

Dear customer

Supermarket people

ENRICO MATTIOLI

Copyright © 2020 Enrico Mattioli

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 9798628637999

NOTES

Names are randomly joined letters and companions of a transfigured identity. Perennially searching for stuff, the human being wanders without destination, pointing at deformed targets, committing to misrepresenting ideals. Only a nickname will give him back the clues of his true nature, evoking a fact linked to it.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter one Pg. 1

Chapter two Pg. 9

Chapter three Pg. 19

Chapter four Pg. 30

Chapter five Pg. 41

Chapter six Pg. 49

Chapter seven Pg. 55

Chapter eight Pg. 62

INTRODUCTION

When I was a boy and acting was my passion, I felt sooner or later I should have entered the film studios. I wasn't making a mistake. Years later, I was working at the shopping centre near them.

CHAPTER ONE

Fate always extends a hand at the wrong time. I was at the theatre for rehearsal when it all happened. The other background actor called Zucca appeared, with a telegram: *Let us pray you to be present on Monday 31 July in Via De Nardi n. 50, for urgent news that concerns you.*

Identical news also reached me. Everyone in his life had his own Vietnam.

In my family there was many problems since my father was retired. Zucca lived in my own landing. We followed a worn out company with the intent of collecting funds and contacts to make our own alternative show. We didn't want anything else, our dreams and stage board were enough.

We were both sending out hiring requests just to calm the families. Smoke, just smoke: I sent some questions to security firms, post offices, big chain stores, sure the fatality wouldn't have materialized on Zucca's mother, who called back the postman who hadn't found anybody in my house and was on his way back to the office. She told him she was a neighbour, signed the receipt and handed over the telegram.

It was the end of July. The sun that morning was beating harder than usual. Along the way, Zucca and I shared the slap of the crazy variation that we hadn't calculated: had it ever happened, in the history of humankind, that not one but two applied for a job, without recommendation, were taken into account?

We came to the building, and I was pouring with sweat. We showed the telegrams to a secretary who made us sit in the waiting room. Zucca entered first. When it was my turn, I stood in front of a moustached and distinguished gentleman. He was surprised he had an interview with two people who lived in the same building. When he proposed me a trial contract with a subsequent contract, I replied: *I'm going on vacation. Can we meet upon my return?*

He laughed, thinking of a joke, I persuaded myself to have been just witty. In the afternoon of the same day, another telegram arrived at home: *We invite you to come for a medical check-up on Wednesday 2 August at 9.00 am at Clinica Pinzi, Via Nicolai n. 2, delivering a copy of this telegram.*

At the theatre, I felt out of the fray and needed space. My room was as cramped as the whole house. I couldn't tolerate neighbours, as I wouldn't have resisted a wife and children. Adult life was adultery. It was stealing soul and truth. The job was eating up our cells and membranes. People seemed distracted, frustrated, dissatisfied, losing themselves under possessions thirst without realizing they was buying and possessing everything, except for their own lives. Were they all slaves?

The crowd spent part of the day producing surpluses. Over the other half, they were trying to make it look beautiful. It celebrated the family's sacredness rigorously. It worked all day and rarely it saw its spouse. Sometimes, someone scam with someone else. Everyone bought in excess. The family was sacred, a precious good, as an heir, the most important investment to be achieved. The children were like an investment fund or an insurance company. I would have understood it well in the end.

With theatre as my accomplice, I fired my grudge against a society that draws its foundations into commonplaces, logos and trends. The living being is an animal, which suits and can live also in a pigsty. Lie was the filter of relationships. He lies to his wife (or husband), to his friends, and send his life to the public to reviews it. His other half doesn't really understand him because he (or she) has spent more time with colleagues than with relatives. He is the one who knows himself less than the others perceive him to be. Everyone has limited awareness of his condition. He wants to be deep but he becomes oppressive. He looks for alternative solutions without realizing they are trivial. One must have tattoo that characterizes him, the

DEAR CUSTOMER

important thing is turning to professionals working in proper hygienic conditions. One may also not dress but he can't give up the trimmings. Because details make the difference. The important thing is to be part of the same breed. One lives in a civilization with soul protected by a prophylactic. Friendships are cheap and when he's incorporated in it, he can have as much friends as he wants. With a precaution and a lie, it goes wide and there's no better stage than the one presented by the working environment.

- *Perhaps with time, you'll get used to it* - said Zucca, turning the telegram into his hands. He had already phoned his mother to report about the interview while I was trying to resist, so also my mother was informed. A big party on the third floor of our condo will be prepared.

The entrance of the supermarket overlooked the large square congested by traffic, while the indication on the telegram addressed me to the tree-lined avenue where a rusty door seemed to be the entrance to garages or something similar. Undecided, I went to the bar to get breakfast. I showed the telegram to the bartender and asked him if he knew the exact address. Yes, he knew it. I crossed the ramshackle gate and entered the good reception of a big store.

It seemed to be in an old forum, where vendors, hawkers, and artisans met and checked each other, in a hellish, even musical noise. Few moments were necessary before someone noticed my presence. A guy carried me to the office and introduced me to the head of the sector, a happy and schizophrenic kid who seemed to be waiting for me. He led me to visit the supermarket.

I looked nervously around because, during the job interview with the Lord Moustached (the chief of staff), he had told me about a large dining centre, where you could take a break. I asked the head of the sector about the dining room, and he pointed out to me a poorly lit room whose ventilation system didn't work since they were breathing the gases of the trucks that came to unload. I inquired perplexed if that was the so praised bar. He, laughing hysterically, patted me on my shoulders, giving me a synthetic fabric wrap larger than a couple of sizes and then led me to a colleague who would initiated me to the job as cashier. I kept looking for a couple of hours trying to understand all the operations; then she said: *Come on and try*

it.

The customers in row fell silent, looking at me at each movement. Technically, the job consisted of passing articles with a bar code, over an optical reader. There was a need to pay attention to the change to give to the customer, and the work didn't involve significant difficulties.

In the first few months, I worked hard because it was summer and most of my colleagues were spending their holidays. The new job didn't spare me any time since I left home in the morning to return in the evening, and at lunch I stayed at the bar.

My training was artificial, made up of advice taken from older and experienced colleagues. I finished the trial period, and I was employed indefinitely. I was proud to have my current account, alongside money to go for dinner and cigarettes.

Zucca worked at another branch, and we rarely saw each other. We crossed on the landing, going in and out to go to work, but we didn't see as once we did. Later, his family moved because it bought a little distant house. I knew nothing of him for a long time.

During those two years, I became a regular cashier. Hereafter, I moved to the replenishment of the shelves, until I became responsible for the oils department.

One afternoon I was instructed to arrange some items in the biscuits and sweets department. The night before I was at dinner with colleagues and the next day at lunch I hadn't eaten.

The colleague Miss Serpe, head of the pasta department, had also come to dinner. Both launched into a career path open to every possibility, we were rivals because of that ambiguous relationship that is created when a subject is a woman and the other a man.

That afternoon I felt some stomach cramps. Serpe passed through the department, and I told her I was hungry. She replied she hadn't even had lunch and took me to the warehouse, where we left the goods to be destroyed and the open packaging to be delivered to the supplier. She took a package of snacks with cherries jam and ate a couple of them apiece,

DEAR CUSTOMER

keeping a lookout each other. Then, we went back to the department. Half an hour later they called me into the office.

It was the first notification of my career, and I convened in the general direction. A company can't help but punish you if letter disputes by issue.

The chief of staff penalized me with a day's suspension (on March 21st), and a fine equivalent to the full amount of the package. I was informed of the transfer to a newly opened supermarket that needed cashiers. I didn't like this destination, so I opposed this choice, also because I had become a supplier and I didn't like to go back. They assured me that it was always better to go home and, given the situation, my resistances were in vain.

It went that way. The new colleagues knew who I was and why. They called me 21/3, in memory of the suspension day and in memory to the Beagle Boys. Many had experiences similar to mine. One day I would understand why there was a need of a place to hide the slaughter. Destiny had its own path and it continued to give me a helping hand when I wouldn't have needed it. I had to start over again. Miss Serpe, faithful to her nickname, started again from a desk in general direction.

A bad time, beginning at the new supermarket. The deli department was paralysed by illness. The holidays had also reduced the cashiers: eight absences out of twelve employees. The warehouse was subject to the scandal determined by the organization of the job. The director thought it necessary to disassemble the warehouse's staff so that everyone would charge the merchandise alone. In fact, the placement of employees was inadequate. The new recruitment was blocked because the staffs, though disinclined, were in power and would increase their salaries.

Only the freight receiver was left in the warehouse. One morning he fractured his wrist. There was a need for a substitute. I woke up at five o'clock. At six I was in front of the clock for stamping duties. I assisted the girls in the department, bringing them the platforms to replenish. Cracked slices and cereals, biscuits and snacks; pasta, oil, and tomato puree; babies, animals, detergents, and perfumery; drinks, beer, wine, and spirits. My colleagues completed the supply and I prepared home delivery left by the evening. They called me into the reception. The truck for perishables had arrived: meat, fruit, fish, frozen foods, and gastronomy. Just enough time to

unload because they were meant for seven o'clock: I had to clean the empty carts of the market and transfer them into the car. When it was finished, I had to do the opening round. I took the keys, opened the door of the stairs, then the elevator door and loaded the shopping carts into the parking lot. I came back and put the funds in the box. Unexpectedly, another truck arrived with the promotion. We phoned the depositor to send it back, but it wasn't possible. The warehouse was already crowded due to some demand for overcrowded goods and because I had to compact and shrink the advanced platforms.

I offloaded it to the market, among the customers who came in and found the corridors clogged with goods still packed. I managed to settle them without much difficulty and as close as possible to where they would be placed. Fagiolo, who was responsible for the promotion, wouldn't have had to say anything.

