

# Show business' stars

An incursion into the  
undergrowth of art and  
entertainment

Enrico Mattioli



Copyright © 2020 Enrico Mattioli

All rights reserved.

ISBN - 9798624492097



## DEDICATION

There will be a hiring far away from home. Weariness will deprive us of hunger and sleep. The sense of wandering aimlessly will remain, the only company of a cigarette and a deserted road.

Cats are the only friends which in the indistinct hours of the night, share the melancholy reflected in the dark windows: squatted in front of narrow opening they well know, in perennial expectation of the proud meal, they are not worried to sleep with seven lives they had from God.

The actor creates the audience as the cat hunts the mouse. Everyone invites the colleague to the respective event; we exchange each other's role, one day on the stage and another one in the parterre. It's the hard work of filling a hall, leaving the soul in chaos.



## STREWN NOTES

Documentation work meets too much resistance. Few accept an intruder into the environment in which they operate, trying to reproduce it. Many will find in that attempt aspects treated marginally, questioning its authenticity.

*Stars Of Dust* is a narrative text. The vicissitudes of Riccardo Nola, the protagonist, leave no room for illusions or expectations.

The forced claim of the highest result with the minimum effort is a common seed. Instead, it would be better to repeat not always; by insisting and trying again and again, we can achieve sure results: It's a wrong equation. Unfortunately sometimes, even in the case of fierce engagement, things don't happen on account of different or unknown reasons.

This book is a consideration about attempts, regrets, the need to get a reason only to go ahead.

Enrico Mattioli



## ONE

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

I am on the fifth consecutive yawn because I don't know the minimum time of nail regrowth, necessary skill to intervene in Willy's speech. He collects nail clippers and personal care sets, but the unbearable thing is he likes to share these interests during dinners like the one in progress. Moreover, when he books a table, he doesn't allow anyone to make an order, believing he's the only one able to filter relations with the waiters because he's an assiduous visitor of every venue and knows how things work.

Regarding Mary, Willy's cousin, she has the role of organizer of parties. She takes care of every detail and got all of us, idiot friends, by the balls. Willy and Mary, their secret is in the two names which sound good. Mary likes people, and Willy loves company. It's vital to feel good with others when you're not comfortable with yourself.

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

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

I also wrote scripts and comedies. I sent material to directors of which I saw several times their performances, trusting to snatch their friendship or to arouse a feeling of gratitude for the loyalty I showed. The fundamental value of an artist is to be busy, even if they were only housework. They were always engaged in meaningful projects or, at least, I have believed it as first hypothesis. I was trying to keep away from my mind the second thesis linked to colic stuff, but the passage of time convinced me I created another shit again.

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

**Riccardo Nola**

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

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

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

Anita, poet of Forlì, approached me in chat the day following the message. She wanted a name; she wasn't satisfied with his. She

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

- *So, Anita. What would you need exactly?*
- *Do you know the erotic chat?*
- *No. But we can find something for the name.*
- *Do you already have any ideas?*
- *Yes. I had thought about... Eva.*
- *Eva?*
- *The greatest sinner. Name of bitch, no?*
- *My mother's name is Eva.*
- *Oh... I'm sorry.*
- *No, but it's okay. It's right.*
- *Really?*
- *Really. It's OK.*
- *Oh well, then I say: Eva Pop!*
- *Eva Pop is fine.*
- *Yes, Pop: it winks to art and poops.*
- *You are great!*
- *A question: why the chat?*
- *Look, it's a magnificent business!*
- *Really?*
- *You have no idea of the losers which are on the web! The bad luck is worth a fee.*
- *Oh well, ok, I'm glad to have been useful.*
- *One last thing. My sixth sense tells me to ask you.*
- *Tell me.*
- *Would you like to collaborate? Texts, indications, special services like someone who wants to have a threesome - paying the supplement...things like that and others we would find along the way.*
- *Well, I don't know how long I can dedicate you. I'm an actor. If I get a job?*
- *I offer you a thirty percent. I put the web space after all, the idea is mine.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *I know Al.*

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

- *Don't worry, Al.*

- *I'm a proper person, Rick, you know it! I hope you appreciate the fact I speak to you sincerely.*
- *Sure, Al.*
- *Not like Willy, the piece of shit!*
- *Why?*
- *Ah, don't you know?*
- *What?*
- *He went out with Roby1.*
- *Roby1, the one you liked?*
- *Yes, just her. They went out in three. Also, Mary was with them.*
- *So?*
- *And what do they do in three? They crowd, Rick – but he says it with the disappointment of not being considered. He stays out, in the cool of the evening and stretches himself.*

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

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



## TWO

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

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

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

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

That summer, as usual, we had to go to San Lazzaro to mother's grandparents, but aunt Sonia, mother's sister, was giving birth and that event catalyzed the interest of the whole family. We opted for a

holiday on the Adriatic coast. Before leaving, my parents went to Emilia for a few days, visiting the beloved Aunt Sonia.

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

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

It was the last time I heard my mother.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I accepted without hesitation. I immediately ran to tell it to Enrico who was infected by my enthusiasm.

The rehearsals continued. Arianna was the younger sister of Thomas and incited me. On the day of the premiere, Enrico and Claudia were in the hall. I attended the first act concentrated and peaceful. People had fun. The second act began. First scene. Second scene. Third scene, the one of the window; it was my turn. I couldn't go wrong, for a month I had tried those fifteen or twenty seconds.

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

Here I fall to my knees and start sobbing. I cried uninterruptedly. The beam of light which illuminated my face, combined with the act

of evoking a *mother*, influenced me. At that moment, I believed I was shouting at my mother about the devastation her absence had produced in my life. I cried for the memory of the last time I had heard her voice, for the years passed in silence, for the sleepless nights of my adolescence; I cried for not saying goodbye to my father.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

umbrella, Thomas opened his arms as if he were blessing the city. He seemed like a bird ready to fly. Arianna, his sister, assisted seraphic without being dragged by Enrico's laugh, forced to turn from the other side.

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

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

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

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

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

Tests and lessons for six days a week, from November to June, while until October special activities were planned in collaboration with European theater foundations for detailed studies about dramaturgy and foreign acting. I found myself thrown into a microcosm in which

I'd have filled my hand luggage, but by now I was traveling, I had succeeded: I had passed the three phases of admission. Actor student at the acting course.

The academy absorbed all my time; I didn't have a free minute. As a student, I was to be available for any ordinary and extraordinary activities of entertainment or experimentation or teaching. Mandatory attendance: after ten unjustified absences during a year, you were out. I didn't have an aptitude for dance, but I was good in fencing: theater applied a deception and fencing was the sublimation. It perfected control, improved posture and the expressive properties of the body. The preparation was hard, many subjects: proxemic, communication distances; use of the body, theatrical pedagogy, mime, use of the voice; scenic movement, cognition of the body in accordance with a text; singing, diction, acting; work on a character, space and form, time, theatrical dramaturgy. History of theater, comedy of art.

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

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

One day in the classroom, the teacher made a sign to the cat to get on the table. Marx went up. There were also other teachers intrigued, and I was making me suspicious. They called my name. In front of everyone, I performed myself briefly in *Hamlet*. Maybe three minutes. At the beginning of the soliloquy, in the climax of *to be or not to be*, I modulated that *not* in the same way with which at other times I recited the passage to Marx in the corridors. The cat began to answer me in the silence of the classroom and repeated this answer to my different modulations on *this* and *question*. Actually, I hold the vowel longer: *not* became *noooooot*, and *this* became *thiiiiis*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *Well, but...*

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

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

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



### THREE

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

My beloved...

Dear, dearest...

You are adorable...

Oh, teacher...

I read your monologue the other day...

Really?

You are a genius!

No, you are a genius, teacher.

But no, you are a genius, honey.

Noooo!

Yes... and don't contradict me, bad girl!

Ok...

But I'll sign your monologue for you!

Noooooo...

Yes!

But noooo...

Yes, if you wanna work...

You asked me for a very high price, master: what the fuck!

How dare you: I'll let you work!

Really?  
Yes, just because you are a genius!  
If I'm a genius, then you're amazing!  
No, you make me blush in this way... why do you tell me this?  
Because you let me work!  
Only because you are so dear to me: the dearest of all!  
It's late, teacher. I have to go.  
Where are you going?  
Why?  
Stay here with me tonight, and I'll let you touch the stars!  
Ihhhhh... Oh Jesus, teacher: *this* is not a star!  
My darling, I am the son of the stars, the son of the night...  
Yes, teacher, you are really a son, the greatest of all sons!  
Well, not the biggest, I'm an only child, my dear...  
Good thing, teacher...  
How do you say, honey?  
I said you are unique, teacher.  
Oh, baby, but you adulate me this way...  
Ah, teacher, I adore your eccentricity...

