



ONE

Outside the stage, I often find myself watching friends steal the show. If I'd say talent openly, preparation and hard work make the difference between performing and acting, I'd be taken for presumptuous, and everyone would hate me.

I am on the fifth consecutive yawn because I don't know the minimum time of nail regrowth, necessary skill to intervene in Willy's speech. He collects nail clippers and personal care sets, but the unbearable thing is he likes to share these interests during dinners like the one in progress. Moreover, when he books a table, he doesn't allow anyone to make an order, believing he's the only one able to filter relations with the waiters because he's an assiduous visitor of every venue and knows how things work. Regarding Mary, Willy's cousin, she has the role of organizer of parties. She takes care of every detail and got all of us, idiot friends, by the balls. Willy and Mary, their secret is in the two names which sound good. Mary likes people, and Willy loves company. It's vital to feel good with others when you're not comfortable with yourself.

Everybody's looking for something. I go to parties because I'm hungry. At these dinners, the only thing determined is my position in rank: relegation zone, salvation to the last day, and again the umpteenth vacillating existential championship.

I had no job for a long time. The last engagement was a coordinated acting course with my friend Thomas Albergari. Free the first month, during which we would have a class to teach once a week - preliminary about techniques and diction to catch the interest of the students - then a boarding coast would start at affordable prices. Result: no one came back. It was about girls and boys who let themselves go to waste, and in their horizon, they had the only dream of the TV host. They were already sharp teachers in the theater of life, more interested in artifices than in art.

I also wrote scripts and comedies. I sent material to directors of which I saw several times their performances, trusting to snatch their friendship or to arouse a feeling of gratitude for the loyalty I showed.

The fundamental value of an artist is to be busy, even if they were only housework. They were always engaged in meaningful projects or, at least, I have believed it as first hypothesis. I was trying to keep away from my mind the second thesis linked to colic stuff, but the passage of time convinced me I created another shit again.

The ancient habit of Americanizing names hadn't spared my friends. The real name of Willy was Guglielmo, and Al was Alberto; Rick was Riccardo that is me. This propensity of people had to be commercialized or analyzed. A simple game as often happens, is taken into significant consideration.

Riccardo Nola

- Specialized in stage names, music titles, novels titles, back covers and intellectual works in general -

*- Did you compose your masterpiece but can't find the correct title? Write me; we'll talk about it.
The presentation of a work or a stage name is fundamental -*

Who visited my profile found this note amusing. Self-esteem also feeds only on berries when its level is well below the normal average. My mailbox was full of invitations to shows but empty of proposals. In my virtual dressing room, there was a mirror, where I remained to observe without impulses the carnival of the existence in which there were no fat days.

Anita, poet of Forlì, approached me in chat the day following the message. She wanted a name; she wasn't satisfied with his. She believed that was the reason why things went to hell; even the bad thing became a boob to attack herself. Anita had understood vices and weaknesses of others were used unscrupulously because they were opportunities. She arranged herself as a proofreader, but errors sprouted on leaves which didn't give money, so she decided to deal with an erotic chat.

- So, Anita. What would you need exactly?

- Do you know the erotic chat?

- No. But we can find something for the name.

- Do you already have any ideas?

- Yes. I had thought about... Eva.

- Eva?

- The greatest sinner. Name of bitch, no?

- My mother's name is Eva.

- Oh... I'm sorry.

- No, but it's okay. It's right.

- Really?

- Really. It's OK.

- Oh well, then I say: Eva Pop!

- Eva Pop is fine.

- Yes, Pop: it winks to art and poops.

- You are great!

- A question: why the chat?

- Look, it's a magnificent business!

- Really?

- You have no idea of the losers which are on the web! The bad luck is worth a fee.

- Oh well, ok, I'm glad to have been useful.

- One last thing. My sixth sense tells me to ask you.

- Tell me.

- Would you like to collaborate? Texts, indications, special services like someone who wants to have a threesome - paying the supplement... things like that and others we would find along the way.

- *Well, I don't know how long I can dedicate you. I'm an actor. If I get a job?*
- *I offer you a thirty percent. I put the web space after all, the idea is mine.*

Some days later, one evening, I convinced Willy to go with me to the *Testa di Coccio* for a show in which Thomas Albergari played monologues. The start was scheduled for 10:00 pm, but I always arrived first to eat something. It was raining. The road from the other end was closed on account of sewage works and Willy couldn't pass through. He called me on cellphone, cursing. Via Monte Testaccio goes around Monte dei Cocci, and I was on the opposite side, already in front of the venue. On the other hand, Willy came back, traveling through again the remaining path up to the Pyramid, instead of following the road and only going around the palace. He came out behind me, almost half an hour later, coming from the non-Catholic cemetery where John Keats's tomb was. When I saw him coming, furious and soaked, I couldn't resist mentioning the epitaph on Keats's grave: *here lies one whose name was writ in water*. Willy got mad, cursing me which I had convinced him to follow me, his navigator and even the satellite, i.e., the causes of his mistake in finding the right address.