I was sweaty with the sweat that the air conditioning dried upon me. I changed the vest and settled in the cashier where we were only in two: Argo, an old cashier with an Anglo-Saxon look, and I.

It began the procession of customers who didn't understand what was the good in discount because we didn't have time to display the bidding cards. I stared like a stupid old woman who complained because I was already tired and lazy at ten o'clock in the morning. When Monza and Muffi arrived, I managed to escape pausing. I walked away from the office where the phone was ringing for several minutes. It was Pomata. He asked me to inform the director he was sick. He added he actually had several commitments.

I took a chair and stood outside, smoking. It was ten and a quarter o'clock, and the director came. He looked at me.

- Why I always find you smoking?

- You come in when I leave for break - I replied.

- We're trying to work because the situation is complicated...

DEAR CUSTOMER

- Pomata called. He said he's sick...

- Ah, hopefully, he will get well soon.

When I arrived in this new place, I met a girl. She came with her mother on Saturday morning. She smiled when greeted me, and I noticed the dimples on her cheeks. She was beautiful, with her long, wavy hair, brown in colour that blurred like that of a blonde. She had black, clear and lively eyes ... her skin was radiant. She was long-legged and had a slim and well-defined figure. Her gaze pulled me off. She looked distinct, didn't look like someone who followed underground shows, but I could get over it. Her age was about twenty years old. I hadn't seen her for weeks, but I remembered.

I often hid myself to observe customers. The human nature endured a spell. In one place, there was everything. Years ago was the fairground or a market to perform this witchcraft, then later at the shopping mall.

Those who came for leisure were the most sought-after prey because they could eventually become potential customers. The percentage of people, especially during the weekend, who go to the shopping mall just for fun, is extremely high. When you work in contact with the public, you feel the pressure while not being aware, because the employees don't know the techniques. It happens when you read up about it. The value of the goods didn't exist. There was a price. Interminable debates about the persuasions of the consumers took place on the Internet. Initially entering to shop for one thing, his cart at the exit was overflowing. Placing a futile article at the entrance triggered the temperature of have in the individual. The signs were placed so that they could take a long walk to get from one point to another: specific strategies induced for the purchase of items on the path and that would have ended up as purchase. The first necessities were at the bottom when the cart was already full, including the money of the addict which was put into the coffers of the company for which he worked for. Buying caused unhealthy addiction and someone should have warned of it like gambling cigarettes, but they weren't self-harmers.

In the cold business mechanism, it was difficult to create a deep relationship. My introversion was dissolving, authenticity overflowing. Constant grudge fades away in false circumstance smiles.

CHAPTER TWO

Contact with the audience was intriguing and perverse. Customers were tormented with the stamps for the gifts: the more they spend, the more they accumulated points. Paradoxically, they really knew how those gifts were only supposed. They asked the full share of their purchase to know if they had reached the score; otherwise, they would have taken some other article to round off. It was crucial to create a dependency, sealed by the loyalty of the fidelity card.

The concept of fidelity had its pleasing aspects. A young married woman, with two children, was shopping on the first morning. She went in and greeted everyone. Then stood in front of the mirror of the underwear department and looked at her, she freshen up, loosened the fourth button of the blouse showing a generous décolleté. She was silent though, if you greeted her when she came in with her husband.

We would have rewarded her very much. Dal Canto took a fancy for her. The director, on the other hand, was convinced the young woman stole tricks and perfumes. She made love with her husband and perhaps, weighed the already priced meat on the scale of the vegetable department under the *endive* voice. I saw her and called her Lady Endive. She realized I wouldn't betray her and smiled me malicious, showing me a few inches of her boobs. In a manner of speaking, it was a game. It was a stage. We created amusements for customers and sometimes this exchanged. Sometimes we are anvils, sometimes hammers. One day, who knows, that lady would have hammered me in place of Dal Canto.

I carried the customers with my sight to the escalator. From the shop window I saw a guy walking around with the dog, Doctor Carloni came back the office, the secretaries of the insurance office get out of the bar gesticulating, amused.

The business was very good for the city's transport company, because public transport was full. Everything was normal.

At break time I wandered without a definite goal. My colleagues went home for lunch, as I entered the bar and stared at Pirelli's calendars, understanding one year was really of twelve months.

Donna Boccione, our most whiny customer, complained, like every day after lunch, with the bartender because the espresso was too hot. Knowing Boccione, I agreed with the poor man, looking at him with understanding.

Words were as useless as my actions. I had the impression of spending time when everyone was running. Suddenly, something abducted me... Yes it was she, really her: the girl with the dimples on her cheeks!

She walked fast to the bus stop. I couldn't follow her zigzag motion between the cars at the traffic light, and when I decided to tail her, the traffic light became green. I could have considered it a sign of destiny, but I decided not to abuse it because the girl was going to work and that was her habitual journey. I walked away and thought of her. Belinda, she resembled Belinda Carlisle, the Californian singer. I would have waited for her the next day. I didn't listen to Carlisle's music, but I followed the Carlisle that was in her.

I went back to work. I waited for Belinda and Gatta came in. She greeted me without moving her lips, saying only L-L-O instead of a sunny and open hello.

Gatta said she didn't consider herself a colleague with a disadvantage like me. Once she came up against me with Barone, her CISL union official, because I had made fun of her.

In the previous elections, I had obtained thirteen votes and I became the trade union delegate for CGIL.

DEAR CUSTOMER

I obtained my first trade union permit. I had two days of training together with the new delegates from other branches. I went into the federation with the bundle of recommendations from colleagues' hopeful and satisfied with their choice, i.e. me: "*You have to get stuck in! Close your fists hard nosed*" said to me Terremoto, a butcher, then added: - *I'm happy the votes went to you, even if I suspected you were a half-gay, thinking about your theatrical past...*

I was in the meeting room at the union, and somebody touched my shoulder.

- Hello! What are you doing here?

- How long - I said – And you? Why are you here?

It was Zucca. Joined together, but in different branches, friends from a lifetime, we were lost in sight. He explained to me he was there for a controversy. Six years earlier, at the time of the move, he had informed direction of his change of address. On the staff agenda, his personal data appeared with the current address and phone. During the month he was ill, and his manager sent a doctor to his old home, an inexplicable fact. Due to the disagreement, Zucca had a 300 euro reduction. Besides, the director had told him he would find another in the next payroll.

I listened to Zucca's story and was shocked. He gave me the letter in which they disputed him the mismatched address.

- I don't understand: they sent the doctor at the six-year-old address, while the letter of dispatch has been sent to your actual home address? - I asked him.

- That's what I'm asking myself, too - he said. We laughed at our past theatre experiences, and we greeted, recommending to stay in touch.

Working with the public was no different than theatrical efforts: bluffs, plays and comedies, company meetings and assemblies with colleagues. All the characters passed by with their respective monologues, convinced theirs were the key role. There were no major scenes, no ladders or final climax finishes, only continuous and secondary plots.

It seemed like a daily comedy to which everyone was watching and attending unconsciously, lost in their frustrations. The script didn't follow any other thread than the illogical. The individual often doesn't find the way, but only apologizes, sharing them with the whole company.

Stuck at the cashier, I was celebrating the shift delay for the break round. I had trouble with sight because the neon light melted my retina like cheese. Gatta was still at the setup. She always stamped the card and remained in front of the mirror. Exasperated, I yelled at the microphone: - A person at the cashier!

The manager scolded me: - You have to say a cashier, a secretary for the office, and so on. Do I have to teach you everything?

He shook his head: - There's always one who doesn't want to grow. Canapone, try to be positive...

He irritated me. A few minutes passed, and a customer struck a bottle of oil. The substance was spreading on the floor. By treasuring my superior's teaching, I rephrased the announcement: - A wanker with sawdust in the oil department!

The director showed me the thumb: - Okay, okay, bravo. Positive...

The day ended. I went as usual to the bar with Pomodoro. He, immersed in the midst of the club, drank a Campari soda. I turned and saw the director reading the Lord Tribune. He looked up and greeted me. I was banned, but then I accepted the concussion. He approached me.

- Canapone, despite you are over 30 years old, you remain at the extremes of our environment. Why?

- I am extreme - I replied - or the large food agro-food groups which...

He interrupted me: - You Canapone, always you! And mind I understand your sarcasm; don't believe it has gone unnoticed. The next one you will force me to make you a notification you; then we'll see who the wanker is...

DEAR CUSTOMER

Pomodoro dragged me out. The temperature was stiff. Scarves and coats were pulling straight towards their respective destinations. Pomodoro, carefree, uttered a burp to break the silence. We reached to the cars, and said good-bye. We looked serious from our respective cockpits, and we departed roaring back, as if this gave us more credentials.

The only surge was to write every possible vileness in the bathroom of the staff. Pomodoro and I started a race of anonymous insults. At the entrance, an exhibition of sketches and indirect messages each one sent to the other. At the top, in the centre, with red Brushes, homage to the director: Welcome to Cutazzopoli (at the registry of Giovanni Cutazza).

DO IT YOURSELF MANAGER?

NO, CUTAZZA?

OUCH, OUCH, OUCH.

A SECRET MANAGER WITH LICENSE TO GO OUT!

(But to exit he must enter first)

On the lid of the toilet, was a sticker with the inscription ENTRY, supported a similar signal placed inside, with the inscription EXIT.

All the staff imitated us, to demonstrate the level of frustration achieved by each. The manager knew where to go when he broke our balls. Our colleague Saltalafune discovered why since the '70 no one wrote her hot messages. Terremoto realized that after using the bathroom, it was necessary to pull the chain, while Dal Canto, following the arrows, learned to pee in the cup.