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

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

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

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

- *I'm worried, Rick. You're doing a vulgar thing; you waste your talent.*
- *Listen, Carmela...*
- *No, Rick, don't fuck me with the story of Maria Carmela. That's just a name on my identity card. You know I suffer about it!*
- *You're an unconscious trans, Mary.*
- *And you're an asshole, Rick and you're bad. You're a bad asshole!*

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

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

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

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

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

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

We were in the big hall set up for the party. Willy relegated to the role of barman, was sullen. Mary came and went with the empty glass, jokingly claiming it was pierced. He gave her angry looks. Despite the high heels, it was clear the reason why Mary couldn't keep her in

balance was another one. In the corner of the room, there was a wooden bookstand on which we, supposedly entertainers, would take turns to animate the evening. The most said were the verses selected by Thomas, but immediately we started a challenge of jokes and we, actors of high hopes, became spectators.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *Look, forget it* - answers Enrico.

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

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

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

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

- *Rick* – he says - *don't you offend if I tell you something? Your brother is unkind: what's wrong with him?*

- *Old family problems.*

- *What kind of problem, if I'm not indiscreet?*

- *We had family current accounts in common, and I withdrew money to finance shows with Thomas. One then another and another one. I was sure I'd recoup them.*

- *Those money were yours too. What's wrong? Sometimes you're wrong, others exaggerating... it happens. Anyway, can I say what I think?*

- *Sure.*

- *Thomas is a good actor, but this doesn't give him the right to do what he wants. As a man, he isn't right: he didn't have to accept that money, he doesn't need it.*

- *Don't you ever hear tell these things, Thomas gets angry for these jokes...*

- *Oh, poor boy... well, he's a perfect hypocrite, let me tell you.*

- *Anyway, I used that money because I was as involved in the shows as he was. It wasn't a whim of Thomas, but Enrico faced him and said him he manipulate and influence me negatively, making me look like a child unable to understand.*

- *Your brother wasn't wrong, Rick... he wasn't wrong. And then what happened?*

- *Enrico had decided to get married. He had behaved like a father with me, but to Claudia, the future wife, it didn't like it.*

- *He didn't want you between your feet.*
- *He wanted him to stop worrying about me, our relationship caused problems, and Enrico was in trouble.*
- *Understandable. Yes, I understand it. Continue...*
- *When they began to go around houses, and they needed money, they realized from our treasure lacked big sums.*
- *Ah, well, this is hard to swallow...*
- *I know. He only repeated: I can't believe it, Riccardo. I can't believe you did something like that!*
- *What a bad thing you're telling me.*
- *Yeah, but it's not over. Even Claudia couldn't believe he didn't know anything. She took offense, they argued, and she left him. They got married two years later, at the end. I wasn't a witness, and I wasn't invited. Time and silence have destroyed the situation.*
- *It's a very strong story, Rick.*
- *I know. Well, let's not think about it anymore. See you at the party?*
- *Ok. See you there. Be good, I recommend!*

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

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

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

The alarm of a car marks 6:00 pm. Underneath me, I hear the trains' speed. Walk towards the square. From afar lights seem near the pines

row seem like Christmas lights on that trees. I look for soul inside the windows, but shops are empty. I could make a robbery - is less tiring than a revolution - but I no longer have desires, and also money has lost its attractiveness since credit cards exist: then what sense would have to rob in an empty shop if you can't see the terrified face of the people?

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

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

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

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

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



## FOUR

The evil rain and imprecation against the thief government has been fatal and if this isn't a topic to cut the show, let's say they empty my henhouse: Anita, alias Eva Pop, keeps all the hens with her, i.e., she decides to close the erotic chat because she'll marry and doesn't want to make known to the future husband the expedients with which she has earned money. She repeats she's sorry to leave me without a job, but when I make her an offer, she makes indignant.

- *If I continued alone?*

- *What!* - She says.

- *I need money.*

- *I understand, but chat and domain are mine.*

- *Exactly, I ask you only if maybe...*

- *Excuse my selfishness* - she firmly replies - *but it's an idea of mine, and she has to die with my character.*

We need to adapt, find new spaces: actors sing, singers write, writers act. In the undergrowth, one can live with his aspiration of life into one hand and the vile but male coin into the other.

I reject the invitation for the party of Willy and Mary with the excuse of an appointment at the last moment, and I turn off my phone. I couldn't stand new sarcasm about the development of my engagement with the chat. It's difficult to play the game when you lose the job which guarantees you the minimum to live.

I go down to the street, and I go to Dante, a rotisserie behind my house. There's a van parked on the sidewalk, and a guy is unloading the preserves of tomato.

Empty locale. Dante is a figure impregnated with oil and looks like a cartoon character. He sees me and avoids me. He doesn't greet me and goes back to the kitchen. I take some chinotto, and I sit at the table. I observe the traffic over the window. It's windy, and there are few people around, just some hasty lady who comes back from the market with her cart.

The aromas of the dishes spread from the kitchen. Dante sets the hot pan of parmigiana di melanzane and steam fogs the glass. He comes out of the counter and approaches me.

- *Welcome back, Marlon Brando. What brings you here in my humble shop?*

The scornful tone convinces me it's not the case to go off on a tangent because Dante has already understood what I need.

- *Hi Dante.*

- *Listen Riccardo, let's do it soon because I'm busy: there's no work here. At least not for those who want to play like you.*

- *I don't play, you know my job...*

- *Yes, I know it! You always disappear suddenly when I depend on you!*

- *It only happened once and...*

- *Three times: three times I believed in you without results, Riccardo! You don't fool me anymore.*

- *Okay okay...*

- *Did you eat? I bring you the left-overs of rice I use for supplì. The sauce is fresh, I did it this morning. And... and a dish of roast potatoes. Then go away. If my wife comes back, first kills me and then you.*

Pride and dignity are luxuries I can't afford, so I eat risotto with tomatoes served on a bed of pecorino cheese, and potatoes cooked in the castrato pan. And I drink chinotto.

A caress on the shoulder and I greet Dante. I head to the market. It's almost time to close, there are only elderly people because after lunch it's time to save money. Senegalese boys dismount and load the wooden pallets on the trucks. A fat manager has the strength to scream about the quality of his beans, and then another one peels clementine offering the peelings to the few customers because *with*

*these you can even take a shower, don't you feel, madam, how do they smell?* He rubs a peel on the face, as in a demonstration of personal care products, screaming *I have the good stuff, I've got the best stuff!* I'm looking for the Vanda counter, the old greengrocer, squat arms and face darkened by work. I arrived at the kiosk. She's eating a slice of stuffed white pizza.

- *Good morning.*
- *Hi, what do I give you?*
- *I wanted to talk to her.*
- *To me?*
- *Yes.*
- *And what do you want?*
- *I wanted to know if you need a person to help you out sometimes...*
- *Well, yes, it could be useful to me, but the pay isn't big.*
- *How much we talk about?*
- *Eh, how much... let's say fifteen...*
- *Per hour?*
- *Per day, my dear!*
- *But...*
- *Look, here you have to work hard. You must arrive at 5.00 am until about 11.00 am. Then, if you come back half an hour or three quarters around three o'clock in the afternoon, you can help me dismount and load everything on the truck. I can give you... let's see... twenty-five?*

I make a quick account, and I accept. Every month I get as much as with the chat. I clarify I couldn't come every day, and she tells me it's okay, all we have to do is agree and get organized.

- *When do you want to start?* - She asks me.
- *Even tomorrow* - I answer.
- *Tomorrow is fine. I recommend: at five.*

I come back home. My legs seem sturdier, and my feet adhere firmly on the raw earth, but my dreams fly away like a balloon escaped from hands. I watch them go away, and I'd like they find a refuge. The time to take them back in my fingers, one day.

Via Appia 397. I'm back under the door in the company of a normal existence. It starts raining, I shelter under the cornice and light a cigarette. I remain watching the rain, enjoying this comforting boredom. Working at unusual hours will take me away from the world. Thieves and policemen, journalists and news vendors, bitches and bakers: all resist this acid life.

4.00 am. The time when actors go to sleep. I get up to go to the market. I wash myself, I lie down, and I stretch myself. A glass of water, a coffee, and some biscuits. It's still the first day of work, so I look myself in the mirror before going out, and I wish me all the best. In my neighborhood, there are three local markets. At this time traffic consists only of carts and pickup trucks which go slowly, dividing the road. They look like caravans of migrants described in the adventure narrative, even if the journeys are always the same, day after day, and I somehow am in it.

I arrive in the area. The strong smell of vegetables and fish uncork my nostrils, the sounds of the boxes slamming on the ground and the sides of trucks opened up, echo in the silence of the first lights of the day. And then the buckets of water on the goods, the voices of the merchants who talk about that has precedence to attach the pipes to the fountains.

I walk between the kiosks, and I arrived at Vanda. She's chewing olives cooked in the oven. She takes some of them from the container.

- *Oh hello. Did you have problems getting up?*

- *No, all right.*

- *Better. And then you get used to it, you get used to everything.*

- *Yes.*

- *Take the banana boxes. We put them there, in front of the counter. Then take the cart and place apples and pears. Can you distinguish the breed?*

- *What?*

- *Oh well, you'll learn, for now, you can work out with color. Put the dark red ones at the end. Near you put the red ones with the streaks, then continue with colors, putting the yellow and after the green ones; in the end, put the small ones that are called annurche.*

I start downloading boxes. They're heavy; my bones creak, my back bruises and I realize I don't have strength in the abdomen to support myself in the efforts. I take the forklift, and I lean on it the boxes to make fewer trips from the van to the desk.

