active economic poles in Italy.

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5. RINGRAZIAMENTI

Durante la stesura di questa tesi e nell'arco dei 5 anni di università che ormai stanno giungendo al termine ho avuto a che fare con molte persone che sento il dovere di ringraziare. In primis, un ringraziamento va al mio relatore di tesi, il Professor Newbold, senza il quale questa stessa tesi difficilmente avrebbe visto la luce. Grazie ai suoi consigli sono riuscito a orientarmi in un ambito a me pressoché sconosciuto, ovvero la traduzione, che mi è risultato più leggero e sostenibile. Inoltre, mi ritengo grato per la sua puntualità e precisione, che confrontate con la mia eterna indecisione, sono caratteristiche rivelatesi di estrema importanza per la struttura della tesi e l'organizzazione del lavoro.

In secondo luogo, uno dei più sentiti ringraziamenti va ai miei genitori, papà Fabrizio e mamma Maddalena, i quali sono stati letteralmente la benzina che mi ha permesso di proseguire per tutti i 5 anni di università senza intoppi e rallentamenti, dovuti alla necessità di accomunare lavoro e studio per molti studenti. Inoltre, senza di loro non avrei mai potuto partecipare a due esperienze Erasmus, le quali ritengo essere state grandi fonti di esperienze e insegnamenti per la mia vita futura. Oltre al sostegno materiale, vi è stato anche un grandissimo supporto emotivo che non posso non citare. Vorrei infatti dedicare questa tesi a loro, in quanto non mi hanno mai fatto pesare la mia scelta e mi hanno sempre incoraggiato e spronato nelle numerose sfide che mi si sono presentate davanti.

Per quanto riguarda il lato affettivo ed emozionale vorrei anche ringraziare mio fratello Davide e mia sorella Francesca, i quali hanno letteralmente sopportato uno studente universitario in piena fase di crescita, sostenendomi anch'essi nonostante i momenti no e i litigi.

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Una menzione speciale va a Federica e Giulia, compagne di triennale insieme alle quali ho sempre potuto parlare di tutto ciò che mi passava per la testa, fosse nell'ambito universitario o in quello affettivo e personale e che tutt'ora, in questo periodo di distanziamento fisico e sociale, percepisco come amiche e confidenti.

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