That lustful game had its epilogue one morning. The head of the staff, in fact, gave a mandate for the door to be removed and not replaced. Pomodoro, last time, exaggerated with rhymes.

ANGUISHED DIRECTOR

I think he almost melted you,

That chair you have under the ass,

Especially since time passes

And the more you believe in an unmatched sovereign.

On the door, to the Vespasian, I was happy with the brush

and I created images of convenience,

Until one day, accidentally, I painted a colt.

Now I wondered, why

took offence that big man of the manager?

It's often said that, for an actor or a

Great Lord, staying immortalized is

Anyway a nice honour:

It means he left a sign.

You wouldn't understand it, anguished director,

So, even if you don't say it,

For some time I have tried in vain:

I have nothing to write about you!

DEAR CUSTOMER

I watched the workers load the door on the van. The head of the staff didn't have the sense of humour. Ours was a society that no longer knew how to laugh. I was called back to cashier, and I wanted to cry.

The next day the manager suspended holidays for a couple of colleagues. The staff, exasperated by her ways, demanded us hardness and uncompromisingness.

- You can't sit on your hands - Terremoto said.

Along with Barone, CISL delegate, we briefed the head of the assembly meeting about holiday planning and staff management.

- Assembly? What's the need? - Asked the manager.

- We can't sit on our hands - replied Barone.

The director launched the ultimatum: - If you expose the departments, you will be crushed as delegates, while I will be forced to prosecute your colleagues. And you - pointed to Barone - well aware his trade union permission is likely to become unpaid!

- And why? Am I not a delegate as well? - He wondered alluding to my permit.

We isolate ourselves. Confabulating. We wrote another announcement.

This trade union organization declares the state of unrest for dissent towards the director, regarding the definition of the holiday plan, staff management, and attitudes against the RSU and employees. We will follow forms of protest with minimum notice.

The director read it: - Now inform the head of the staff...

He turned away. Called. He returned to the office with the usual vague questions.

- But are the federations informed of your intentions?

- What kind of question is it? - I asked.

- Right - said Barone - we're not taking orders!

- All right – concluded the head of the staff. - I see you've already decided. However I'll go on vacation and leave you with the head of the sector.

- Well, go, but know we'll stay here to fight - I exclaimed, exasperated...

- Sure - said Barone - go on vacation, but we'll always be here to spit blood in the fight!

We stayed alone in the meeting room to fight against the director and spit blood for our colleagues. We looked at each other desolated without saying anything. Someone knocked on the door. It was Gatta.

- Bravi: have you declared the state of unrest?

- Yes - I said - it's war. It's clear overtime and hours are blocked.

- And why? - She asked.

- We're in state of unrest - explained Barone.

- Sure - I said - we're hurting him.

- But on Saturday I had to make the extraordinary: I need money. You are against the workers, as well as two dickheads!

Someone knocked on the door. It was Terremoto with his bloodstained smock, gestured by brandishing a knife in his hands.

- Next Friday I have to do a job, so I'll first start early and leave soon. Are there any problems?

DEAR CUSTOMER

We seemed to get along very well together until a breath of wind hurled us against each other. Solidarity and union were old terms, and when you pronounce them, you were rhetorical. It was an individualist reality. The wind of misfortune moved, fate touching your shoulder by finding you alone because no one was willing to offer you the support you had never given.

In addition to the fables about the harmony between the staff, it was fundamental to tame the beasts. The horses running in small reserves were not slaughtered: they served as an example. Opening the stable door, one could smell only the stinks, while a wild stallion ran out without a saddle and wasn't tamed: for pride, it preferred to die far away.

CHAPTER THREE

Vacca preferred to die in the break room. His doubts remained far from being dispelled even after half an hour of treatment with Terapia (the UIL delegate) and Barone.

Terapia ran all the Marxian analysis of capitalist society: - Relationships between people are mediated through these goods, so they are not authentic!

Barone echoed him: - Yes. It's so Vacca. Do you understand?

Vacca was puzzled: - It will be as you say, but to me, when you talk me about this Marx, comes to mind only the chocolate with the toffee layer which made me crazy.

Barone resumed: - OK Vacca. But do you make the card. Yes or no?

- No. That's not fair - Terapia interfered - Yours is a dirty game, Barone. I was here first for the cards.

They began to argue with each other as Vacca came out. Was Vacca stupid or was he just acting like a stupid? The manager caught me as I thought about this question.

- Zabaione, you're always doing nothing. Try to be positive...

Caught red-handed, I made the victim: - How can you call me Zabaione?
I'm not your brother!

- Exactly. Do you want to go to work yes or no?

- No.

- And I'll make you a notification.

- Ok, I go to work.

- Good Zabaione. Go.

In front of me was the affluent consumer society. The myth of the stuff, in that pagan manger scene, found its logic. Craftsmen who perfected the works, in a ringing of anvils and hammers, animated the alley. Flimflam men and madman's fast talker attract the customer showing valuable fabrics while respectable gentlemen were simulating deference to the manager to demonstrate the mastery of the shop he masterly directed.

We, the staff, were hit by usual complaints about the differences between the price on the shelf and what the customer really paid. People were right, even if I didn't tolerate it.

Sometimes it seemed the end of the world was at the door. The queue were endless. Shopping carts busy. One day I left my chair for an old gentleman who sat beside the cashier, watching me work.

- I'm tired of being queued. If the queue is so long, the blame is yours.

- Wasn't there an express line? - A lady asked me.

- My lady, we need fast cashier - said the old man.

DEAR CUSTOMER

- Do you have only this brand of Mayonnaise? - Complained Madame Boccione.
- Look - I said - there's another brand down there.
- But that's the light one: do you want to suggest me I'm fat?
- Go to the office, ask respect - said the old man beside me.

Another one, arrived to the register to pay his purchases, handed me his identity card.

- Today is my birthday!
- Happy Birthday - I said.
- Don't be funny. It's my birthday, and I have the right to a discount!
- What?
- They said it on television. Ask your manager. Be informed.

The old man sitting, chuckled: - The truth is, you don't understand shit!

It was Lady Endive's turn: - Look at my cart - she said as she loosened the blouse button again - it's so full! I just came to take bread. In my opinion, is the advertising what gets us, or you put the goods in that way. It's incredible: I didn't have to take anything... but I couldn't give up the Mastrovaldo for dishes with banana flavour or fried potatoes with parsley. When my husband saw its advertisement on TV, made his mouth water. What about my little boy? I couldn't quit the German fruit yogurt with the novelty of the mousse tray! Where is the bread? Did I just forget what I needed?

She stared at me in the eye, intriguing: - It's not by accident that you would kindly bring me the bread as I dispose the other goods on the counter?

I looked at her tits. I mumbled, and then I went to the bread stand.

In a poor but respectable theatre in our neighbourhood, the company was staged by *The merchant of Venice*. Acting for me, rather than an artistic expression, was a disease. I remembered the fierce jab of Zucca, in the shoes of Baldassarre, the servant of Porzia, on the stomach of helpless Stefano (the other servant) when I asked him forlorn if he knew the reasons for the cut of the line being or have, in a my *personal mnemonic* mess between Hamlet and the Sage of Fromm, who at that time, with the Merchant of Venice, didn't really matter.

But it was a non-illogical lapse, a Shakespearian question, which could be: *to have or to be and to be or not to be?*

The question was suspended. Growing up in a shopping mall, I discovered that Santa Claus was managing the direction of the revelry in hidden in a futuristic room. Raised floors and escalators, underground and car parks, ads and a sensual voice: *Dear customer, we would like to inform you the centre would remain open even on Sundays. Come back and visit us.*

On the ground floor, a man wore a red tunic and gave discount vouchers. From a fountain of polystyrene were gushing yarns of cotton candy and soon afterwards there was a faux fireplace, turned on for real. Songs for easy listening reconciled with purchases.

They gave you a basket, and you had to do your job well: fill it. The statistics published on the Internet by consumer associations revealed that 75% of customers with the basket always bought something, compared to those who didn't. The baskets were well placed at the entrance.

Behind the greetings passed of education, the welcome gestures, the signs of Merry Christmas and Easter, there was a study, a science, an academic school: Nothing was left to chance. The feeling that would be a real holiday was packed with phosphorescent ribbons and wrapping paper. Behind smiles and kind gestures, for me, for the ones like me, there was only the consolation for the occupied job.

DEAR CUSTOMER

Boys and girls lined up their own laying to those of the models on the posters and they left epitaphs anywhere, vindicating an anonymous existence.

Chicco loves Lella. Lella and Chicco. Chicco reigns...

Donna Boccione, Chicco's mother, parked the sixteen-valve trolley, entertained her friend, who seemed irritated by the clochard.

- Misery is a pity and then, do they think maybe I feel guilty seeing this starved to death faces?

- You're right, Maria - she said. - I should not even find myself in the queue with all the money I've spent. There's no all this convenience, but if the amount is too high, it's indicative of a decent standard of living, isn't it?

Sometimes I went for a break on the shopping mall's terraces. I lighted a cigarette and stayed there. The scenery changed. The middle Ages left the place for the Western, the Ancient Rome, to a remote prairie. I breathed hard and didn't have peace. I had no knowledge of time and didn't realize the break was over. One day I found the director. I came close with my hands in my pocket. He wasn't angry.

- Excuse me - I said - I'm going now. I didn't notice it.

- I understand - he said. - Years ago I played the drums.

- Oh, I didn't know.

- Oh yeah. I was in a rock band.

One morning I was smoking under the escalator shelter, before a baleful union meeting.

At the meeting, it emerged the time changes suggested by the director to cope with the criticality of the point-scale were, in our view, inadequate to the needs of the store. Staff proposals were discussed when the

management came less to manage of the coffers with the trade unions representative and began calling the staff members by interrupting the regular running of the assembly. Also, two co-workers were blocked when they joined the meeting.