Vanda watches me work, settles the boxes I pass her, looks the counter to verify the chromatic effect and spits the pits of the olives in the big garbage bin.

Time passes quickly when you work hard. Now it's morning, and the market is filled with people looking for first fruits. My sight is blurred for sleep and tiredness. Vanda is behind me and screams in my ears her screenplays: *this is the apple of Eve, this is the apple of Adam, these are apples of Paradise!*

Days and weeks pass without clamor, all the same. I needed this monotony because I'm discovering routine brings order into my life. It's a feeling I didn't know.

Sometimes, if the work allows it, during the breaks, I play short monologues for merchants and bankers. When I confessed my job is in entertainment, no one wanted to believe me, and I had to try it. It doesn't seem possible for them to see an actor closely and they wonder why I'm in a place like this; even Vanda treats me with more respect, but I'm sure the majority believe I'm mad.

In this microcosm, many workers are related. Vanda has a brother who has a space at the Porta Portese Sunday market, and she has pointed out to him allowing me to improve my earnings. Here I feel good, I eat healthily, especially a lot of vegetables and fruits, and I have not skipped a day's work.

This afternoon, when I got home, I received a message from Thomas on my answering machine. He says friends are worried about my absence, so he asks me in order: what happened to me; why my cell phone is always off and why I'm never at home. He invites me to his show for the following Sunday at the end of which we'll eat a pizza. It's recommended to bring public, and then he'll talk to me about one of his projects.

I answer yes, then I send a message to Willy, asking if he wants to come together with his cousin, asking them not to let me go alone, adding when the show is over, we'll all go to the pizzeria.

Via Appia 397, Sunday. To arrive at Vascello Theater, near Gianicolo, I enter Via Latina. At the traffic light in Piazza Galeria, I'm happily assaulted by jugglers and waders.

Monteverde Vecchio, Vascello Theater, study room. I park the scooter. Meeting with Willy at the bar. He's already there. He's not alone.

- *Hi Rick. She's Roby1. Do you know her?*
- *Sure!*
- *Hi Rick, how are you? - Asks Roby1.*
- *Well. Very well, indeed.*
- *I'm glad Rick. It's nice to feel you good - says Willy - we have not heard you for a long time. What are you doing?*
- *Work, Willy. To the market.*
- *Market?*
- *Yes, to the market. Do you remember the chat? Well, the girl gets married, and she has decided to close it. I found myself in narrowness, severe narrowness.*
- *Oh, I see. When one has problems, he has to adapt himself. I respect you, Rick.*
- *Well, I offer you something. A coffee?*
- *No, Rick - says Roby1 - we already got it, thank you.*
- *Ah... do you know how this show of Thomas is? He says it's a new thing..*
- *See Rick - he says - we...*
- *What's up, Willy?*
- *No, it's...*
- *We go to the cinema - she says firmly - a bit of escape, you know... it's Sunday - she ends up, apologizing.*
- *Don't you mind, Rick? - He adds.*
- *A little, Willy. I didn't wanna go alone.*
- *Roby has had a heavy week. We wanted to spend a Sunday in the name of the ephemeral.*
- *But the comedy is light, Willy, don't believe it.*
- *But if you don't even know it...*
- *Yes, Willy, but Thomas plays comedies!*
- *Rick, don't take us for a ride. Another time we come with you, sure.*
- *Ok, as you want, guys.*
- *We liked to greet you, have a coffee together.*
- *You already had coffee, Willy, without me.*

- *Oh yes, but it was so to say.*
- *Ok, Willy, then I greet you. It's going to start.*
- *Hello, great! Great Rick Nola!*

I go down the stairs to get to the study room. We are in seven to wait for the beginning. We'll be about thirty to go out. He deserved a larger audience. A surreal test: the story of a guy who flies over the city because he sees the world from another point of view.

I await Thomas at the bar, sitting with my memories. It's been a long time since my last performance. An evening organized by Al. That show made me earn some money, a big dinner and an "oral tip" of a moved Roby2 at the end.

I don't hear Roby for a long time. I try to send her a message to invite her to dinner: free line, but she doesn't answer. Knowing her, she will have a switch on the vibration...only loneliness makes me an asshole. It's been a long time since the last time we had sex, that's why I think of Roby2, our friend from the placebo boobs, which she gives us as an antihistamine in the bad seasons. Yes, it's been a long time, the same used by Thomas to get ready and dressed; finally, he passes through the corridor after greeting the admirers in the dressing room.

- *Can I know what happened to you?* - He begins by embracing me.
- *I've been busy...* - I answer.
- *Ah... and what?* - Asks Thomas while he orders two aperitifs.
- *Work.*
- *Good. It must be very challenging to disappear this way.*
- *Enough. Local market.*
- *Market... but you're the biggest provocateur in history, Rick, congrats!*
- *Thank you.*
- *No, seriously, just tell me why...*
- *Eva Pop has closed the chat, and I no longer have a penny...*
- *Well, I didn't know that, I'm sorry.*
- *Schedules are heavy; I get up at four, I gain the oxygen which allows me to go ahead* - I say.
- *Listen to Rick; I have to talk to you about one thing: it's a project which, if it goes well, it will allow you not have to be bumped up with this kind of work* - he says.
- *Do you want to rob the gold reserve?*
- *I'm serious, Rick: the other day I had a crazy idea!*

- *Would be?*
- *Meanwhile, let's start, so I'll talk to you in pizzeria.*

We leave the bar of Vascello to go to the pizzeria *Da Gina*. In the evening, getting off the Gianicolo in scooter is the most significant show you can see in and I, cautious and stiff, look like Poncherello of TV series *Chips* while Thomas, tall, slender, light hair in the wind and without a helmet, seems Captain America of *Easy Rider*.

We leave the scooters in Viale Trastevere and walk along a parallel road. The Porta Portese market has finished, and benches and garbage trucks are cleaning the area.

We are in Via Ippolito Nievo, in front of the restaurant. We enter, Gina, a tall, strong, dark haired woman, comes towards me as soon as she recognizes me: - *Damn son of a bitch, what happened to you?* – Her landlady mama's girl behaviors make you feel at home.

- *Hi, Gina, we're two.*
- *I know you, don't you?* - Says to Thomas.
- *We came other times here, yes.*
- *Well... choose a table.*

We sit in a corner, ordering water and two beers. I like this place because it's spacious and tables are at a right distance, so you don't have the feeling of confusing your topics with the ones of the neighbors. And then, I like its tablecloths and brick walls.

- *Well, hear me Rick: there's a book with no more copyright. Its topic is about the challenge of the thousand Garibaldians, it was written by a lieutenant of the general.*
- *So?*
- *No copyright, Rick: if we write a show from the book, we'll not have to fees, we don't have to pay anyone.*
- *If the problem is to avoid the copyright, it would be enough to make a selection of all the works with the right expired or without rights. Why The Thousand?*
- *This is a suitable work. It's interesting on a historical and cultural level, can I explain?*
- *Yes. The topic is interesting, but I don't know how can we reproduce it in the form of a play. Then, obviously, we need to find the spaces.*
- *And that's the idea, Rick: we can do it on the street, at intersections, at the traffic lights, at bus stops.*

I take a sip and finish the mug. I order another one along with bruschetta, fried and pizzas. We remain in silence. I think about the crossings and the waders, the jugglers, the clowns, the players in the subways. Yes, the road: why couldn't we do it in a theater?

- *I was thinking about it as I arrived* - I say to stop the silence.
- *At what?* - Asks Thomas.
- *I was stopped at the traffic light, and I watched all those entertainers, and... I was impressed; I don't know by what, perhaps from the extemporaneousness of the event.*
- *You see? We are on the same wavelength, you and me, we have to get to work...*
- *Thomas, the idea is good, but we have to work on it. Don't run, also because it will not be simple...*
- *No, Rick, let me do. We'll conquer the streets one by one, meter by meter. With our rifles full of art, we'll sleep where it happens, we'll travel far and wide...*

Fried and bruschetta arrival saved me from the delirium of Thomas. We dive into the Flemings as two who have been fasting for a long time. The actors eat at episodes. While we devour fried, Gina goes to our table for a chat.

- *So Riccardo: how are you?*
- *Bad, Gina. I missed a commitment which gave me to live.*
- *You could do cabaret here with me, but the business doesn't go. I can't afford it.*
- *Nothing, eh?*
- *Do you think this is a locale which must remain empty?*
- *It looks empty because it's big* - Thomas intervenes cleverly.
- *No, my dear, it's big because it's empty* – she answers, moving away to another table. I look around. There are three customers and us in the smoking room and five in the other. Outside it starts raining.

Thomas eats and isolates himself, his imagination leavening like pizza dough; I drink, smoke and think about Roby2. Roby was a classmate of Thomas and my brother. We called her Roby2 because her destiny is to be uncomfortable in other people's stories; her love life was full of adventures.

I made love for the first time at sixteen, and the woman was just Roby. So, for me, just for me, she was, is, and will always be the

inimitable Roby, not because we were in love, but because in bed I was fine with her as I was with no one.