Inviting Willy was a gamble. Dissatisfied chronic of his job as a telephone company employee, he always questioned if the evening wasn't organized by his cousin, sending it on the wrong side.

We climbed the stairs. He stopped to read in detail the warning about alcohol rates allowed to get back to driving, trying to get the exact relationship between his weight and the alcohol level of two beers drunk to empty stomach.

I told him we wouldn't remain too fast, we would have eaten something, but he replied his hunger was gone. He seemed impaired without drinking. He continued complaining: - *What have we come to do here?*

I pushed him in, and I ordered the penne arrabbiata and something to drink. He didn't want anything: - *I taste from your dish* - he said.

It was a place with white walls, tables, and sofas; cushions on the floor, arched ceilings and corridors converging towards the stage. Often it was possible met people touched by fame with which I was myself uncomfortable if it hadn't passed through the tunnels of the undergrowth. It was like the *Roxy Bar*, and there were VIPs. My God: they behaved like VIPs and the nice thing of becoming it was making assholes.

I approached Giorgio Lallo, a director with whom I missed an audition for the movie which, then, became my favorite one of the moment: *Parties never end*, which seemed vaguely the story of my friends and our parties. I reminded him; I said Al Sapone, my agent, had brought me the casting through the Honourable Arena. Giorgio Lallo listened to me in silence. Then he called the bartender - *Oh, a beer for my friend, and bring him a sandwich* - he patted my shoulders and disappeared down the aisles of the pub without saying anything.

I came back to the table. Willy was eating my last piece of pasta, and he was guzzled down my beer. - *You didn't lose anything, too hot, and then* - he said chewing - *they were full of oil*.

Waiting for the performance of Thomas, a group played blues music. He lifted my soul, thanks to its melancholic notes. For a moment I forgot my tragedies. At the table next to mine, I recognized Maddalena Lola, the girl who had a part in *RIS*, the TV crime drama. We had worked together a few times, in the past. Now she was surrounded by monkeys and gorillas, smiling at all those who approached her with their cellphone for a photo.

- *I'm Riccardo Nola* - I told her - *do you remember me?* - She answered distractedly without smiling: - *Riccardo Nola... that is?*

Willy stood up. I followed him to the exit. It had stopped raining outside. We walked to the avenue. Streetlights reflected the light inside the puddles. Ruins were on our left and the Anglican cemetery of the side. The sound of our footsteps and the silence of the dead were the backgrounds of that night, and then my outbursts about an environment which saw me on the edge.

Seen from any perspective, my condition was without attractive prospects, so I couldn't refuse the proposal of Anita, alias Eva Pop. It was still a job and, in a manner of speaking, it was about acting. Three or four hours at late night, like any other part-time job, raised me about five hundred euros a month, and in my situation, they were a fortune.

Of course, I didn't say nothing about the nature of my collaboration with my friends, even if I said some indiscretions to Willy: never have secrets when you drink something. And Willy has no secrets for Mary. Now I find myself at their dinner to enrich me with all the possible information about hand care.

The Japanese one is as thin as a leaf and has a very elegant line. Quality stainless steel and a high precision system make it safer than the others, but it's not as cheap as the French one, also supplied with a shaped leather case: I always thought you have to keep your hands tidy, some people observe them discreetly and then draw their conclusions...

Willy persevere, and Mary noticed some other yawns beside mine, then she draws attention ringing a glass with the tip of the knife: - *Friends, listen to me. Hey, I say to you all: now, our friend Rick tells us about his new collaboration.*

I refuse, and Mary starts to tell I am an actor, and I work with an erotic chat. I try to be calm, but under the table, my left leg dances nervously; Thomas laughs, and Mary tells about Eva Pop. A friend of them whom I don't know, asks: - *That is, would you be Eva Pop?*

The guy, Walter, saw our advertising and started to ask me about Eva. Thomas incites the group inviting everyone to ask me about her. It's unusual for me to find people interested in my work, so the actor's syndrome triggers in me: in other words, the more they ask me questions, the more I free myself from all ties and undermine the locks of censorship which Anita and I had imposed to us. After a moment of embarrassment, everyone shows their lust. Roby2 doesn't speak, but his eyes come out of their orbits, and he doesn't notice he's swallowing slamming his lips in a vulgar way; Willy continues to have hysterics snigger and Al, my agent, scratches his cock as if he had ants in his underwear.

The fuse continues to burn, and the locale is now empty. I go out to smoke. Al, the hostile lawyer, follows me.

- *What's this story of the chat?*

- *I needed to work, Al. For months you didn't find me a role.*

- *Why did you tell it to Mary and not to me?*

- *I didn't tell anyone. I mean, only Willy...*

- *Willy? I'm your agent, fuck!*

- *I know Al.*

- *Stay away from Willy and Mary, they're a couple of maniacs. Do you understand?*

- *Don't worry, Al.*

- *I'm a proper person, Rick, you know it! I hope you appreciate the fact I speak to you sincerely.*

- *Sure, Al.*

- *Not like Willy, the piece of shit!*

- *Why?*

- *Ah, don't you know?*

- *What?*

- *He went out with Roby1.*

- *Roby1, the one you liked?*

- *Yes, just her. They went out in three. Also, Mary was with them.*

- *So?*

- *And what do they do in three? They crowd, Rick* – but he says it with the disappointment of not being considered. He stays out, in the cool of the evening and stretches himself.