We declared a strike on Saturday, causing anti-union activity. We informed the federations and waited for the events. We spent a day.

The following day, the CISL component contacted the head of staff who asked to suspend the abstention intent, offering an urgent meeting to deal with and hear our complaints. The CISL component, therefore, issued a statement in that regard and put it on the notice board.

I informed him, as CGIL delegate, my federal correspondent. He was surprised because he hadn't been warned of anything. Irritated, he gave me a statement indicating we had to continue the fight, persisting in the strike and preparing a leaflet in front of the entrance.

Barone and I informed the respective members of the different lines of our federations. The CGIL members asked me why we had to strike for losing money even for those of CISL. CISL members asked Barone why the CIGL's ones striking with the risk of taking the merits of union action.

We reported the question to our federations. The CISL component clarified, with a statement, the strike hadn't been revoked, but only postponed if the meeting with the head of staff was unsuccessful. The CGIL component issued a note on which it declared that, while condemning the anti-union attitude, it acknowledged the will of the company to meet the demands of the workers, but that they weren't willing to grant discounts. Another day passed.

The next day I was on the registry. I was bottled up in a new discussion on non-EU citizens. Monir spent 24 euros and seven cents. He paid in coin money. I had to count, and the row was locked. Donna Boccione began her monologue.

- Here it is. Are you going to put it on now? To we, Italian, cashiers never count the coins.

DEAR CUSTOMER

Then she turned to other customers looking for comfort: - I pay by credit card and the ATM here is always dead. Do you have it for me that I bring you a lot of money? Instead of thanking us for making you live from gentlemen!

- But madam...

- Shut up! How can you interrupt me? There are so many people who need to work, so while you're working, just goes on strike. I would take you all away! Acc... If there was my husband! He really works hard from morning till evening...

She taken back breath: - And you're still counting his coins? But do you know, dear you, the daughter of a friend of mine, in fear of attending these strange types, has become a vegetable too?

- Vegetable?

- Vegetable. In short, she no longer eats meat.

My colleague Giannetta has to beat a pack of candy and jumped the line of the customers. I issued the receipt. My colleague moved away.

I called her back: - Forgot something?

- What? - She said blushing.

- Candies...

- So you tell me you have it in for me. I didn't do anything to you...

- It's useless to make so much talk, pay for the candy...

- You have it in for me because I didn't give you...

- Giannetta, the surveillance is watching us...

- Ah, but I got the receipt, so I paid...

So he went away. I already had enough of it. I closed the registry and went to phone the federation about the meeting with the company.

The saga with the vertices continued. The company stood in waiting position by proposing three possible dates. The first proposal wasn't viable on account of CGIL's secretary commitments in Confcommercio. On the second date, the secretary of CISL was unable on account of a congress. The third created problems for Barone who had to go and talk with teachers of his son. We started to argue again, and we all wondered - rhetorically - because the company had waited so much to offer availability, despite the many remarks. The company replied it had previously commitments and strategies to define, monitor and implement new formats to be developed.

Meanwhile, the autonomous people were watching us. Having fun or almost. They were another trade union component in antithesis of the triple line (CGIL, CISL, UIL), accused of convergent strategies with business needs and, worse, hidden deals with the companies themselves. The Triple replied it was too easy to spread rights to workers in a heavenly way when they didn't have the power to sign contracts. The Autonomists replied they would have had the power to sign if the Triple had put in the same impetus into the struggle against the companies as they did in making their way to trade union elections. The Triple concluded that, as the history of the past decades taught, rights were conquered by harsh and bitter battles.

It was impossible to go out from this situation. I was a little convinced of the unity of the Triple, but the presence of the autonomous ones on the trade union scene had soldered the semblance. This was the clearest data in this infinite controversy.

In the muddle of clarifications and terms, Barone appeared to be the only one able to withdraw from his commitments. The meeting was scheduled for the third proposed date, and the company announced it has always supported the respect of trade union relations without any indication of attitudes other than those enshrined in the national contract and the supplementary agreement: availability to the meeting was a proof.

The secretaries of CGIL and CISL found the cohesion, telling the head of the staff not to be fooled making the politician, and even in the federation

DEAR CUSTOMER

we knew how to play with the words.

The director, meanwhile, informed us he had followed the company's instructions on the time changes and it was a defamation to support the argument of his anti-union activity. Therefore, if we had declared the fake in front of the head of staff and union federations, he would have been forced to protect himself in the right places. We held it hard as we waited for the meeting to take place.

At the cashier, our behaviours were empty, the same as those of our customers. The customers looked like many sandwich people; some signed from top to toe. The labels penetrated the imaginary until they were thrown away. Every day, thousands Madame Boccione came in and attacked you: one in front, the other in the back, the other two still at the sides; all this while you were giving the change to the fifth customer. They were angry if you didn't pay attention to them and wondered why we were not like on the brochures shipped to them by the company: "operational, urgent and snappy." Why we replied when they criticized us and why we didn't talk when they insulted us: maybe we were underestimating them? Some people didn't know what to buy; others were hesitant.

From the loudspeakers, Gandolfi's spot about marinated anchovies. Now I know what to buy-said a persuasive voice, but if the product was finish, customers asked for the company's free phone number, and as you indicated them the sign, they replied: "You must read it to me. You're paid also for this".

They threatened they would ask for my name from the director if I had kept watching them the wrong way, but the direction wasn't obligated to indicate our identity to the clientele. We no longer had an identity. That was the only advantage.

I was Leopoldo Canapone, thirty-three years old, best known by my colleagues as Zabaione. The author of this term of endearment was the colleague called Puzzone, disheartened and complexes by his own nickname coined for him by me. It's useless to specify the reasons that prompted me to baptize it that way. Puzzone was a guy who thought he was funny, not knowing what the border between sympathy and intrusiveness was.

Years ago, finished the shift, I went home. Puzzone walked the same route. I got on the bus and met Samantha, an old school companion. Samantha was married. We talked about our situation when she asked me about Arianna.

- And tell me how did it go with Arianna?

- Bad. You know, we rarely saw...

- I understand. Don't tell it me...

Samantha would have come down to the next stop, but her way of speaking was overflowing as if raising her voice gave her brilliance.

- When I was engaged, my husband was more passionate. Now, instead...

The bus stopped. Samantha stood at the door and screamed at me: - Do you think it's fair that I'm 25 years old, and I have to fuck just once a week? Bye! I get off here.

She got off. I stayed. Puzzone was far away, and with disappointment, he couldn't hear the conversation, but like all the passengers he had heard the last sentence. In short, Samantha seemed to be my girlfriend, and she was complaining. The people stared at me grumbling. One had tears in his eyes. I went to the next stop, and Puzzone shouted me feeling satisfied:

- Make your girl happy. Do you want a zabaione?

The next day, my colleagues standing in front of me, said: - You have a new nickname, no more 21/3. You are now Zabaione.

DEAR CUSTOMER

CHAPTER FOUR

I was about to begin my afternoon shift. After a brief pursuit, Gigliola, the security guard caught Nico the addict, who was about to escape from the bookstore on the first floor and tried to take refuge at the supermarket. Nico had the pockets full of books, including a biography of Marshal Badoglio.

- Do you know how to read it? - The guard asked sarcastically.

- I didn't do anything - Nico said - on the sign, its written *pocketbook*.

I took advantage of it for another ride. I went out of the supermarket and headed to the women's underwear department in the adjacent store. A lady was in front of the mirror with her daughter. The girl looked at her; she turned on herself as a model. Her mother was looking at her with satisfaction. I was watching them, and they were not bad. The director by chance approached me and blocked himself too. The lady noticed.

- What do you have to look at? You are two depraved servicemen...

The two servants became one when the lady recognized the director in the other and her grunted face left room with a smile.

I went back to the supermarket. My colleague Giannetta wanted to pay her snack. I gave her the receipt. She told me she would pay when she finished her break because she didn't have any money with her. Returning, I made her a sign to remind her she had to pay. She told me she didn't hear me because the music was too loud. I replied she had to pay. She told me she didn't understand.

The snack - I yelled. She told me to take them out of my snack, so we were even. I replied, telling her it couldn't possible and that she should be careful because surveillance was looking at us. Giannetta turned around, gave a look the security guard, smiled and settled her hair.

The manager called me into the office. A fax had arrived from CGIL. It was a trade union permit for a meeting between the top officials of the federations and those of the company about the situation of our trading group, its prospects, and possible developments.

At that time respective roles - delegate and director - were diminished. The defences lowered, and the interpreted roles remained outside the office windows. We were two devils, pushing by parallel currents who met occasionally.

We exchanged information, believing we ought to believe in something or someone else. Everything was flowing over our heads, wet currents, cyclones and turbulences, which invested us, and we couldn't help but only open an umbrella or shelter under the cornice of fate, hoping the entire apparatus wouldn't bury us. We both wanted to cultivate our sacred contrasts and continue the human comedy of all time instead of suffering that convergence of mind, metaphor for the critical nature of our manufacturing sector.

Saturday. Bus. Bus Stop. If I missed this crossroad with Belinda, the day was going to go wrong. That day, I saw her getting on the bus next to mine. Everything seemed to be against me.

On Saturday, volunteers from Caritas arrived to collect cans for refugees or the third world populations. They had those Franciscan ways, and we supported them. Even if you had to go through with a platform of mineral water and they were in the middle, you didn't disturb them. The boys

arranged their own tables at the entrance to take the envelopes of customers who wanted to participate. The clientele was impressed, dazed by the news from television about dioxin chickens and mad cows. At some moments, real psychoses were created. People were suspicious.

- Look at this chicken: doesn't it look too bloated?

- Madame, it's not a chicken. It's a guinea fowl.

- Really? I had no idea you imported meat from Egypt!