- Gina comes back again: - *How was pizza, guys?*  
- *Good, exceptional dough* - answers Thomas.  
- *Do I bring you a sweetie, a bitter, a grappa, a coffee?*  
- *No* - I say - *just the bill, Gina, thank you.*

We go out and light a cigarette. I look at the marble engraving of the street in which we are: Ippolito Nievo, writer, and patriot. Thomas shows off his preparation: - *All this area is strongly marked by the Risorgimento. Nievo joined the troops of Garibaldi with Nino Bixio. He died on the journey back from Sicily in the sinking of the boat he was on. He also wrote diaries and letters.*

- *So is the book you were talking about of him?*  
- *No. It's by Giuseppe Bandi, a lieutenant of Garibaldi.*  
- *Ah good.*  
- *But the idea of Gina, to do shows in pizzerias, isn't bad.*  
- *Yes, now we are going to do shows where people want to eat.*  
- *No, hear me: first of all, you have to consider the place. This place (like the Gianicolo), is a historical area of the Risorgimento, so you have a point of contact because you tell people: hey, right here, where you parked your car, Giuseppe Garibaldi tied his horse...*  
- *Yes, oh well, the donkey...* - I say, trying to discourage him.  
- *No, don't laugh, I don't joke...*  
- *Moreover, I don't see the link with pizza, fried food, and these characters...*  
- *Every place has its own story. Example: you eat your pizza margherita, and I tell you about the pizza chef Esposito who dedicated it to the First Queen of Italy, Margherita di Savoia, and then I start talking about her...*  
- *Well, if you have to talk about royals, you have an advantage, dear Count Thomas...*  
- *No, look that Margherita di Savoia was a great character, promoter of art and culture and wouldn't have allowed an actor graduated from the academy, even if proletarian like you, worked in the... local market.*  
- *Eh, for you everything is easy...*  
- *Let's go to the Gianicolo! Just a patrolling tour.*  
- *Another time. I'm tired; tomorrow I have to get up early.*  
- *Ok. But one of these days, we have to go there.*

It's raining, and Thomas is like a river in flood. He gifts me his evening philosophy: *eh – he sighs - there are no tragedies or comedies more real than life.*

We reach the scooters, and he continues to talk about the fact to perform on the street, we would need short sentences and monologues to play in the dead times between the red and green of the traffic lights. It seems he has already planned everything; I answer yes, but I just try to go home. I keep thinking about Roby2. I don't want to spend the night alone.



## FIVE

It's just midnight, the hour when the thoughts which kept you company during the day become obsessions. I couldn't sleep anyway, so I'm in front of the door where Roby lives, not far from my house. It still rains, and I shelter under the cover of a closed bar. I phone her, ignoring time and good manners.

- *Hi, honey* - she replies with a quiet and not surprised voice.
- *Do you offer me a coffee?*
- *Where are you?*
- *I'm under your house.*

I chained down the scooter and entered the door. I climbed the stairs up on foot to the second floor. I have a fear only she can shoo. She's waiting for me at the door wearing a men's shirt. She has a short blonde haircut. She's barefoot and looks shorter; the hard physicist tells me she's resumed the gym.

- *What did you do to your hair?*
- *Do you like it?*
- *You know I like women with short hair.*

An embrace. I need to feel her body on mine. He greets me without asking me about the inconvenient time, we go to the kitchen, and she prepares coffee. I sit in the chair.

- *I was at dinner with Thomas.*

- *Ab, the old couple comes together!*
- *Oh, it never broke up...*
- *All couples explode, sooner or later...*
- *I called you this afternoon; there was a Thomas show at the theater.*
- *I was at the cinema, and I couldn't recall. Then I went to dinner with a friend too. What a pity, we could meet all together.*
- *Well, we're meeting the same - I say, smiling.*
- *Yes. You did well to call me - she says sitting down on my knees. I caress her legs; she holds her arm around my neck: - So, what are you doing at this moment, Rick?*
- *Now I work in the local market.*
- *Ab, I didn't know.*
- *My only source of subsistence has dried up, and I had to adapt.*
- *It happens. Don't lose heart, Rick.*

Coffee is ready: - *Just a teaspoon of sugar. Right?* - She asks.

- *Yes.*
- *How was Thomas's show?*
- *Surreal. A personal vision about things of life.*
- *Ab, I imagine him. He and his philosophical air... my god, how he likes to teach how to live!*
- *Yes, it was a bit like that, in fact, but it was a good test.*
- *And you? Al can't find you something?*
- *No, but Thomas made me a proposal.*
- *Has he declared himself? Do you want me to start being jealous, at my age?* - She says laughing.
- *No, really. It's a serious but mad proposal.*
- *I mean... serious or crazy?*

We light a cigarette, and I explain it. Roby listens to me with attention. I ask her what she thinks about it. She thinks and smokes, in silence. I continue to talk: - *Do you understand? It would be fun, but... I can't blow up other jobs without having a minimum of economic tranquility.*

She becomes serious: - *Hear me, Rick. It's all very bohemian like Thomas is... but for him, it's easy to live like that. We know if necessary his father makes a few phone calls and he can work. These seem like the whims of someone who has no problems; when he gets tired, Thomas finds a hiring, and you've only lost time or another job. That said, the idea is very good, Rick.*

- *So what can I do?*

- *I'd buy time, but I'd not leave work at the market, at least not until you understand if you can build something. After all, you still have to write something. In short, just tell him you wanna try but without obligation. Do you understand?*

- *Ah yes... test without obligation is my usual philosophy.*

- *Mine too* - she says, turning and placing her legs on mine. I get up from the chair holding her so tightly. Our moistures intertwine, and we end on the kitchen table, setting it with her shirt and my jacket.

Night had his continuation in the hall. We used all our healing herbs to relieve the annoyances of life; then we fell asleep together on the couch.

Now it's half past three. In an hour I should get ready to go to work. I get up and go to the window. Rain stopped. Roby is still sleeping. I find a cover in her room. I go back to the living room and watch her sleep for a moment. I cover her. I write her a note, explaining I have to go to work. I gently closed the door behind me and went down the stairs, took off the chain and turned on my scooter. Along the way, the reflections of the lights on the wet tar made me company. I met the caravan of vans which goes to the market and I blew the horn to greet them. I parked and chained down my scooter. I passed by of the fish kiosk. Gastone is rummaging through the bag of hot croissants and offers them to me. He must have kept them in the van along with the boxes because the yeasts were impregnated with the stink of fish. He made fun of me calling me *Helene Delon*, which would be a game of assonance between my work and the French actor, but maybe it implies what think here about the manhood of those who worked in the theater. I don't care about it, and I ate maritozzo with the flavor of squid ink.

- *Welcome back* – shouts Vanda from his counter – *Did you have a good Sunday?*

I greeted her with a wave, sipping coffee as I pass between kiosks and piles of empty boxes. I arrived at Vanda's counter. I took the cart to unload the boxes of chard and chicory.

Vanda is seated on one side, covered by the waste of salads for the pinzimonio she personally prepares, creating what seem to be floral compositions with bunches of radishes and fennels: *I do it to stand out*, she says. Here the competition is strong. Vanda doesn't want I make friends with Rita *la cicciona*, who has the meat counter with her

husband, because she's a great gossip, according to Vanda. She strictly forbids me to talk with Marta *la formaggiara*, of the gastronomy kiosk, without explaining the reasons but as if it's an implicit clause in our work agreement.

Last week, one morning while I was going to get water at the fountain, I met the *formaggiara*, who asked me how I can resist with *that*. I smiled trying to escape, telling her she's a good lady. Marta has disagreed in her own way on the term *lady*, hoping for the intervention of the *comare secca* and wishing her a permanent pension under the *alberi pizzuti*. Translated from the dialect, it's something has a relationship with death and cemetery.

Returning to the counter, Vanda, promptly warned by his counter-information service about my brief conversation, didn't talk to me for the rest of the day.

Life here goes this way. The daily rhythm is punctuated by fragile and farcical balances if seen from the outside, but from the inside, they can take folds similar to Middle Eastern issues. For one like me, it's like walking on a minefield and what's being forgiven is due to virginity determined by time; it's essential to learn quickly because the difference between a novice and a sower of discord is really subtle.

End of the day. It's 11:30. I greet and thank Vanda for the gift of a bag of tomatoes and a bunch of rocket. *It's just the rocket* - she says - *the secret for a magnificent bruschetta. You can do what you want, also the panzanella...*

Arrived at home, my answering machine is full of messages in which Thomas explains his project, inviting me for a reconnaissance together. Fascinated and perplexed, I call him to agree. At 4:00 pm to the Re Del Tiramisù, in Piazza dei Re di Rome.

It's a quiet afternoon of a normal working day. Temperate climate, clear sky and few traffic. I go round the square, and I park. Thomas is seated at an outdoor table under the enormous curtain with the logo of the *monarch* of sweets, immersed in reading of affably duplicated notes.

- *Hi* - I say.

- *Sit down; these are yours* - he says giving me my copies. - *I ordered tea and biscuits for you too, okay?*

The resolute voice, hasty but formal, makes me understand he already feels the head company. A company of two elements. He tied his hair, and when he talks, he touches his tail as if he had a tic. He doesn't look at me while he explains, but he fixes an indeterminate point because he feels he has already clear everything in his head.