The others come out. I greet Mary. I greet Roby2, who gets on Al's car, who still fights with ants. I stay alone with Thomas who sniggers, shakes his head and offers me a ride on his scooter.

- *Evening to forget, eh?* - He says.
- *Have you to always be an asshole?*
- *We were getting bored, Rick. I have only spread a little interest on this remarkable initiative of yours* - he says without holding the sarcasm.
- *It wasn't funny at all, Thomas. At least not for me.*
- *So why do you do it?*
- *Because I'm not you. I have to keep a house.*
- *Oh, always with these stories...*
- *Come on, set in motion your bike... it's better...*

TWO

My surname has origins from Campania, but my grandparents moved to Rome after the war. Aldo, my father, responsible for human resources at Poste Italiane, had worked in Sardinia, Lombardy, Marche, and during a holiday in London, he met Marina, my mother. She was from San Lazzaro di Savena, in the province of Bologna.

It was the summer of '67. Aldo watched amused the English employees deflowered by the sun at Golden Square, but Marina liked the Rolling Stones, and there was the clash of two asteroids. After the holiday, they remained in contact and continued to spend time with each other; after about a year my father asked her to marry him.

London was far away, but the ghost of old William continued to beat blows: my brother Enrico (so baptized by Marina for Shakespeare's drama) was born in Ancona in 1970 when my father worked in Marche, then the return to Rome. However, the capital's ponentino was swept by pressure from across the Channel. To confirm the supremacy in the choices, as a mark on his flesh, it's clear why Marina, the woman who gave birth to us with pain, called me Riccardo.

Mom graduated in classical and modern letters, didn't spare the passion for English literature even to our cat. Otello, the cat, was the third child.

That summer, as usual, we had to go to San Lazzaro to mother's grandparents, but aunt Sonia, mother's sister, was giving birth and that event catalyzed the interest of the whole family. We opted for a holiday on the Adriatic coast. Before leaving, my parents went to Emilia for a few days, visiting the beloved Aunt Sonia.

My brother and I were left in Rome with our father's grandparents, in the house where Dad grew up, and we slept in his room. They filled us with anecdotes about my father when he was young, and I was surprised to find out he was a child too.

It was the summer of 1980, the end of July, and we were waiting for our parents to leave. One evening our mother called to greet us, reassuring us they would come back the next day to go to sea.

It was the last time I heard my mother.

An articulated lorry coming from Germany caused an accident on the highway invading the opposite lane. Seven dead including my parents.

I have confused memories of that day. The phone was constantly ringing, there was a procession of people I didn't know, and the next day relatives came. I couldn't lift my head; I had the impression my neck was sunken into the chest causing a strong pressure. It was a physical pain, and for some time I felt a grudge against my parents on account of their abandonment. It seemed to me like a cruel game, an unmotivated joke. You don't do these things to children.

Our grandparents decided to move to our flat, where we had our habits. I closed myself in a resigned silence, and soon I understood I'd have suffered in a more devastatingly way seeing one without the other. Today I am surprised by so much practicality and cynicism, but I only draw upon a natural survival instinct.

Losing my parents when I was five gave me an endless warmth: everyone had their own preserve of pity in the sideboard.

Enrico, given the age difference between us, was overcoming the time of despair, but he wasn't able to fully absorb the hit. Then he met Claudia, the woman of his life.

One morning in June '91, the old grandmother Bruna, in her bed, surrendered to sleep. Taking care of us had given her the last strength. Now were Enrico and I have to support grandfather Franco who lived two years before he fell ill.

Thomas Albergari, a friend of Enrico, was graduating from the Academy of Art. He was staging shows with his classmates, like experimental shows. Sometimes I stayed to listen to them enchanted.

For a long time, I didn't feel any interest and Enrico noticed it. He encouraged me to go and often accompanied me by insinuating the seed of temptation.

Following Thomas to the rehearsal, I was seized with a deep passion. I brought them coffee, water. I was a kind of mascot. That company staged a comedy in faux Scarpetta style with experiments of revisitation. The plot was trivial: a young man courted a girl; her mother was opposed, and the young man tried to ingratiate his mother-in-law, but the more he insisted and the more he obtained the opposite effect.

In the third scene of the second act, the suitor sang, under the window, a song for his mother-in-law. It was *Mamma* of Bixio and Cherubini. The mother looked out the window and watered him. A background actor, passing, derided the young man singing the refrain of the same song: *mamma, solo per te la mia canzone vola*. The young man, wet and hurt, would have chased the background actor until he left the scene. Nothing else for the extra.