This consideration ended a week of stress, crap, and rain.

Monday. The week started with another promotion. The opening environment was orderly and clean as the shelves and the offers looked like fragments of inlays: stacks of items tied together with the base of four packets horizontally, under another four vertical packets, and so on. Vegetable department was a little flourishing garden, and the pork store a rural wine cellar. The scent of hot baking bread spilled across the corridors.

At the end of the day, the rush hour noise didn't fade; it moved inside your head. From the outside, you heard the horns of cars at the traffic lights, while the store looked like a country demolished by an earthquake. The posters of the offers were exchanged, and the stacks were in disorder. The counter outside seemed attacked and bombarded. A bottle of rustic tomato sauce lay destroyed on the floor; a bottle of oil had the same destiny few steps away. Papers and leaflets on the ground, packs of meat were abandoned on the shelves for detergents. At the exit, there were full envelopes that someone hadn't had time to hide. Cashiers resounded with the typical computer rhythm of our end-of-day sums. That job was paradoxical: one had to create a magnificent exposition, which catches the eye of the public, knowing success would be determined by its disfigurement. It was the opposite of the theatre.

Sometimes my grandfather came back to my mind. He told me about the years of the war, of his country, he likened misery to a circular cheque, equal everywhere.

There was this conflict somewhere in the world. The television broadcast it. The Western World also participated. The supermarket was filled with people who were impressed, old people who were hoarding all sorts of items: sugar, pasta, and flour. Patients were standing in queue, and nobody complained. The music was turned off, for my relief. The coffee shelf was empty. There were grains fallen from open packages. An old man approached slowly. He stopped, looked around, and with a brush dropped a mixture of dust and coffee in the empty bag.

It was elder Mr Alfredo Toffolo. He seemed out of movie *Sciuscià* or *Ladri di biciclette*, but he didn't have the bike, and his shoes were peeling with mended laces. He passed his hand through her white hair, which was kept good by a stream of water. Coming down to the supermarket with the spirit of a boy, and trying to cheat the same middle-aged lady, accompanying her and holding her bags.

They kept each other company.

Alfredo gave me his poems: - You always have to read - he said.

Green meadows where red poppies grow.

That's where I'd like to sleep, exhausted.

No plates and no marble.

- Keep my poems and every time you see a red poppy, call it Alfredo.

He winked at his sarcastic ones and came out of the chocolate department. He seemed to have prepared the plan for the robbery of the century, but he only searched for an emotion. Those sweets were for grandchildren. He pretended to be there by chance when I was throwing off the waste from the vegetable department. Alfredo held a bag stacked in the raincoat pocket.

The old man waited for me where also Belinda passed. I saw so many people during the day, but it wasn't looking right at my eyes. A distracted view of the person you were facing and returning to doing your job. She, on

the other hand, stared at that dull market clerk, exposing his awkwardness. Following Belinda kept me clinging to life. I wanted to talk to someone, to really open my heart. I felt like I got to the midpoint of madness. My existence was a defrosted, tempered, tasteless product. I needed a place to lay dreams away from the chaotic traffic of materiality.

It was an afternoon of autumn, but climate change was only partial to us. The truck of requested stuff arrived, and someone had to offload. I opened the door to the warehouse and realized it was raining outside. I found a cloak without a hood took a yellow umbrella from the sale department and tried to offload it by holding it on my shoulder. It was a vain attempt because the electric forklift was swerving with wet footsteps suspended at half a meter high. The space was tight, and I bumped against any obstacle. They should have repaired it; once I had risked a massacre because of the supports were stuck at the top and then, suddenly, touching the heads of Cirillo, Fagiolo, and mine lowered them: 150 kg of metal. Life was hanging by a thread.

I left the electric forklift for the other hand because it's safer. The truck driver was blaming because he had to lower and raise the trucks sideways to every footpath for it to be unloaded. The housekeeper complained because, in the meantime, I had tarnished the warehouse she had just washed. I finished, luckily. I prepared the bill of transport for the truck driver. I greeted him and he went away. The director entered the warehouse. He asked for a cigarette, and he ducked himself under the air conditioning shelf, remaining alone with his thoughts.

Outside it continued raining.

It was early morning, and I was stationed at Belinda's house. My nose was pouring from cold. She went down. She was beautiful, as usual. It seemed she was waiting for me and, perhaps, I hoped I should accompany her. She made happy when she saw me, as someone who couldn't find the right words...

- Are you even under my home, right now?

Shyness made her aggressive, but it was just a way for her to defend herself.

DEAR CUSTOMER

- Can we see each other sometime?
- I'm very busy with my job. I don't have time.
- Why, what do you do?
- Event planner.
- I work too. We have something in common, fuck!

She laughed at my enthusiasm. She shook her head, curbing her emotions. She was dying from the desire to know my name.

- I'm Leo Canapone.
- Not me.

I kept following her, thinking of something smart to say. She started to pick up the pace, but I realized she was impatient to be reached. When we arrived at the bus stop, I stopped. Belinda turned to me, staring at me from head to toe, and that fact made me nervous: stuck with my crooked feet, I ventured into a conversation.

- I, I d-do the ca- cashier at the hypermarket. I s-see yup p-pass e-everyday. You a-are b-beautiful.
- I have to say goodbye. My bus is coming.

I saw the public vehicle move away, depriving me of a primary need. Desperately, I screamed: - Where are you going? I'm positive!

- Did she turn you out bad another time? - It was my colleague Puzzone, who came down from the same bus on which Belinda had climbed.
- No. She's a friend - I said. - I accompanied her.
- Which girlfriend? She has planted you like an artichoke. I go to the bar: do you want a zabaione?

He moved away laughing tastefully. I followed him to the bar.

- Puzzone?

- Don't call me Puzzone; we're in a public space.

- Okay. I have to explain to you!

- But what do you want to explain...

- Look...that girl is interested

- Yes, yes...

- I swear. She has that French face. Tell me, doesn't she look like a French girl?

- For goodness sake! Let the French stay.

- Why?

- You, dear Canapone, just think about playing. Do you know if the French come, we will close the shop?

- What do you mean?

- There's this French company who wants to take over the majority share of our company.

- Well, our company...

- If the French come, they make you work!

- Fuck!

- It's so my dear Canapone. You are not married, but I have a family!

- But how did you know these things?

- I've said too much - he said, putting a sock in his mouth.

DEAR CUSTOMER

Puzzzone and I came down to the supermarket. We found unexpectedly the presence of a senior executive from Milan. He presented the new corporate hygiene campaign. The man showed signs.

SCRATCHING YOUR HEAD?

BACK DOWN!

GOING TO THE BATHROOM WITH A UNIFORM?

BACK DOWN!

PUTTING THE LID ON THE DUSTBIN?

COME ON!

SANITIZING YOUR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER DELICATE WORK?

COME ON!

We listened with obedience. The manager complimented and turned away, appealing to the manager: - I have to talk to you.

They went into the office. The walls were of glass. The manager settled down. The other manager spoke. The gentleman listened and looked at us one by one, from inside the office. The manager stood up and walked toward the door; he turned to the director again.

- Aurevoir, monsieur le directeur!

Puzzzone stared at me. No one spoke. The director took the phone. I was the only one who didn't know anything yet, evidently, because each one had their own guesswork. Puzzzone's revelations were never so secret. The delegate came back.

- Have you seen my paper?

Vacca replied: - Is It The 24th Sun?

- Yes - said the manager.

- I seem to have seen some pages in the bathroom.

We all laughed. The delegate went away, swearing.

Vacca wasn't new to those comments. He terrorized the clientele by telling personal facts or trade union problems, which interested only us, employees. He had blue eyes, of ice, typical of a serial killer. He spoke with a relaxed voice. You could find him behind you touching your shoulder, asking if you were deaf. He was there for five minutes talking, but you couldn't notice his presence. He had a plushy footstep, with his lost eyes. Since he shaved it, his head was more like a watermelon than a human's skull.

That time Vacca turned on the microphone and called for a replacement:

- A change, please. I have to go to the toilet.

The queue moved, but the colleague didn't care. Vacca from his post felt authorized to inform his manager, his colleagues and all his clients about his embarrassment. Vacca often had intestinal problems. If you were on break or eating a sandwich, he will involve you in issues of colic and flatulence disorders.

According to Vacca, the books were on the ruin of the human being. They contained those principles of incitement to a thought, which compromised his blissful growth in the thriving garden of ignorance.

His troubles went up to the previous day's picnic. It was June 2nd, and with CGIL's comrades, we celebrated the anniversary of the Italian Republic at the Castelli Romani.

- I'm coming too - said Vacca - even if I don't understand what is being celebrated on a newspaper's birthday!

DEAR CUSTOMER

(In Italy, The Republic is also a newspaper...)

After several jugs of red wine, everyone tried to stay awake, while Terapia was venturing into the nostalgias of Ernesto Guevara. Vacca listened, holding his head in his hands and replied with personal convictions...

- Che Guevara killed Spider-Man, and the Americans have killed him. You're such a jerk if you're competing with superheroes!

We drove back home and were greeted by mother's swearing. The next day, he was a rag. Dal Canto arrived to replace him.

- Good Vacca, go on with reds commie. They are only able to drink and eat. Look how you have reduced.

Vacca ran to the bathroom. He reappeared after half an hour, relaxed. He was entertaining a customer who didn't even know him, telling him how satisfied he was because he had been able to move his bowels and throw up at the same time.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was a hot day. I went to the bar with Pomodoro. I ordered a cold tea. A gentleman at the side table read La Repubblica. I didn't see the face, but I breathed the stench of the cigar, along with the bacilli of a cough. Pomodoro made a sign to me, pointing to the gap at the bottom of the page for me to read.

Revolution in food chains. Germans are coming!