He tells me an idea would be to use a voice between the rhetoric of a commentator of the Istituto Luce and the one of a sports commentator because it creates a contrast with the content of the text. Like that. Emphasis: *on April 30, 1849, at Porta San Pancrazio, General Peppe with an attack on the bayonet, put the balls of the francesi who retreated to Villa Pamphili and then reached Civitavecchia. The political desist from pursuit to give them the coup de grace, was fatal. After a month the Napoleons came back to besiege the territory: at Ponte Milvio they pierced the defense of the University Battalion, where many students died heroically.*

I listened to another couple of things about this genre. Then, his question: *what do you think about it?*

I took a sip of tea and immerse in it a biscuit to take time. A bartender goes out to raise the curtains because the sun doesn't bother now. It's like when the curtain is raised. It's my turn to talk.

- *Yes, funny...*

- *But?* - Asks him already evidently annoyed.

- *It will be necessary to give him solidity.*

- *You didn't understand a shit!* - Burst out with the air of those who don't accept comparisons - *Rick: we'll not be in a theater, but in the street, this is another language. The plot is not important; we need short things to act at the traffic light, between red and green!*

- *How do you make people understand what you're talking about?*

- *Oh, you can create problems, I need an enthusiastic person!*

- *And then, one acts: and the other? We are two.*

- *I know. The other is the mime.*

- *Mime?*

- *Yes, mime. Indeed, it will be a thing halfway between mime and language for the deaf.*

- *Yes, Thomas, working on it can become interesting and fun...*

- *So?*

- *I'd not give the impression of a cabaret of the '70s and become like a Derby-style comedian duo of Milan, do you understand?*

- *Yes, of course, I understand what you wanna say. It will not become it; we work on it.*

Rome, Via Appia 397, 19:30 pm. Our work continues in my kitchen. Penne with garlic, oil, and anchovies. A spray of chili for an arrabbiata in white: *penne alla Ciceruacchio*, the name Thomas coins for this dish.

I made a mistake asking Thomas who he this Ciceruacchio. *He begins to explain he was the carter who had a tavern at Porta del Popolo and fought for the second Roman Republic, but when it fell down, he tried to reach Venice with Garibaldi's legion. Angelo Brunetti (Ciceruacchio), was arrested by the Austrians on the Po and shot with his sons Lorenzo (of thirteen) Luigi.*

Water is boiling. We drain the pasta, and we put it in a pan. We mix it with sauce until we have hot and spicy penne.

- *It would be a good idea put two olives - says Thomas.*
- *Good, excellent I'd say.*
- *Eh, sure... penne alla Ciceruacchio. They never betray.*
- *Do you know a thing?*
- *Tell me...*
- *I thought... but isn't it better to open a restaurant?*
- *What an asshole...*

After eating, we get back to work. We calculate the notes of Thomas, bringing short passages from books without copyright and trying movements for the mime.

In the end, we extract about ten monologues which last a minute, one and a half minutes or two, the time calculated for the color change of the traffic light. We decide to take it immediately on the street in the following days because we know it's the only way to see the effect on people.

4:00 am. It's time I should get up to go to the market, but since I'm ready to go, we go back to the kitchen and start cooking again. *Penne gentili*. The same recipe for dinner but without chili. My idea about the upcoming opening of a restaurant is very strong.

We leave my house. Thomas goes to sleep; I go to rest at work. The day is characterized by my yawning and my distracted presence caused by the lack of rest and... even by a slow digestion.

Vanda, as everyone, has other complications: the market suffers the unwelcome visit of the traffic wardens. Agents roam between desks.

Cold eyes and slow steps to inspect all managers of kiosks. There's an unreal silence, some short whistle of those who pretend to be industrious while is studying the executioner's movements. The inspection shakes the dirty consciences (and there are) of those who, for principle or convenience, don't follow hygienic and fiscal rules, and also establishes a temporary truce because grudges and competition seem to sleep. Vanda suggested I go home to sleep, then called me in a corner, making it clear *if they make questions, you will say I never paid you: clear? Above all, you don't work here. For a few days, don't come here. Call me next week, prudence is never too much.*

Her look is convincing, and there's no need to add more. Moreover, I'm so sleepy. I went home.

These developments allow me to dedicate myself, soul and body, to the project with Thomas. As agreed, we bring our work to the streets to check its effect.

Rome, Ponte Duca d'Aosta at the intersection with Lungotevere Maresciallo Diaz. Behind it, the Marmi Stadium, by side, the Olympic Stadium. Sliding traffic. After a moment of concentration, I get up from the ladder in front of the pool. Thomas at the traffic light nods the drivers to go, miming the movements of a traffic guard.

In a warehouse dealing with theatrical clothing, we searched in vain two garibaldi uniforms or, at least, something resembles them. The keeper has suggested us a shop which rents carnival costumes, and that's why we're both dressed in red and with a plastic shotgun on our shoulder, in a uniform not attributable to any continental army. The effect is ridiculous, we draw attention to which I prefer not to consider the reasons.

Traffic light turns red. I put myself between the first and second row of cars; I use a convincing tone of voice and dive into the rhetoric of the monologue asking a supposed *dear friend* if he wants to *hear* about the *race* from Genova to Marsala.

First driver turns to the other side to look at the Obelisk Mussolini. A lady, driving an economy car, raises the glass scared by the shotgun of Thomas. The traffic noise and the first reactions make us discouraged.

The attempt fails between indifference. We go back on the river side, discouraged. Thomas, over his jacket, also wears a white bib on which he has written *Crossroad Theater*.

The window cleaners and lighter sellers have fun. The cars spin. Traffic stops. Thomas tells me he wants to try. He speaks in a clear and solemn voice to the motorists, repeating the rhetorical question to the dear friend who wants to hear about the challenge from Genoa to Marsala.

In the background, I suddenly improvise the dirge about Garibaldi who *was injured, was injured in a leg*.

The driver's sarcasm about our *brain injures* zap us. We stay in the drains of cars. It begins to drizzle. The washer and the seller continue to smile.

- *We're actors* - I say.

- *Ah, actors!* - Said surprised the washer: - *I'm Anuar, Egypt.*

- *I'm Richard, he's Thomas.*

Again at the traffic light. The bus driver looks at us and hears. He nods to get in: we didn't foresee it. I greet with a nod Anuar and his friend. We got in. The bus goes to Piazzale Clodio. It's not too crowded. Someone reads, others listen to mp3. Passengers look themselves with indifference.

We pore ourselves. The voice on the bus is better despite the shudders and the hard breaking. I place myself in the center, so everyone can hear me. Thomas is in front of me. I briefly explain who we're and why we're on the public mean.

A man stops reading, a girl takes off her headset and smiles. We evoke the days of May 1860, when Garibaldi decided to make that madness which became his most memorable challenge. We choose the rebound technique, i.e., a preposition at the beginning of the chosen monologue. Two voices for a story. Almost a rap, in short.

Thomas exposes his part, I listen to him, waiting for my turn. It's exciting, and the technique chosen is the right one. In particular, I feel the bus transformed into a vaporetto which sails the waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea, and so we go to the challenge to fight against Bourbons; Thomas and I go from handle to handle between the passengers which move them over in order not to obstruct us, our voices improve. Just a few meters from the stop, we put ourselves on the doors and in a single chorus we evoke *the sound of the bells of*

*Marsala who welcomed the two boats at noon, and then the frenzy of getting off for the first contact with that sweet and bitter land.*

Someone has to consider us foolish, but they all smile. The driver turns from his cockpit and improvises an applause. Also two gentlemen in a jacket and overnight case. Also, school kids with backpacks and ladies with shopping bags applaud.

A guy, getting off, leaves me 20 euros banknotes and a fleck on my cheek. Ladies give us the skim and even two freshly baked baguettes. Three tickets for the bus, coins.

We get off the stairs of the bus backwards. We bow down and thank repeatedly, Thomas takes off his hat and puts it to heart. He takes a step back and points to me: *Riccardo Nola*, screams. I reciprocated, I pulled back and left him the scene: *Thomas Albergari!*

Theater in motion. Two street actors.



## SIX

In arriving at the Gianicolo, there's a labyrinth of streets dedicated to the men who fought with Garibaldi. The fact these people, in the memory of a marble, remain next to their commander, softens me. I am going through the busts along the Belvedere. I stop in front of the sign of a street: *It's the Ramp David Bucchi* - says Thomas - *messengers of the Garibaldi Brigade, a twelve-year-old boy*. A few more steps and we arrive at Viale Lorenzo Brunetti, the son of the innkeeper Ciceruacchio, shot 13 years old.

Thomas turns to the rides. Children who are complaining about their parents because they wanna take a ride again amuse him. A few more steps again and we find the best of the Audacious Righetto: *an orphan boy who threw himself with a wet rag on the bombs fell to the ground defusing the fuse* - says Thomas. - *One morning of June 1849, Righetto was on the beach at the height of Ponte Sisto when he was hit by a bomb which also killed Sgrullarella, his dog.*

After Piazzale Garibaldi and the statue of the hero, the walk continues towards the lighthouse and also continues the row of busts of the fighters. Alongside the puppet theater, there's an exhibition of puppets. I like to believe the spirit of the children of '49 finds a dignity among these funny puppets, to compensate their lost childhood.