One afternoon I had just brought coffee; the actress who played the role of *the beloved girl had the idea to ask Thomas: - Why don't we do it to him?*

- *Yes* - said the woman who played the role of the mother-in-law - *they are only seconds. Do you feel Riccardo?*

I accepted without hesitation. I immediately ran to tell it to Enrico who was infected by my enthusiasm. The rehearsals continued. Arianna was the younger sister of Thomas and incited me. On the day of the premiere, Enrico and Claudia were in the hall. I attended the first act concentrated and peaceful. People had fun. The second act began. First scene. Second scene. Third scene, the one of the window; it was my turn. I couldn't go wrong, for a month I had tried those fifteen or twenty seconds.

Thomas sings *Mamma*, singing out of tune as in the script. The woman looks out and pulls the water. I went on the scene determined; I arrived at the center of the stage and looked at Thomas. When he, wet, looks up and stares at me, that's the signal I have to start: *mamma, ma la canzone mia più bella sei tu, sei tu la vita, e per la vita non...*

Here I fall to my knees and start sobbing. I cried uninterruptedly. The beam of light which illuminated my face, combined with the act of evoking a *mother*, influenced me. At that moment, I believed I was shouting at my mother about the devastation her absence had produced in my life. I cried for the memory of the last time I had heard her voice, for the years passed in silence, for the sleepless nights of my adolescence; I cried for not saying goodbye to my father.

That was my debut. Arianna called him "Therapeutic theater." She hugged me in the back giving me so much love which remained in my heart. There was no need to apologize, Thomas told me he had managed well the inconvenience.

But art was another thing. It wasn't enough to steal from the diplomats. Engaging in acting meant attending a school. It took three years for the first level diploma at the Academy of Dramatic Arts.

After graduating with a tiny thirty-eight, I decided to try. It was a hard and severe path. The admission application established a three-step examination, after which we were admitted as students.

The first phase consisted of a performance test in which I had to interpret the role of a scene chosen from an Italian opera or an opera translated into Italian. Then, I was admitted to a second phase divided into three tests: recitation of a monologue; vocal expressiveness with a song and reading of a prose text; physical expressiveness, improvised movements at the request of the commission.

The third phase consisted of a written debate about theatrical questions; an intensive workshop lasting ten days with talks about the general culture and notions about the Italian and European theatrical reality, as well as some historical hint about theater.

I felt inadequate, but I devoted myself to the study and knowledge for admissions to the Academy course.

Thomas said an actor was a high-voltage conductor. There's a common thought about artists and their fragility, but it's a reasonable condition when you continuously climb up and down from an emotional swing on account of your work. We went to watch storms because they rebalanced our energies. Transmitting emotions to the public consumed the spirit, so it required maintenance. We went to Zodiaco, a pub above the Olympic Stadium, and we waited for flashes, accompanying them with

chorus from curve waiting for the roar of thunder. I remember the first time he involved me. I held his umbrella, Thomas opened his arms as if he were blessing the city. He seemed like a bird ready to fly. Arianna, his sister, assisted seraphic without being dragged by Enrico's laugh, forced to turn from the other side.

Thomas closed his eyes, breathed and then shouted sentences from monologues, poetries, and songs. At that point also Arianna started laughing but Thomas didn't care about it. I was focused on protecting him with the umbrella, and unlike our respective relatives, I was taking it seriously. The ritual lasted half an hour, then Thomas gave me his place and took the umbrella. I breathed deeply as if I had to dive into empty space. I closed my eyes, and I cleared my throat.

I shouted out loud monologues and disconnected sentences when in less than a flash I found myself completely wet: they escaped with the umbrella crying "*idiot, idiot, idiot,*" and locked themselves in the car. A small group of people under the bar shelter found it all very funny. They left me a minute outside the Renault, in the middle of the storm; for me, it was like a century. A premeditated joke because Enrico had brought towels and changing clothes in the car.

I believed everything Thomas told me because I had no experience. I express myself instinctively, but I had no skill. It was all new to me; I spent that period looking for the diaphragm when I had just discovered I had one.

I used to go to the gym to build myself up, and I ran in the park. I studied opera and theater history. I took lessons of autogenic training and enrolled in a breathing course: barefoot, on the ground to inhale and exhale, dilating my belly. The diaphragm goes down, the diaphragm goes up slowly. Breathing, a fundamental element to live the experience of our lives, was the linchpin of communication. Exercise after exercise, lesson after lesson, I breathed. Maybe I wasn't ready, but at least I felt more confident. I submitted my application in early July; tests were scheduled in September.

November. It was necessary 30 minutes from Via Appia to reach Via Bellini. Riding an old half-broken scooter, I sped by choosing the less busy ways to reach Porta Pia; from there, through a series of turns, I arrived in the Parioli district.

Tests and lessons for six days a week, from November to June, while until October special activities were planned in collaboration with European theater foundations for detailed studies about dramaturgy and foreign acting. I found myself thrown into a microcosm in which I'd have filled my hand luggage, but by now I was traveling, I had succeeded: I had passed the three phases of admission. Actor student at the acting course.

The academy absorbed all my time; I didn't have a free minute. As a student, I was to be available for any ordinary and extraordinary activities of entertainment or experimentation or teaching. Mandatory attendance: after ten unjustified absences during a year, you were out.

I didn't have an aptitude for dance, but I was good in fencing: theater applied a deception and fencing was the sublimation. It perfected control, improved posture and the expressive properties of the body.