- Then they are Germans, not French - He said.

- What do you care? - I answered.

- You don't understand, huh?

- I don't see anything strange.

- Yes, yes - he said apocalyptically - Bye.

- But where are you going?

He left me alone at the table. I got out of the bar and went to the newsagent.

- Give me *La Repubblica*!
- Are you afraid, huh, Zabaione? The newspaper seller said.
- By which you mean?

For fun, he started to sing Lili Marlene; I opened the newspaper on page seven.

The large Italian food group seems to have sold forty-nine percent of the stock package to a German holding company. These foreign companies enter into a partnership with the Italian groups and overlook the market. Together, they managed, revise their territorial structure, and close their activities, thin out their staff and open new supermarkets. Competition between big chains is ruthless.

In the short article alongside, the worried comments of the trade unions were read.

Germans intend to close ten markets of the Italian group and put in mobility their employees despite the fact a very big shopping centre will be opened: an unacceptable perspective!

I read, I read, and Belinda passed nearby me. I crumpled the newspaper and went after her. Her perfume, her hair in the wind and her elegant posture, cancelled the time and the place where we were. She guessed she was being followed, so she turned back and looked at me.

- You again?

She remembered me. I struck her!

Breathless from running, I took in a deep breath. I would have had so many things to say to her: she was beautiful, classy. The wake of her perfume and the magic of her smile were the thoughts I used to erase the boredom of the people and the frustrations of my days. I was really discovering love. All

DEAR CUSTOMER

I had to say. So, I dropped the paper, fixed my hair and cleared my voice. I looked into her eyes. She also looked at me.

- What's up? - She asked.

- Germans are coming - I said.

She walked away with not bat an eye. Germans were at the door, but she couldn't say I hadn't warned her. I looked around, worried Puzzone or anyone else wasn't in here, when I heard the call. It was Mrs Endive, difficult to avoid.

- Hello - she greeted me confidently - what are you doing?

- I was going to work.

- Would you accompany me? This shopping cart which is damn heavy!

- Yes, sure...

We came in front of the door. Monica - Mrs Endive - had a great body and along the way she seemed to dance.

- Do you want a coffee? - She asked me.

- Of course - I said

The elevator was too tight for Monica, and the buttons on her blouse seemed like mines ready to explode. Her waist was tight, and her hips were like a hairpin bend and curve. Noticing her black eyes and smooth, brown hair, it became a bargain to be concluded at the end.

We got off the elevator and went home. We got into the kitchen and she prepared me a coffee. She said I was always very kind to her and I told her she was a happy and sympathetic woman.

- You know, my husband works so much, but fortunately, the kids are at school, so in the morning I can arrange a home...

Coffee was ready.

- How much sugar?

- Let me do it - I said.

Our hands touched, and I braided my fingers with hers. She didn't retract them, and we ended up on the couch in the room. She took advantage of me but without encountering any resistance. She made moans that shook me like a chalk on the blackboard. A scrupulous woman. Before I went, she prepared me another coffee.

My colleagues were depressed, while at that time I felt cheerful. We decided to hold an extraordinary meeting at Terapia's home to investigate the activities of the struggle, to understand what was going on.

Terapia's Studio apartment looked like a resale of political souvenirs. A lithograph of a pair of moustaches was close to the intercom; a Cuba flag covered the couch, and a UIL TUCS flag served as a tablecloth on the dining table. Signed up for the CGIL, he replaced it with UIL for trade union controversies. As a true Stalinist fetishist, Terapia argued in a democratic system it would be desirable for a left-wing government to issue a decree or any other plague through which the coalition could govern uninterruptedly for at least five years.

Terapia, while sitting on an armchair, waited for calls from the federation. He tortured the TV remote control, lowering and raising the sound. News reports about the liberation of a kidnapped entrepreneur were heard in the background. His roughness was a symptom of how he had become cruel, without scrupulous and very little positives.

- Why did they release him? In defending the interests of the working class, even anonymous seizures were not left.

Insecurity united us and sympathizes with us as it rarely happened. Other colleagues also came. The huge Pippimortadella came with news.

- Hello, comrades.
- Hello.
- Do you know the latest?
- Which is?
- Mr Dal Canto, he has been transferred!
- I knew it - Terapia exploded - he always knows which way to go!

The intercom rang from downstairs. It was Barone, came directly from the CISL.

- Did you hear about Del Canto?

At that time I was worried about having several unresolved issues: the national contract had expired; as it regarded our commercial chain, renovation work had to be started on a national scale; the hypothesis of a mobility procedure; the possible change of business name.

The danger, in my opinion, was that with all the problems to be overcome, the trade unions, engaged on too many tables of concertation, left something unattended. It had happened other times: in the end, who benefited from the concertation of bitter cabbages all at that moment?

Aside from the renewal of the contract, the other points seemed to me to be linked to each other, and since it was sin have bad thoughts, but often I guessed, apocalyptic scenarios would be arrived.

With my surprise, I was called for an active unit at the Sports Palace, about contract renewal.

I was walking towards the entrance. Before the stepladder, there were standing booths with free gadgets, scarves, flags, and bandanna to colour the day.

Once I got in, I hit by the perfect formality of the day. The audience was composed of the CISL members waving their green, white and red flags celebrating. On the right were UIL members, coloured with their blue flags. To the left, of course, were the CGIL members, with red clothes.

On the podium, where I found a seat, we were mixed. When Vasco Rossi's music played from the amplifiers, the audience was filled with ecstasy. It was a real stadium show. Detached ones attended the choreographies.

Detached because they had been delegated of supermarkets, cleaning companies, fast food, and more. Having they put themselves in the spotlight, they had been detached, that is, they were working for a trade union secretary, but were responsible for the company in their field of origin. They were the filter between you and the manager who couldn't run behind any trivial question.

Barone dreamt of that place. He remained alongside the federation secretary who already had an accompanying attendant; determined opponent of this one, Barone wanted her benevolence. He was also victim by a platonic feeling because of the creamy maritozzi the woman, kind and honest as she was, offered him to have a minute of rest. Like a poodle to which a biscuit is given, Barone was isolated in the corner of the bar licking his fingers from the stuffing and snarling towards whoever dared to approach, indifferent to our teases for the staged acts of which he wasn't even conscious. Lost in the moment, he didn't realize his Beatrice came out of the room and with an uninhibited sense of guilt, crept along the sidewalk stepping on anyone to regain her side.

Trade union's life for so many delegates was the only reason for the realization. For many, it was the only source of news about what was happening outside the doorstep, as well as a diversion from family monotony. Many individuals who would never have headed for a director,

having the federation alongside they felt like protagonists of the lives of others because they couldn't be on their own. The role was emptied and used to face their lacks of personality. Too many flat existences had found depth.

The detached ones continued to stimulate the crowd to fling. It was like a Tv show, with the attendants cheering up. A chorus similar to the stadium one started, po popopo, po popopo, which lasted ten minutes at least, speaker sent the song "Bandiera Gialla", until someone, already drunk in the morning, sang alone "Bandiera Rossa". Two women, in front of me, came back from the bathroom and said with enthusiasm and declared, to have written: NO TO WAGE MODERATION on the door of the toilet.

I had almost not realized the national secretaries had arrived. Before the intervention of the CISL spokesperson, the applause was requested for the bus, which finally arrived, by Cava Dei Tirreni, which had been stuck at the junction of a pill up. There were endless interventions by the regional secretaries who, in front of their national secretaries, listed a series of oppressions carried out by the companies and confirmed the union SAYS NO!

The Nationals' turn came. With his powerful voice, broken, CISL spokesperson assured us the government would surely shut us up. His voice became powerful when, with prescriptive gestures, talk to the audience. It seemed he had it in also for you.

I left after the shut up sentence. I looked around. All enclosed in the walls of a palace, in an area far from the city's political centre, in a holiday atmosphere and, precisely, without a gag.

CHAPTER SIX

Strange and funny was my destiny. As a child, I was fascinated by the department stores: I was so looking for Santa Claus to identify the big old man in an aged clerk with beard, supposing he was hiding among the staff so as not to be disturbed.

It was exciting to move in the spaces illuminated by lights of a thousand colours, where you can find from ordinary article to the strangest one. The escalators attracted me more than anything else. I played with them using them for hours until an employee scolded me.

Luna Park, just a Luna Park, the fantastic world that only a little boy could imagine. Those escalators represented the transport in the underground cities, where the angry soul of the people underwent a metamorphosis; the immense container of articles pleased a delirious dissatisfaction, each one looking serene by holding a shopping cart. It's all in this secret concept of consumerism: to keep alive the playful feeling in an infinite park, a time machine which took you back to the early age when the individual was devoted to hunting and fishing. Actually, it's a struggle for the survival of the system, not of the person.

Growing up, I went to the shopping centre to steal: plans perfectly studied. Proletarian shopping? No, socially useful purchases, only to take advantage of the song by Francesco De Gregori, *Chi ruba nei supermercati?*

Drugs addicted and gypsies. Occasional thieves, innocent professionals, minors. Painted ladies hid goods in the wheelchairs. Wretches sold the items at other stores.

Kleptomaniacs forgot who they were and why and how they were there. The employees cursed due to differences in the inventory. There were those who robbed the salary, who made shopping during the work time, and who in the company bargained on workplaces.

Techniques of various species flourished in the general direction, waiting for a strike to replace the employee who abstained to it. The company spent considerable amount of money in preparing the workers for emergency regulations. Trained employees formed emergency teams on a single day a few years ago. Inspectorate and control bodies didn't have enough staff to supervise. Corrupt trade unionists, idealist delegates, frustrated chief of cashiers, envious department heads; staff who wanted to grow. Incapable managers, betrayed directors.