On the opposite side, after the Fontana del Gianicolo, we arrive at the Ossario dei caduti of the Roman Republic, a travertine building with four open sides. There are some pedestals bearing the indicative

dates for the liberation of Rome, *which took place about ten years after the Unification of Italy*, an annotation on which Thomas emphasized not to make confusion between these two moments. On the back, some gravestones recall the thousands of fallen, many of which inspired the name of the streets we have traveled to climb up to here. In front of the tombstone of Mameli, Thomas sings the Italian hymn in a low voice, as if it were a prayer.

We go back to the panoramic open space. So much beauty breaks your life. Thomas, at the laptop, transcribes from the block notes what I wrote notes during the search.

The enchantment of the view attenuates the fatigue of our research, of which only a small part will be used for the scenes. Meters of paper transcribed on electronic bytes are useful only for authors to control the work.

It was early in the morning when we arrived. The bartender at the kiosk had the coffee machine off. Now we order two espressos. A cigarette, we stretch our legs and continue the work. Thomas opens his webcam to film a test. The sky is clear, and the sun warms us. This is our urban office. You see the whole city from here.

It's almost time for lunch; we're tired and hungry. Before taking our scooters, Thomas approaches the seller, asking him to inflate two balloons with Mickey Mouse face, then we go down to Trastevere looking for a tavern.

We find the locale. We leave the balloons tied to the saddles and enter. Today in the menu, there are polenta with sausages and spuntature. We order two portions and red wine.

- *Rick, we have to go to Sicily* - Thomas tells me.
- *What?*
- *I know a guy in Marsala. He can help us.*
- *Yes... ok... and then?*
- *We go back and follow the itinerary of the Thousand.*
- *On horseback or scooter?*
- *Hear me: years ago you took your brother's money for our projects. Now it's my turn. It doesn't make a fold, Rick.*
- *You're mad...*

They bring us appetizers: spicy olives and pecorino cheese, boiled artichokes and parmesan flakes.

- *What's up, Rick?*
- *I was thinking about work.*
- *How can you work hard into the market, Rick? You're an actor!*
- *I don't know. Everything seems so crazy to me...*
- *Let's do this madness, Riccardo... let's experiment, let's live as vagabonds, then we'll build something for the theater. This experience will give us the right push. We'll use internet to run. We'll give appointments, the words will spread.*
- *I can't be so enthusiastic.*
- *So tell me: do you have alternatives other than chicory, chickpeas and other vegetables?*
- *No, but I could be a farmer. It seems much more sensible.*
- *Come on Riccardo, this idea is a bomb. We'll go to Sicily by sea.*
- *By sea? - I ask with amazement.*
- *Yes, by sea. Ah, but don't worry, not swimming.*
- *Ah ok, Now I'm feeling a lot better. Much better...*
- *Riccardo, it's necessary. In this way we really become the same with the emphasis of the challenge, we'll look the part, we'll try the same things experienced those guys...*

The innkeeper serves polenta on a wooden chopping board, and his arrival puts an end to Thomas's proposals.

Full stomach, torments, and recent remembrances. Coming down from the bus, after the performance, I felt a bit of pride running through my soul. I perceived a spare of life. My heart beating. So: is the project crazy or do I suffer from lack of enthusiasm? My defenses react reluctantly to any news as if I needed more time to adapt myself.

With these intimate conflicts, I greet Thomas. He continued talking and planning, and I nodded my head, touching my wrist to feel the blood pounding in my veins.

I wanna talk to Vanda. I have to do it, at least to explain her and not to go away as in other circumstances of my past. It will be the first thing to do, tomorrow morning.

I got up early, and I go to the market on foot. Beyond the entrance, a cheerful confusion involves me. I pass through the desks between elderly who have time to hang around and people who are in a hurry, between the discreet smell of tangerines and the aggressive smell of onions, between *the window on the sea* of the fish shop and the Spanish hams exposed by the delicatessen owner, and then the usual popular chatter and the screams of the merchants.

- *Good morning, Vanda.*
- *Oh, bello. You didn't come for shopping, did you?*
- *No. You know, I have to go to Sicily for a theater job...*
- *I understood it as soon as I saw you...*
- *I'm sorry...*
- *Oh. What's this funeral tone?*
- *No, it's...*
- *Look, everyone must find his way. You must try, at least try... and then, every road is made to go and go back. When you need, Vanda is here.*
- *Thanks, you're relieving me. I was anguished.*
- *Come on, give me a little kiss and then go. I have to work...*

I go away with my bundle for free: an envelope of lemons and oranges, apples and pears of which I had just learned the breed. Coming back home, I stop at Dante's diner. I enter, and he's at the cash desk. I line up to order a spit-roasted chicken and roast potatoes. He sees me, and I serve me, avoiding the queue. I thank him, greeting him for the departure. He winks, wishing me good luck. *No, you have to say merda* – I say. *So, merda* – he says laughing. Thomas has *obtained* the skills of Willy and Mary to organize an evening of presentation of our show. It seems we are leaving for the moon and not in Sicily. In the two days before the event, our friends seem more excited than us. Except Al. He's upset because I don't consult him, but I have figure my way out myself for too long. A rather stormy phone call follows.

- *As usual, I have to know things from others, Rick.*
- *What should I do while I wait for you to find me somewhat?*
- *It's about waiting. I have proposed you to various productions.*
- *I repeat you the question, Al: in the meantime, what should I do?*

- *Do you think working with Thomas is an opportunity? And then, who do you want Garibaldi's interests today? Do you think you are prepared for something like that?*
- *We have experimented. We have studied. We have documented.*
- *Shut up, Rick. Going down the street dressed like two clowns to turn with the hat for alms. Between us, it's not even upstanding.*
- *Ah, of course... your proposals are upstanding. Works without pay, the protest against the cuts in the show: strike. I strike everyday, Al. Thanks to you.*
- *Jobs without pay are investments you make on yourself, and the protest was just an event to show you by other colleagues, operators, directors.*
- *Oh, sure, it was the event of the year...*
- *Everyone was at the demonstration. If it sucks you put in contact with them, then don't complain.*
- *And who is complaining? I'm absolutely enthusiastic.*
- *Do you know what I think?*
- *No. What do you think, Al?*
- *That you're a bit pretentious, Rick. Take a soul-searching once in a while and get over yourself: with your Academy diploma, you're cleaning your ass.*
- *That's enough, Al. I'm tired. See you at the presentation, if you want.*
- *Despite everything, I'll be there. Even if you continue disappointing me, Rick.*

The balance of my career is depressing, as the management of Al. The academy prepares to be tenacious, but nobody explains very often employees don't pay for work, time, dignity, and they have invented the concept of *investment on yourself*, as if to say if you don't agree to work for free, It's implied besides being a troublemaker, you don't believe enough in your artistic abilities: so, why should they bet on you?

Meanwhile, the years pass, and you can't do anything else. You must consider the possibility of not being good, but if you weren't, you would like to try before you leave, and don't fill the rest of your existence with regret and frustration.

Al has many possibilities and intimately knows he's not brought for acting. He remained in the environment, but with the same results as his past career. He often forgets that his work depends on other person. He continually reproach me a mistake of two years ago as if it was a penance to be served for the rest of my life, rather than admitting *it* represents the only successful blow.

Al had involved me in a farce with a little politician who had written a book about linguistic minorities. He had to present the book, but his editor at the last moment couldn't be present. He needed a quick solution, and Al offered to find him the publisher, asking me, as a personal favour, to enter the part. I replied it wasn't a favor, but a fraud. He convinced me telling me he would return the courtesy, and I desperately needed courtesy. I had to pretend to be an editor in front of the audience during a presentation at Palazzo Marini, a side street of Via del Tritone.

When I reached the entrance, there were many celebs, all of them revolving around the carousel and running the top. I was wearing a blue blazer and beige jeans. I identified my man in who was celebrated by everyone: Giulio Maria Arena, ex of Verdi and now in the Mixed Group. I approached him with the identity smuggler's air.

*- Lawyer Sapone sends me. I'd be the publisher - I said. He understood: - Come with me. I explain you the book - he said softly. Then he turned to all the others: - Gentlemen, the publisher has arrived. Allow us to move away for a moment?*

After his explanation of the linguistic minorities of which I understood almost nothing, we also reached the classroom. At the table, there were two journalists; one from the *Messaggero* and the other from *Unità*, then a man who read articles in the South Tyrolean language, and of course the honorable and myself. I succeeded with formal words of greeting from the publisher to those beautiful people. Presentation lasted an hour, at the end, the Honorable paid my fee. I also collected manuscripts of poor devils who were looking for a publisher, works I'd never have read, poor to them. However, I met Camila Sanchez, a poet from Costa Rica with a domicile in Paris. She spoke excellent Italian and needed an accommodation. She was in Rome of way.