The preparation was hard, many subjects: proxemic, communication distances; use of the body, theatrical pedagogy, mime, use of the voice; scenic movement, cognition of the body in accordance with a text; singing, diction, acting; work on a character, space and form, time, theatrical dramaturgy. History of theater, comedy of art.

In those years, I made friends with Marx, the cat who wandered through the corridors of the Academy. Indifferent to the rules, it was allowed to attend the lessons. Often it slept, and this was taken as a cavil by some teacher to inveigh against our performances. *Incredible* - they said - *Marx also falls asleep!*

Thanks to Marx, in that second year, I attracted the attention of the teachers. Sometimes, in the rare moments of pause, I remained in the corridors to improvise a monologue. Marx went up to the edge of the window and stood on his paws; it listened to me. I realized by modulating a falsetto I obtained its different meows, according to the volume I used. Someone whose identity I never knew, must have discovered me.

One day in the classroom, the teacher made a sign to the cat to get on the table. Marx went up. There were also other teachers intrigued, and I was making me suspicious. They called my name. In front of everyone, I performed myself briefly in *Hamlet*. Maybe three minutes. At the beginning of the soliloquy, in the climax of *to be or not to be*, I modulated that *not* in the same way with which at other times I recited

the passage to Marx in the corridors. The cat began to answer me in the silence of the classroom and repeated this answer to my different modulations on *this* and *question*. Actually, I hold the vowel longer: *not* became *noooooot*, and *this* became *thiiiiis*.

I heard some laughs, and then everyone began to applaud amused: - *When I talk about experimentation, it's also thiiiiis I mean. Hazard!* - said the teacher.

I graduated at the end of the third year: first level Academic Diploma, actor came out by the Academy!

Thomas, having already graduated, had several experiences and I considered him as an extra school. He, at the registry office, was Tommaso Albergari di Polonghera, aristocratic origins and a family of Counts who managed to maintain their comforts. His mother was an opera singer, the Albergari Counts also had a small theater in the Province of Cuneo, destroyed during the war.

We spent whole days sitting at our favorite pub, the *Re del tiramisù* at Piazza dei Re in Rome, talking about art and theater. He said that an actor had to consider jobs in which he believed, without accepting compromises for money: - *When what you do doesn't satisfy you, you begin to lose cred. Never forget it!*

- *Oh yes, but you have to live...*

- *Another devotee of fame: money, success... do you have any other cliché in your pocket?*

- *Well, but...*

- *You're an accountant, Riccardo. Why don't you do a bank competition?*

Regarding Enrico, my diploma turned us away. Although he was the one who encouraged me, he thought my passion would be a transitory period and not a reason to live. Slowly he distanced himself from Thomas, until a definitive quarrel.

After his graduating in law, Enrico settled for a manager's desk in a supermarket chain and our respective points of view diverged radically. Time which passes, scraps and silence have established the distance between us which exists today.

THREE

Troubles in my career began in a theater of the distant Este, province of Padova, on account of a show called *Confessions of an actress of failure*, which was staged harassment suffered by a girl with fine attainments. I played the role of the *teacher* who was looking for a physical collaboration with the actresses.

My beloved...
Dear, dearest...
You are adorable...
Oh, teacher...
I read your monologue the other day...
Really?
You are a genius!
No, you are a genius, teacher.
But no, you are a genius, honey.
Noooo!
Yes... and don't contradict me, bad girl!
Ok...
But I'll sign your monologue for you!
Noooooo...
Yes!
But noooo...
Yes, if you wanna work...
You asked me for a very high price, master: what the fuck!
How dare you: I'll let you work!
Really?
Yes, just because you are a genius!
If I'm a genius, then you're amazing!
No, you make me blush in this way... why do you tell me this?
Because you let me work!
Only because you are so dear to me: the dearest of all!
It's late, teacher. I have to go.
Where are you going?
Why?
Stay here with me tonight, and I'll let you touch the stars!
Ihhhhhh... Oh Jesus, teacher: *this* is not a star!
My darling, I am the son of the stars, the son of the night...
Yes, teacher, you are really a son, the greatest of all sons!
Well, not the biggest, I'm an only child, my dear...
Good thing, teacher...
How do you say, honey?
I said you are unique, teacher.
Oh, baby, but you adulate me this way...
Ah, teacher, I adore your eccentricity...

Surely it wasn't the best dialogue in the history of theater, but it was amusing. The director, Bartolomeo Alfonsi, didn't pay the actress Maddalena Lola and even me, saying there was a misunderstanding about our agreements, but if the show had had more resonance, as he expected, we would have had only to benefit from it.

I finished to shake him, rebelling. He, sturdier than his virtues, got stuck in his chair and cursed me. The image of this man who tried to stand up without anyone helping him spread out the posterity and I had trouble finding new roles.

I had a cordial relationship with Maddalena Lola. A few months later, we met each other in a cabaret pub in Milan, where she had some hook. It was a comedy played on the misunderstanding. Lola had a very low volume of voice and played part of a transgender.