Inflation, escalator, recession and the only lust knew to civilization: profit. It was our circus, people: *who stole at the supermarket?*

Entire districts built to justify the shopping mall, street signs ripped off, expressways and road connectors enlarged, stretched, for easy access to parking space.

Consumer Associations to the rescue, freephone numbers for grievances, club cards and benefits, discounts and balances, unbeatable promotions. Banknote dealers. Free competitions, prizes, and stickers. Hypochondriacs. Temporary employment, easy layoff and undeclared work, facilitation for companies, which came out of the submerged, tax reductions for companies.

Bro: *who steals at the supermarket?*

Company used terms like service efficiency. The service it was we. The employees represented the company's image, but in front of the clientele, you were just a number.

It was good to take advantage of the work of someone under a fixed-term contract. If you were talking, if you were having problems, then you were

out, boy. There was still a lot of distance to cover, you could read it in the eyes of all the people who went indifferent, in the looks of all the exploited in this world. The answer, friends, blew in the wind, but this, had dispersed it.

All minutes you had to hear complaints about high prices or the fact the amounts shown on the label didn't match with those on the receipt. You couldn't get on the cashier, take the microphone and talk about seignorage, or surplus value or bank profiteering or as you would call it: in other terms the concession to the central banks to send forth papery coin to typographic cost, then surrendered (in loan) to States to the suitable nominal value on the façade and burdened of affairs, in exchange for the titles of public debt; therefore the public debt of each State becomes owned by the banks.

Sometimes I tried to explain these concepts to Vacca. Everyone was looking for Vacca to teach him something, taking for granted he needed it but above all that he was in the dark. In reality, we had need of someone who made us feel shrewd and with the eyes well wide open to the things of the world.

I had a lot of confusion in my head or rather, I couldn't give a precise order to the inconclusive things of civilization, and I just wanted to inform Vacca the economic system as it was conceived, was humiliating us. Since 1694, when Guglielmo III of Orange won the war against Catholics and emptied his strongboxes. He, having accumulated a lot of debts with the bankers in over half of Europe, under the suggestion of those, instead of leaving himself in debt as a physical person, began to print the coin as a banknote. It was a pledge or a set of pledges, with which the King claimed that for each 100-pound sterling banknote, there was gold equivalent in his strongboxes. This statement was a guarantee to the people who wouldn't dare to doubt his sovereign credibility. The Lord's income, precisely. Over time, the system had evolved: how would you explain it to Vacca, for which the term system was associated with the lottery?

Vacca had the singular ability to send my already fragile convictions even more into chaos.

- I mean, but did you understand what I am explaining to you?
- Repeat it again...
- The seignorage of banks is the profit that is gotten in to send forth coin and is given by the difference between the nominal value of the banknote and its typographical cost. If you print a banknote of 500 euros, it costs three cents; the difference between three cents and 500 euros is its seignorage. It's as if you leave the car at the parking lot and pay the attendant. Then, you come to work, and he rents your car to another one and then another one again. At the end of the day, he earned a lot of money with your car, but you also paid a parking fee.
- Are you saying Varese lends my car to someone?
- Oh my God, Vacca: It's an example.
- Ah, then it's not true...
- It's an example! I mean banks do a similar thing with money.
- And what's that called?
- You should call it seignorage, but I'm not so convinced!
- But if that thing is true, this is like scalping.
- Look, Vacca, have you seen that you've understood? Bravo!
- But I didn't understand something...
- No, don't start again...
- You do the moralist so much, don't you?
- And so?
- You're just like them.
- What are you saying? Them who?
- You rent movies from a rental, and then you make copies and sell them, remember the other month? You made me that American movie which

DEAR CUSTOMER

didn't watch very well...

- I make fakes from the originals. The attendant lends the original car; the bank prints the original money.

- You make the fake, but you make them pay. I don't think it's a good thing.

- Oh, don't you think that's a good thing? Do you think it's fair they made you paid a fucking movie or original CD 20 or 30 or 50 euro euros? In the end, you no longer pay for the film, but for the case and the packaging, in short: the materiality you need to be created in a work of intellect to gain on its surplus value, because otherwise on a book or music how can you speculate?

- Yes, but if one tells about what you do, you end up in trouble, my dear.

- Look, asshole: are you threatening me?

- No, but it's not fair for you to charge me.

What can we say? With Vacca, there was always an agreement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mrs Endive was a great woman, and she knew how to listen. She told me I was too burdened with theories - fundamental for charity - but I had to learn to let them flow and not turn them into frustrations. She asked me about my time at the theatre and insisted on me reciting something for her. As an actor, I was a disaster, and many were the things in which I had failed. However, she appreciated me. I was standing in the middle of her living room, to recite a poem of which I confused the author, or I couldn't just remember him. Monica curled up on the armchair, clutched in her tits and moved herself. She said her life was empty - it has always been so, she remarked - and no one had ever dedicated her verses, much less her husband, who only thought of his career. It wasn't the first time she betrayed him, it was only the first time she didn't feel a whore. I excited her - she said - because she saw me at the cashier, polite and set in the uniform, and imagined to tear it off me. She liked to strip me and it feels her good. A woman, I mean. That was what she missed.

When I went up to her, sometimes I got with me the yellow supermarkets and she went crazy for it. She took advantage of me (always without encountering opposition) holding her clothes and when she felt I was ripping off her panties' edge, she began lurking and moaning hoarsely while pulling my hair firmly.

Sometimes, she went at the shop without wearing any underwear beneath her skirt. She pretended not to know me. I closed the crate and followed

her to the corridors. I wanted to touch her, and then she came back home and wait for me. She said the wait drove her crazy.

She had a bottle of egg liqueur on furniture in the living room and put a bit of it in the coffee. Then, she sent me to work.

I spent my working hours jumping from on topic to another, but I had stopped turning. I had cut out a space: supply of the brewery department. Ah, the beer. Blonde, red or dark, double malt or unpasteurized, imported. There was the abbey beer produced by the friars or at least it was said, and I liked to believe it. There was wheat beer; I loved advising clientele not to rest on commercials but trying specials ones to know the production as well. I was watching at her with compassion, that kind of a gentle clientele who was immersed in advertising campaigns. The client was a fucking customer and not a fucked customer. Customer paid for two snacks and took away four of them, saving up to the third, in fact, however, their sons didn't need it: they only consumed more than usual. When the offer ran out, the habits remained. Customer took the products from the shelf at the height of the look, which was, according to statistics; the articles there were sold in greater quantities than other in different places. It was there the products with the logo of the company found place, which obviously had an interest in trading with their own logo. On that shelf, the customer found the convenience, ignorant it would become addictive. Would you let your son weep in front of everyone?

Free tasting of some speciality food, feed hunger, releasing little gastric juices, so the poor customer couldn't have bought that product; a little hurt, going around he'd would have taken another. Nobody wasn't starving on his way to the supermarket.

You've been consumed by eating out yourself, you couldn't be able to do without it: you'd end up being sick. You didn't follow the course of your life, but you were running after a loan. You were wondering whether to buy a car, a computer or a cell phone.

Cynical, people said. A failed actor, nihilistic to the marrow. That's why I couldn't stand it. Where the world was going to with regards to the dignity of the human being, for those who had to consume, it didn't care. It had to

DEAR CUSTOMER

run; it was in a hurry to get into another store. When customer was in line, he asked to open another cashier to pay, he complained about why they didn't hire any other staff because so many people were looking for a job?

Good question. The delirious systems, which dictated labour market regulations, especially reduced the prospects of the individual. The large groups suffered the reflection of the serious crises of the international markets and considered the staff as a cost too high. In the society created, the only safe figure for an assumption was the consumer.

Historical workers, those with the supplementary contract and the national contract were the ballast. In addition to the salary, the employer's contributions were paid. On the payslips, they followed cascades of other acronyms, quotas and taxable ones, which were the damnation of us delegates, none other than tax experts.

The cost of labor, in fact, didn't only constitute the wage amount, but by all the items related to it. When an employee perceived ten, in reality, the cost for the company was fourteen.

Ten years earlier, a mobility procedure was started, with the consequent incentives for soliciting colleagues who had little for a pension. For those like me who continued on the path, it had been a relief to lighten up, but someone came out, and another with the same slopes arrived: we were all with old contracts.

The looks of those who retired were characterized by the same melancholy for the part of life that had punctuated the days and which, inexorably, wouldn't have been the same. It was the plate from where you had eaten. It allowed you to live, even if it didn't really mean living.

Now the caravan swerved through the corners, and the circus was in serious difficulty maintaining its animals. Our charts, from the head of the area to the head of the staff, from the administrator to the director, were in pain.

I was at a company, which does underground shows. In the end, I became only Zabaione. Yeah, a whipped egg with a few teaspoons of sugar and nothing more. I had next to me, Leo Canapone, whoever it was. I could play a monologue or ruin a comedy; I could understand what it was like.

Dinning in a dark studio, immersing our nose in a pint of beer and drowning ourselves in until sleep, and then return to play a farce.

Nostalgia was a whore who didn't charge, but the price of her betrayal was high. You'd call her when the days were infamous, thinking it would relieve your pain with the sweet nectar of memories, but it was a short relief. That night in bed, I felt some traffic noises. A horn sounded far away, yet out there was deserted. The control light on my soul was on the reservation.

A peeping-toms job was mine, practices of sexual acts every single day. Consuming was an erection. Everyone consumed what he had gained, paid and swallowed up what was his. Television transmitted the spot against anti-personnel mines, then the advertising of canned meat. They transmitted the documentaries about favelas, and I didn't feel any shake, just relief for not being born there.

A powerful multinational was coming. No longer a French and not a German either. Now he seemed to be a Spanish. Yeah, but what did that matter? Our habits were at risk. A push that started and crossed me, I clutched at the blades of a slow-moving mill, which slowly dragged me in its lap. I was pulling stronger with everything I could. They would have massacred us. Their freedom and our dignity steeped in.