I hosted Camila for about two months. Al told her I was an organizer of events in the capital. In practice, that afternoon, I had a double identity, one for the Honorable and one for the girl. Al changed my generality according to his convenience. I don't know what kind of interest he had for the poet, but he had told her to go to Palazzo Marini and get in touch with me.

A week later, Al informed me the goal was reached; the Honorable managed to get me an audition with a well-known director. It was a remarkable thing: Giorgio Lallo had a large prestige with a film of independent production and was preparing the cast for what then became a successful comedy: *Parties never end*.

It wasn't easy to approach Lallo. The audition would have taken place two months later at the Teatro Quirino. I marked the date on my kitchen calendar: April 13th. I seemed to touch the sky. I had a stratospheric hottie inside my house and the perspective to act in a movie.

Sanchez was one who marked my senses. She walked around the house in g-string, declaiming her poems in Spanish. She said she liked watching me while I was asleep, she woke me up declaiming verses I didn't understand playing with her panties. She liked to be photographed and had a big assortment of underwear. I don't remember I've ever seen so much underwear. I don't even remember so many hand-jobs as I did in that period and I think she read my suffering. One evening she came into my room and my bed, declaiming the only verses I could understand. It was his way to settle the score.

The morning after I woke up in the silence. In the kitchen there was a note written in Italian: *I was fine. Call me if you come to Paris*. Her phone number follows those words, and also the memory of his purple g.string. I prepared coffee. The rumbling of the coffee maker fed the sense of loneliness. Distractedly I turned to look at the calendar and only at that moment I remembered: *April 13 - Audition - Giorgio Lallo - Teatro Quirino*.

Two days had already passed. Did I miss the appointment with destiny or was my destiny to miss the appointment? Wondering what life would be like if I remembered that commitment is like talking about the sex of angels. Sometimes existence can change due to the lack of a knot to the handkerchief or even the lack of a handkerchief. It's true: it was a film that I felt was mine, but It's not said he would have taken me. I will never know it. Is there something more devastating? A job cut off on me and I didn't cut myself, I just stayed with this permanent scar in my head. And so, when Willy and Mary give a party, I remember *parties never ends*, and I'd like to kill myself.

But not this time. The presentation party for the Thomas show takes place in a locale on Via Ostiense, in front of the former general

markets, thanks to the good jobs of Willy and Mary, who are very excited. The *right moment* exists and exists angels who offer the second chance.

A band plays disco music, and the guests of a web radio and a web TV will interview us. There will be people of the environment but no big name because we can't afford to pay their party fees.

When I arrived, I send messages to Thomas indicating the place where I'm. I watch the guests dance and fly with the sparkling wine.

Al remains in a corner, hurt by an event which banishes him to the edge and also to the fact he sees Willy, strutting like a landlord, boasting about the event; in few moments Willy will show everyone the new nail machine, a cousin's gift. Mary is divided into choosing the sparkling wine and keeping an eye on Floriana's movements.

A hand is resting on my shoulder: - *Do you see what a stuff?* - It's Thomas. He takes my arm, and we can do the catwalk. Willy notices us, interrupts the dances and the toasts, asks for silence and background of *oh!* and the band starts with *Twist it (Shake Your Tail Feather)*, so we, Thomas and I, throw ourselves into the empty dance floor dancing alone until we are joined by everyone. The beginning is sparkling. If with our show we had only half the success of this party, we would be satisfied.

It's time for the web radio interview. We withdraw in a corner, and Thomas explains of a *wandering through the real streets of popular theater, on the Risorgimento wave which united this country and then blab blab blab*.

He allowed me to clarify the technical details of the work. Short monologues at bus stop, on public transport and in stations. We greet the radio guests, inviting those who cross us along the way, to stay and listen to us. Another glass of rosé and we go out because Thomas has to talk to me.

- *Hear me, Rick: the man of Marsala, Ringo, will take care of your arrival. He will think of all. He will send someone who will take you to Trapani who, then, will take you to Marsala.*

- *I don't understand: my arrival?*

- *In three days you leave with the ferry. I will join you soon. First of all, I have to go to my home in Piedmont to get the funds. I've already talked to my mother: she finances me. Everything is done. No problem, Rick, one hundred thousand heads will be enough to set up a theatrical discourse. Sicily will be just one stop where we'll have to prepare. We'll breathe the smells, and we'll see the landing sites, but then, Rick, there will be the strong walls of a theater. Do you realize? I'm leaving*

*the day after tomorrow; I have to put a little signature on a bank account of our own. Moreover, we'll have two credit cards, Rick. You and I. I still don't believe it!*

*- I... don't know what to say...*

*- And what do you wanna say, my friend? Hug me and let's enjoy this party.*

We are recalled by a crash. Al, visibly drunk, pulled a bottle of sparkling wine on a display case, smashing it. The other guests continue to dance, friends, surround him. Mary, also drunk, reminds him of the price of sparkling wine: *- It's a pity to waste the expensive stuff, you had to choose a bottle of orange juice, Al...*

He takes a bottle of orange juice and throws it back against the glass.

*- Done. Is that okay?* – He answers her.

*- Let me try; it must be fun...* - she says.

They remain in front of the shattered window, throwing different objects. For caution, people don't approach them because Al holds a bottle with a broken neck in his hands. I try to dissuade him.

*- Are you worried, Rick?* – He says. *- Don't be afraid; only broken mirrors are unlucky, not windows...*

Managers of the restaurant also intervene, and we calm him down. Willy takes his cousin and brings her to the bathroom to rinse her face, begging me to prepare a bitter coffee in the bar. Mary complains saying everyone has a personal way of having fun. She keeps calling Al: *- Honey, where are you? What did they do to you?*

Willy asks me to stay with her because he has to go upstairs to Roby1. I tell him I should also go up to present the show, but he runs away without hearing me. Also, Floriana comes in the bathroom, worried and embarrassed. I leave her with Mary, and I go up too.

I rejoin Thomas, and we allow ourselves to the TV cameras. We sit on the sofa, floor as background, music and a lot of sparkling wine. We look like two sailors who see ground after months of sea.

Willy doesn't care about anyone; he's completely kidnapped by Roby1. They remain secluded to toast each one from the wine glass of the other and look each other in the eye. Mary is hugged to Floriana, rather, she sits on her knees like a child and watches the party, in silence. Al seems depressed, remaining a few steps away

from me, and singing songs about solitude, in order that I listen and feel a little sick for him, for me, for the whole world. I realize only now Roby2 is missing. Probably she has been seized by the doubt about *whether we have noticed more to go or not at parties*.

It's almost like New Year's Eve. The restaurant is located below street level. From the dance floor, through the window, you can see the sky. It's midnight, and there are even fireworks. Mary cries for no reason, Willy struts around and Al has changed corner. I'm agitated, confused, tried and happy: I never thought it would be possible.



## SEVEN

Via Appia 397. I'm home; I prepare bags for departure. I've never been In Sicily. I imagine it as a planet flooded by the sun and burned by the sea. Thomas is traveling to Piedmont. In a manner of speaking, we cover most of the country. The phone rings. It's Roby2.

*- Would you like a dinner? I'll take you in a couple of hours.*

It's on time. When I get off, Roby parked in a double row. She wears the smile of the dinners of Willy and Mary. The reflection of the colored lenses on the metallic color of the new car, blinds the eyes.

*- Do you like it? Navigator, USB connection, speakerphone, CD radio and air conditioning.*

*- Congrats, Roby. Really magnificent.*

*- Do you see? I have all controls on the steering wheel.*

*- Eh, you like to have everything under control. Where do we go?*

*- Anzio. I discovered a little restaurant near the port. I wanna celebrate.*

Roby is enthusiastic. We got in the car; she tidies up, fixes her décolleté and seems she's touching her tits to start the Fiesta. We go. I need to breathe the sea. Roby is taken from the stereo settings and the phone, and I can relax and watch the view from the window. It's getting dark, and there's not much traffic on the coast. Roby stops at an emergency stopping place to call. It must be her new conquest, and most likely, he's also the reason for her absence from the party.

I go out, and I stretch. The breeze enters in my lungs and from the street only the small white waves can be seen dying in the dark of the waters: It's such an incessant rhythm I'd like to set the sea on fire.

- *Nice, eh? The sea in the evening - she says.*
- *Yes. So: why didn't you come to the presentation?*
- *I was busy.*
- *Ah, yes... do I know him?*
- *No. And then mind your own business...*
- *For charity, forgive me, forgive me, forgive me...*
- *I spoke with Al.*
- *The great Al. Here's the reason for this dinner between us...*
- *Have you tried to recall him?*
- *Do you know what I think, Roby? There are people who, in order to keep you tied to them, work to get you in trouble.*
- *I'm not following you.*
- *I mean if my career had a leap upward, he wouldn't be able to handle it. Maybe he's afraid I'll find another manager and therefore, for Al, it's much better I work with advertisements when or it's even better not to work at all. After all, my career is very similar to his, don't you think?*
- *It seems to me only you're exaggerating, now. Rick, you're friends.*
- *His only friends are percentages.*
- *And what's wrong? It's a job for him too...*
- *Nothing, there's nothing wrong. Only I got tired, Roby. I'm tired of waiting for a comet that never comes. I'm tired of cracking my back on the market. Now if a train passes, I try to take it as everyone does. Don't talk about friendship and fairness: in this environment, morality is an excuse for all those who wanna make fags with the ass of others and not have scruples when positions change...*

The establishment which can be seen from up here looks like an abandoned island; on the beach, only two boats left upside down. The sound of the sea and its movement now seem fading.