Mary, sincerely interested in my career, was extremely worried about the gossip come into the capital and she believed Lola was a trans. Her apprehension amused me, and I didn't clarify the identity of my colleague. One night on the phone, after the show, Mary anguished me with moralism. It was late, my head was bursting, and I began to joke about her vulnerabilities.

- *I'm worried, Rick. You're doing a vulgar thing; you waste your talent.*

- *Listen, Carmela...*

- *No, Rick, don't fuck me with the story of Maria Carmela. That's just a name on my identity card. You know I suffer about it!*

- *You're an unconscious trans, Mary.*

- *And you're an asshole, Rick and you're bad. You're a bad asshole!*

Carmela, i.e., Mary, didn't really get angry, she just tried to attract attention with victimization. He decided she should help me make a change in my career, and she wanted to introduce me to a person she knew. I met Alberto Sapone during an ill-fated dinner organized in his honor by Mary.

Alberto and Mary had met during a holiday in Formentera. He was an actor. Disappointed by the artistic failure and pressed by his respectable family, he decided to use his degree and become a manager. Mary, fascinated by any person gravitated around the world of entertainment and with a tendency to cut the names of anyone, convinced him that Al was perfectly matched his surname, Sapone: - *It resounds! It's as if it were Al Capone, But with the S letter* – she said him.

In that holiday there was also Willy, who felt neglected by his cousin and couldn't stand his interest in the affairs of a stranger like Alberto. Al and Willy never bound, although they didn't clash until the evening of the party.

Al had created a small stable of artists and Mary took care of the plaque of his studio. Then, she organized a party in the house where she lived with Willy. The two cousins didn't share only one house: they lived in unison.

Mary provided to each guest some T-shirts with a picture of a smoking cigar which gave, as she said, the feeling of brusque and shady. Under the photo of the cigar, the written *Al Sapone, lawyer, and show agent*.

Mary was receiving compliments about the t-shirts and the success of the evening. We were about thirty guests, me and a few others with an indefinite role in the show environment, while the other guests had a healthy life and a regular job.

We were in the big hall set up for the party. Willy relegated to the role of barman, was sullen. Mary came and went with the empty glass, jokingly claiming it was pierced. He gave her angry looks. Despite the high heels, it was clear the reason why Mary couldn't keep her in balance was another one. In the corner of the room, there was a wooden bookstand on which we, supposedly entertainers, would take turns to animate the evening. The most said were the verses selected by Thomas, but immediately we started a challenge of jokes and we, actors of high hopes, became spectators.

I clumped with Floriana, joking about our t-shirts. Mary noticed it, and a bit for jealousy and even with the excuse not to steal her to the other guests, she took her away asking *Oh, deeeeeearrrr, tell us about when you met Scorsese*.

I watched Flo go to meet friends arm in arm with Mary and with my hand sent her a goodbye kiss, while Mary kissed her on the mouth to make the situation clear to everyone.

At that point, Willy, exasperated by the fact she had dedicated a party to Al, and she was affected with Flo, grabbed her by the arm and told her to stop because she was drunk and out of control, adding he wasn't her nurse.

Mary replied, "yes, you aren't my nurse," and in front of everyone she told him to get lost. Hurt, He slapped her.

The situation got worse, and at that point, Al intervened accusing Willy of having ruined the party: - *And you – answered Willy – remember you're at my home, Mr. Al Capone with Letter S!*

They shook themselves, Al grabbed Willy by the jacket, howling the obvious unhealthy relationship between him and his cousin. Mary, drunk, started to cry, asking forgiveness to everyone.

Al went away. Later the situation between him and Willy went better, but only formally. Mary apologized to Al, blaming the alcohol. It was the only time in which Willy and Al had a physical contact, from that party there are only mountains of mud the two unload against each other.

It was my meeting with the great Al. It's said every first meeting is revealing. Well, I didn't notice it and underestimated the evolution of the evening.

I was less than thirty years old, a long way to go and, I believed, also a resource which allowed me a good margin of confidence. Time, however, isn't a friend of anyone.

Cinecittà Studios. I go out after finishing the audition for a spot of pickles. Al is waiting for me outside. We stroll, and I tell him everything about the audition.

I take him to the supermarket to buy beverages for the umpteenth party at Willy and Mary's house, along with the usual friends, some new person, and absences. Absences will be our topic of conversation. We laugh thinking about Flo's excuse to elude Mary's invitations: which excuses will she fabricate this time? Mary is dispirited and needs to see people, Willy is more peaceful, but they are little issues like platonic relationships and unsustainable solitude, too serious to hold up in reclusion and sobriety.

We enter, take a trolley, and we steer to the wine and sparkling department, then we go to the counter and get in line. I try to turn my back on the information box. In this supermarket, my brother Enrico is the director, but I chose it only because it was on the way, hoping he wasn't on duty.

We placed the goods on the tapin when the cashier speaks to me.

- *You're the one of Acqua Cocca advertisement!*

- *It's him, it's him* - says Al.

- *Why don't you buy Acqua Cocca?* - Ask her.

- *It was just an advertisement, Miss* - I answer.