For months we have been waiting for a sign from someone who assured us, despite the difficulties of the industry, we would go ahead, but meetings in this regard had already been skipped. Signals didn't arrive. It was a bad omen.

One morning I found a welcome surprise: Zucca. I saw him there, sitting in the box, his hair cut and his beard made.

- Weird life, huh? - He said as soon as he saw me.

- Great! - I greeted him.

- They moved me. I had forgotten to have a transfer request. A couple of days ago they called me to tell me I would come here. The distance didn't change much, but I could no longer stay there... It's better having a change

of scenery.

- But yes, the old band is still together!
- Eh, the band... do you know I'm dad?
- Good luck.

He gestured with two fingers. Two little Zucchetti, I mean.

- And do you know how many letters I had accumulated?

He began to laugh and made four. In that shop, the average was six. We looked like a penitentiary, but the company left us alone. There at the shopping centre, there were few complaints. It was a strange fact, yes, but you'll get used to the well being right away and you don't ask about the reason. When the shift was over, Zucca asked me where he could get something to eat. I recommend him the outdoor bar in the shopping centre, but I told him I wouldn't accompany him there. A couple of hours with Mrs Endive was waiting for me.

Monica was imaginative and always found different solutions. This time, she was waiting for me at the park by the car and had prepared a white pizza stuffed with speck.

She seemed bothered by the fact she could take advantage of me in the car. It was too tight, and the seats were too stiff, so we always had only oral sex in the car without encountering resistance, because it was even harder to defend ourselves. Monica was so exuberant I would have barely gotten up. The pizza was good, that afternoon we ate it with voracity.

Afterwards, we went out, as usual, on the terraces of the shopping centre, from where you could see the park of studies. I remained motionless to observe the scenarios move from time to time. I would have stayed there for days. Monica looked at me patiently, without saying anything. To

overcome the momentary crisis, I tried to recite something. I was worsening the situation, and I laughed bitterly noticing the lack of exercise has now undermined my already weak artistic abilities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

At 8.50 o'clock. An announcement from the director shocked us.

Internal communication: The staff is convened in the dining room for an extraordinary meeting.

We generally welcomed those invitations with happiness because they constituted a diversion in our attempts to show righteousness. I was terrified. I remembered Pomodoro's joke when he was on vacation and, anonymously, phoning, saying an explosive device had been placed at the sales point and would explode within an hour. Then he talked with Canapone cashier, ie me, ordered me not to utter his name and asking me, amused, if I liked the joke.

Now, I was standing next to Pomodoro, determined to prolong the meeting with inopportune questions. The director frozen us.

- I informed you of the blockage for the requests for goods. In fifteen days we'll close the shop, so we continue until stock lasts and relative inventory of inventories. I'm sorry.

Vacca asked for clarification on the inventory, hoping to make a subjective opinion on the quantity.

DEAR CUSTOMER

- The inventory is an evaluation of the assets and liabilities of heritage. Among these elements, dear Vacca, if I were to consider you, I define you as an active element with some difficult.

Thinking of a word of praise, my colleague wore a complacent smile. It was the last overflowing of the director. He seemed tense, bitter. The captain was the last to get off the ship. Now, the union and the company would actually come into action. It was the infamous moment of meetings about staff, retirement, and situations too problematic to consider. Accompanying that crumpled carcass was hard.

The days went slowly; the benches voided. I wandered through the empty showroom corridors, whose past presence could be noticed by the different state of the tiles that now seemed faded concerning their old varnish. Terapia found a postcard in the cabinet and sighed in front of Fidel Castro, recalling in Cuba he had made love for the last time seven years earlier.

There were two days left at the closure. I studied the old supermarket map. Bulldozers would have taken away specks of dirt and malfunctions, which were not mentioned, and also the corners of everybody's life, of which there would be no more track.

While observing the old scheme, I imagined the faces of all those people who mechanically engaged in the departments, the faces of colleagues who were no longer, and in that structure they had fired their lives away, letting it pervade in the memories of others. Our habit of characterizing ourselves with nicknames, released us from a paresis, immortalizing ourselves in anecdotes, in remembrances.

There was a resentment of resignation and past griefs, which seemed to fade away. Even Mrs Boccioni was sorry, she wasn't able to withstand the strangers: - Wouldn't all these mixtures cause damage? First, think about yourself. In my opinion, it was better not to enter in Europe.

- But then - I asked - the modernity of Impressionism? Ideas about idleness and urban life? The joy of living, the culture of entertainment, the theatre and the concert coffee? And yet classical music, rock music, German essay, Russian literature, nightlife in Spain, the streets of France, England, Germany...

- Rubbish - Gatta responded - all this has brought us to the situation we are in. I mean, in this shit. You don't know where you are going, but if you knew it, you wouldn't want to go. You try to stay positive, but companies are closing...

- And the entrepreneurs earn like employees - I replied with sarcasm. For pride, I turned away from the prying eyes of Gatta, especially because I had little to discuss. I thought about our distant barricades, sitting in the position where we both were. I mean, in this shit.

I went out. The emergency light blinked and seemed faulty. On the side, the control camera, lacking in functionality, swayed eerily. In front of me, the woody pile of pegs, the dented boxes of fruit, vegetables, and meat. Cartons boxes. Garbage cans filled with scraps, flies, mosquitoes, and flakes of plaster everywhere. Every corner smelled stale, there, in the belly of use.

In my house, the phone rang continuously, but I didn't want to answer. I listened to the answering machine.

- Hello, Zabaione, it's Dal Canto. I need to talk to you urgently. Come and see me!

Didn't he know why we called him Dal Canto? (*In Italian, Dal canto it means "On his side"*).

Dal Canto was part-time, and it became full-time. Dal Canto could boast of confidential relationships with executives. Dal Canto organized evenings with the head of the staff. Dal Canto was a good friend of all, and his mother had a well-attended bar. Dal Canto had been transferred to another branch just before closing. For that reason we used to call him Dal Canto. I mean it's for his part.

Meanwhile, the director had called me, with sincere regrets, that *blab blab blab blab*, even though I had the greatest presence at work, despite the fact in the last three years I was ill only for a serious tooth extraction, even though I had never abused trade union permits and although my performance was, in any case, discreet, I was among the first names on the mobility list. There was the issue of family loads. I didn't have children; I

DEAR CUSTOMER

didn't have a family. So, those toddlers never conceived, were putting it into the hole. The story I hadn't made a family was the torment of my life. My lack of popularity with women was the fruit of introversion, but also because I had created other expectations over time with the home hearth. First my relatives committed me to the celibacy, then my colleagues. The company was giving me the final shot. The company was structured like a high school economy and the children, the family, represented an investment, your ticket to be kept safe in the time of crisis. The trade union had also warned me in the parameters for mobility would be considered the family loads because, having failed to find an agreement with the union federations, the company would follow the procedure concerning law.

This perspective brought into question my existence, what I (not) did, recommendations about the road to follow, maturity and practicality rather than dreams or passions. Then the acquaintances' pitied for what I had gone to seek, and that was a lesson well deserved. If everyone in the world followed the same criteria, a reason had to be there.

Barone, in that Babylon of gossip and reliable news, attended a trade union permit the day after August 15th. Then, he remained in sickness. In the week before closing, there was no track of him. Barone materialized in a suffocating late summer afternoon, crawling on the walls like a gecko. He declared to the few who had obtained the coveted detachment to the union, using the mobility procedure, *stirring up the mood of those colleagues who had seniority in service.*

We, the remained ones, were still planning a protest against the corporate group, inefficient health service, bad government, racket, misfortune, and whores. We were in front of the branch where our fellow Mr Dal Canto had been moved. I looked at the orange writing on the green background, the group's logo. Effective slogans, such as friends for shopping, your supermarket friend, and your choice is our reward, etc.

At the megaphone, I shouted slogan of different effects. I was passive in exchanging leaflets between CGIL, Radical Reformists and those of the forthcoming Pizzeria Express. I left the megaphone to a colleague and came in. I searched for the office and asked: - Mr Dal Canto, please.

I found out he was in a delicatessen and surprised me, as he came from the canned goods industry. He saw me and embraced me.

- Zabaione, I went to the delicatessen. Now only as a deputy head of the department, but I'm growing up!

Growing in our jargon meant an employee had gotten the smell of progress.

- Canapone, everything will be resolved...

- Let's hope so.

While we were conversing, a client watched us and seemed vexed from the indifference shown by the colleague to him. Dal Canto noticed it.

- Madame, I'm right here with you. Tell me...

- I wanted half a pound of St. Daniel.

Dal Canto sliced the ham, wrapped it in the paper and put it on the scale. Then he stopped. Perplexed, he asked me: - Zabaione, how many acres are there in a pound?

DEAR CUSTOMER

I went out without greeting him. I went to the others and grabbed the megaphone. People came out and shot straight, loaded with envelopes from where receipts came out, crumpled as much as my verve.

Our slogans were confusing with traffic noise. At the traffic lights, a motorist stopped and lowered the window: - Go to work at the Social Forum! - He screamed.

He laughed, raised the music and left again gladly...

THE AUTHOR

I worked in a supermarket for thirty years. Regular contact with the public is important in defining my characters, who are defeated, isolated, disillusioned, and in contrast to the environment. Figures looking for a meaning that is just forbidden or otherwise.

The decade-long experience as a core union delegate has also inspired me with work, crafts, and arts topics.

The stories I tell, are credible and located in the suburbs, at the bus stop or in a small train station in the neighbourhood, at a shopping mall or in a bar...

My web site is www.enricomattioli.com/enrico.mattioli-3/

To purchase a paperback version of this book, click on the link

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0863TKY1Z>