- *... then I think if you advertise a product, the company will give it to you. Is that right?*

- *Ehm...it doesn't work like that* - I reply.

- *Pam? Pamela!* - says the cashier to a colleague - *Come and see. Do you remember him? It's the one of Acqua Cocca!*

A lady in queue gets impatient: - *Are there jammed?*

- *Madam, look at him: he's the one of Acqua Cocca!* - The cashier tells her.

- *Yes, it's him. And what is he doing at the supermarket?*

The smile of Al is between the boaster and the fool. A personal success, the one that advertisement gave him.

In short: a stage, an audition, an actor, a director. The actor is not healthy, rehearses some monologues, but he gets confused. His face is suffering. The director asks him what's happening. The actor replies he feels constipated, weighty. Director looking at the camera in a surprised way, says: *Has never tried Acqua Cocca?*

The actor takes a sip and ends the audition in fluency. Audience applauds him, convinced. Director shows his thumb up. The actor touched, opens his arms to the public. To fuel the sensation of great diuretic properties of the product, the classic noise of an uncorked bottle with a sound similar to a burp which actually should have been a sob. However, from the video came a burp. The actor brings his hand to his mouth, the audience applauds louder, and the actor says: *Acqua Cocca, the water unlocks you!*

On account of those inexplicable dynamics, the spot had a big media impact and I could count on a not bad number of commitments in that season.

Summer in a town of Lazio, party of Ferragosto. Al knew a man of the group which coordinated the event and inserted me into the evening show. I made some cabaret.

The audience waited until midnight for fireworks. My lines didn't arrive. The audience was bored and looked at me dumbly. It was devastating. The presenter, old provincial fox, Glauco Nardi, understood the situation and at the end, before I escaped from the stage, entered the scene: - Riccardo Nola, here for you tonight. Did you recognize him?

He found a chair with the writing *director*. He asked to lower the lights and staged the advertisement of Acqua Cocca. With few conviction, I play the slogan, *Acqua Cocca, the water unlocks you* and from the flat arrived a burp which destroyed the harmony of the valley.

I rethink to that anecdote while I strike a pose with the cashier. Finally, we go out. An employee follows us to the parking lot.

- *What's your name? It's for the corporate newspaper.*
- *Leave it; it's not a problem* - I reply.
- RICCARDO NOLA - shouts Al - *write it: the one of Acqua Cocca.*
- *Really? Also, our director is called Nola!*

We load up the bags in the car. Al sniggers: - *If it hadn't been for me, notoriety would have never kissed you, and you would have remained lying in your bed like Cinderella.*

- *The dawn of a lion's season* - an intruding voice behind us comments. Al remains disoriented; I don't move myself: - *Al, I'll introduce Enrico, my brother.*

- *Hi* - said Al, surprised - *this guy is great!*

Meanwhile, the cashier has remained between us and, surprised, ask Enrico: - *Director, I can't believe it! Is he his brother?*

- *Miss, go to work!* - Enrico answered exasperated. Al is embarrassed and tries to be chatty: - *He never told me about you. I mean, I knew he had a brother, but...*

- *Look, forget it* - answers Enrico.

- *Well* - continues Al - *tomorrow evening there's a party at a friend's house. If you want to be of ours, don't make compliments...*

- *Thank you, is not the case* – says hateful my brother, then turns to me saying: - *Goodbye Cinderella!*

I look at him as he walks away. Often it happens I isolate myself for short moments. I keep staring at Enrico without recognizing familiarity in his ways. We are two strangers and dissatisfactions fuel this situation.

Al calls me back asking if I need a ride. We go in, he coughs, we remain in silence for a few minutes, but I understand he wants to know.

- *Rick* – he says - *don't you offend if I tell you something? Your brother is unkind: what's wrong with him?*
- *Old family problems.*
- *What kind of problem, if I'm not indiscreet?*
- *We had family current accounts in common, and I withdrew money to finance shows with Thomas. One then another and another one. I was sure I'd recoup them.*
- *Those money were yours too. What's wrong? Sometimes you're wrong, others exaggerating... it happens. Anyway, can I say what I think?*
- *Sure.*
- *Thomas is a good actor, but this doesn't give him the right to do what he wants. As a man, he isn't right: he didn't have to accept that money, he doesn't need it.*
- *Don't you ever hear tell these things, Thomas gets angry for these jokes...*
- *Oh, poor boy... well, he's a perfect hypocrite, let me tell you.*

- *Anyway, I used that money because I was as involved in the shows as he was. It wasn't a whim of Thomas, but Enrico faced him and said him he manipulate and influence me negatively, making me look like a child unable to understand.*
- *Your brother wasn't wrong, Rick... he wasn't wrong. And then what happened?*
- *Enrico had decided to get married. He had behaved like a father with me, but to Claudia, the future wife, it didn't like it.*
- *He didn't want you between your feet.*
- *He wanted him to stop worrying about me, our relationship caused problems, and Enrico was in trouble.*
- *Understandable. Yes, I understand it. Continue...*
- *When they began to go around houses, and they needed money, they realized from our treasure lacked big sums.*
- *Ah, well, this is hard to swallow...*
- *I know. He only repeated: I can't believe it, Riccardo. I can't believe you did something like that!*
- *What a bad thing you're telling me.*
- *Yeah, but it's not over. Even Claudia couldn't believe he didn't know anything. She took offense, they argued, and she left him. They got married two years later, at the end. I wasn't a witness, and I wasn't invited. Time and silence have destroyed the situation.*
- *It's a very strong story, Rick.*
- *I know. Well, let's not think about it anymore. See you at the party?*
- *Ok. See you there. Be good, I recommend!*

We say goodbye and go down the stairs of subway. Train delay: three minutes. I walk back and forth. It arrives, and I find a seat. The train arrives at the Furio Camillo stop in five minutes, but in this time, the weather must be changed because the street vendors are inside the station and sell umbrellas. I climbed the stairs: as I thought, it rains. I wait to go out. Any storm, even the strongest, doesn't last forever. I have to control myself: every time I curse the rain, I also say something strong about the government thief who then, as reprisal, cuts funds for culture and entertainment.

I cross the station, and I come from the opposite side because I have the stupid intuition on that side the rain is less intense; I go up and walk. It seems it stops raining and rethink about family issues has transmitted me an electricity I can delete only by walking.

There's a kiosk of bread and pizza. I get hungry, and I take a bag of small pizzas and mixed rustics; I try one with spinach, then another with ham and the fragrance of the dough gives me back the lost balance. I look at the programming of cinema. I continue walking. I arrive on the bridge above the Tuscolana Station: towards San Paolo sky is purple, but here, now, it seems rain isn't imminent.

The alarm of a car marks 6:00 pm. Underneath me, I hear the trains speed. Walk towards the square. From afar lights seem near the pines row seem like Christmas lights on that trees. I look for soul inside the windows, but shops are empty. I could make a robbery - is less tiring than a revolution - but I no longer have desires, and also money has lost its attractiveness since credit cards exist: then what sense would have to rob in an empty shop if you can't see the terrified face of the people?

And where are people? Motionless in front of the stands, buying scarves and hats and eating toasted pumpkin's seeds.

The garbage cans are empty, and the streets are clean, but it doesn't mean people are civil: they don't spend, therefore not dirt. In front of the *Coin* building, between evening lights and shadows, a deceptive optic overlies the image of the store decorated with the one of the Basilica del Santo Giovanni.

I came back. In front of McDonald's, ladies are walking in search of company, but I'm too sad, I see myself through the windows, fat, beaten and even dirty. And I no longer trust.

I continue on my way home. I overcome Il re del tiramisù, and I stop to take notes: the frenzy of traffic and the effect of rain on the road make me feel the need. And then, you never have to leave orphan a thought.

While I write on the pad, someone confuses me for a traffic assistant, so I disappear in the subway station. Apart from this inconvenience, everything is fine on Via Appia.

Let me know if you liked: www.enricomattioli.com/contatti/ or enrico66m@gmail.com

This is a production

www.enricomattioli.com

Enrico Mattioli is the author of

Stars of dust: *Are we the architects of our destiny or do the plots of our lives escape us leaving us impotent in the face of fate? Sometimes it happens that, despite a fierce commitment, the results are not those hoped for. In the attempt of having no regrets you can sacrifice your whole life to realize that time is not a good friend for anyone...*

Cages: *Are we really free or are we prisoners of ourselves? Reading the reflections of Omar Mumba, the protagonist of this story, we live reclusively in our mental restrictions and we stay this way for much of our existence, learning to move in the narrow spaces of those same bars. In every type of system, there proliferate contradictions that become traditions to be respected. The society in which we live has applied the norm that says we can be happy, even if the others are not: all you have to do is not to be among those others...*

Dear customer: *In consumer society, where all echoes are adulterated – Karl Marx is the man of chocolate with the caramel layer and Che Guevara has killed Spider-Man – identity becomes a main topic. Keeping it and being involved as little as possible by the obsession with buying, is a primary matter. Leopoldo Canapone, protagonist of Dear Customer, every day witnesses the procession of customers infatuated by the commercials and promotional offers. He also knows a lot about nicknames and, above all, he had an identity. Aspiring actor, he was sure in the end he would enter the Cinecittà Studios...*

On my generation: *In the messy chronicle of reported events that lead to the transition from the first to the second republic in Italy, Emilio and his old friends are preparing to live the new course supporting the rise of a rampant politician. Soccer and rock music are their only reasons for living, but they believe they can find in the congressperson Andrea Franzoni, a dear old friend of theirs, a shortcut to the difficulties of human life. Emilio – a Beatles enthusiast – earns little money as a guitar teacher, the Reserved works when he feels like it, distributing advertising fliers, the Blasphemy works in the deli of a relative, always after 10 a.m. and never past 1 p.m., the Cobra makes a living as a driver in poorly licit works, and Rigatone is a rock music photographer. “No one could be John, Paul, George or Ringo, but we all are Pete Best and in one way or another we had to live with what was left“. **Emilio Santini***

Greetings from Enrico

ENRICO MATTIOLI

My writing focuses the slag of society