- *You too have your faults, Rick. Don't let off everything on him.*
- *Oh yes, of course. I have my faults...*
- *No, don't be sarcastic. Audition, strike...*
- *Still with the story of the audition: I see he has indoctrinated you very well...*
- *Al made you meet a lot of people at dinners, and you worked a lot.*
- *Of course, I met a lot of entrepreneurs, and I did a lot of commercials for their companies. We can say I worked for companies strewn throughout the region.*
- *Yes, and there were also many steps in private TV.*
- *We can say I can boast a curriculum which goes from tortellini to kitchen towels, from water which unlocks you to craft furniture!*

She approaches and hugs me. We remain silent to look in front of us, then we enter the car, leaving the sea and its waves out the window. Roby stretches her arms around my neck. Shake the tongue. Kisses and bites and eagerly grabs me by the hair, takes my lips and then moves me back to the seat; she kisses my abdomen, unbuttons my trousers, and she bends down, swallowing my faithful partner into the abyss of his throat like a floating motion. It seems the sea beats on the windows.

Roby lights a joint. A long drag and she give it to me: - *Rick, it's good for you, it's for depression* - he says smiling.

Anzio. The port is almost deserted; the moored boats are a mass of iron emerging from the water. A couple compares the menus hanging outside the restaurants of the pier. The light of the street lamps goes with our walk. We arrived at the restaurant known by Roby. We enter, we sit down, and I leave her to suggest me the specialties. Thanks to the trip to Sicily, I choose the white of Alcamo, then Roby asks for goat's cheese and salami of S. Angelo.

- *That is, let me understand* - asks Roby - *even in Sicily will you act on the street?*

- *Yes, this is our idea. The path of Garibaldi.*

- *Well, it's really cool, even if you'll travel by train for hours and hours...*

- *No, we don't go by train.*

- *What do you use?*

- *Ship.*

- *No, Rick. You two are crazy!*

- *Actually, I'm leaving alone. Thomas is in Piedmont. He will reach me soon in a second time.*

- *Why?*

- *This is the great news: we have funds. He convinced his mother, and we can set up also a theatrical work for the future so... everything is perfect, Roby!*

- *I'm really surprised. I was going to tell you to pay attention to Thomas, but this time he denied me. Rick, if everything is like you told me, I'm really happy for you two.*

- *Yes, Roby, I'm happy for the first time in my life. It was necessary, after much pain.*

Ostiense station. I'm waiting for the local train for Civitavecchia. From the phone, I keep under control the situation and the contact of Thomas, the man called Ringo, plays: on the bulletin board of a social network, in fact, I read a greeting, *Welcome Gary Baldi*, and my photo with the red uniform. The adventure begins with a smile.

The train arrives. I put my two bags full of dreams, underwear, and perspectives on it, leaving on the track all my miseries of the last years. The doors closed you in. The city flows through the window. At first sight, it's hard for me to recognize streets and alleyways, as logical when the changes the point of view. In my eyes, the Capital, distancing itself, breaks my heart. In my soul the painful words of every detachment, but also the violent passion for an adventure in which I now firmly believe. The typical emotional harassment, I seem I'm mumbling to life.

About 3:00 pm. The station before Civitavecchia is S. Marinella. I close the tap of melancholy, but the old whore goes back to the drain. I get up by changing place and posture, in the illusory hope of reversing even the mood.

Civitavecchia. I get off the train and exit the station. I walk the short distance which leads to the port. I stop at the Grimaldi Lines stand, showing my reservation: a bridge deck chair, an adult passenger without a vehicle; they show me the pier. I greet them, and I go away. I'm nervous, and I've already forgotten the directions: Pontile Michelangelo, Sardinia pier or another?

Half an hour before boarding. There's a refreshment corner. I ask to heat a pizza and order a beer. I sit down and find a little humanity, I consult the touch screen, after all the sailors hide a little love in the jacket. Another message from Ringo: *Marsala waits, friend Rick Nola, only you and the Thousand.*

It's time for check in, and I get up. People around me with suitcases and trolleys head to Valletta, Olbia, Golfo degli Aranci, Bastia, and Toulon.

I manage the formalities, and I'm in the queue. It's not the boat of thousand, only the Grimaldi ferry. Not even a dog you greet me.

Departure at 5:00 pm. The ship runs along the pier, a change of direction towards the end of the docks and then follows its route.

I occupy an armchair in the great hall where someone is watching TV. It will be only a night of travel, but at least I don't have to prepare myself for the fight with the Bourbons.

A coffee and then a cigarette. I look at a map of Italy hanging on the wall of the bar: from Civitavecchia, it seems to fall on the Island of Favignana, between Trapani and Marsala. I could drive this junk if it were enough to go straight.

It's windy on the bridge. I'm a kind of man of the city, I've never seen so much sea. The blue waters and the white motion of the waves, the light blue sky and the warmth of the sun, keep me anchored to the railing to see all this freedom I can't use.

I feel good, even if I'm alone and I can't understand where I'm in Italy. Soon it will be time for dinner, then night will come, and stars will come out so I will have company too.

From the dining room arrives the discreet noise of cutlery on the tables set by the crew. I stay in front of the window to see the sunset. It's the first time I see the horizon with my own eyes; the shades fade between red and blue, the line which divides the sea from the sky seems an artifice.

I console myself with a beer, two bruschetta with tomatoes, a suppli with fish and a marinara pizza. I drink, I read, and I look out of the window. I review the monologues, I smile. I check the touch screen, a message: it's Ringo who writes me to look for him when I arrive in Marsala. He'll wait for me between Porta Garibaldi and Piazza Mameli. In event of problems, I'll have to ask about him because everyone knows him. I ask him how I can get from Trapani to Marsala. He answers there are abusive drivers and he tells me of a man, Tano, whom I will wait in an established place.

I can't make mistakes because these guys are leaning on their cars and wearing sunglasses even at night. I reply I'll arrive during the day. He says it's the same thing; they hold the same sunglasses they use at night. Nice and mad person, Ringo. I greet him, and then, armed with a fork, I attack the freshly baked marinara.

Deep night. I sit in an armchair, but I can't sleep. I freshen up, I wrap the blanket around my shoulders, and I sit down so I can stretch my legs. From a large window, I can see the stars. It's clear, and there's the moon, the eyes close, and I can get to sleep.

7:15 am. I'm already awake by 6:00. Entry into the port. The sun welcomes us along with some rare clouds. *That is the Colombaia lighthouse*, one of the staff tells me. From the ferry bridge, the port of Trapani looks like the fins of a cetacean. Docking at the West Sanità Pontoon, or so I understand. I follow the short flow of passengers and touch the ground of Trapani. On time, on the touch screen, there's already a Ringo message with directions. I seem to be in the middle of a treasure hunt but without the treasure. I walked a few meters, and I find myself in front of the statue of Garibaldi. On the right, there's a garden with palm trees. This is where Tano, my man, should appear. I look around. The city is adorable, and I feel like an explorer.

It's been an hour since my arrival. It's hot but windy, and it's fine. A white car stops, the window is open. A fifty years old man stares at me; he has a sunburned complexion, gray hair, and glasses. He's impenetrable and immobile like the statue of Garibaldi in front of him. I get up from the bench and go toward him: - *Tano?* - He nods his head and opens the trunk. I load the bags, and I settle behind him as he indicates.

- *Where do you have to go?* – He asks in strict dialect. I look at him puzzled through the rearview mirror. – *Do you understand what I say?* - asks Tano.

- *Marsala* – I answer – *I'm sorry, the dialect is nice but complicated.*

- *You will get used to it. We pass through the Via del Sale so you can see a bit of Sicily.*

We go. The road we follow is the Via del Sale. The sunlight reflects on these expanses creating a natural carnival, making the breath unnecessary. At various points, tile roofs protect this white gold from the planar of the flamingos: the small mountains of salt look like inanimate clouds fallen from the sky. It's the action of wind on the blades of the mills to mark the rhythms of the men at work with the wheelbarrows along the stretches of water. Tano turns and smiles: - *Look out there, this is a natural theater* - he says offering me a cigarette.

- *Where are you from?*

- *Rome.*

- *What do you have to do in Marsala?*

- *I'm an actor. I'm here to work.*

- *For me, an actor is like an athlete.*
- *What?*
- *Specialized in skipping meals. Without offense, obviously.*
- *You're right. The actor skips meals as the athlete skips the obstacles.*
- *What show do you have to do?*
- *One thing about Garibaldi, the enterprise of the Thousand. The landing in Marsala.*
- *U General Garibaddi?*
- *Yes!*
- *Minchia, an historical thing. Congrats, I like history.*

In less than an hour, we are at the destination. On account of the chat, I hadn't noticed.

- *It's thirty euros. I don't wanna take advantage, eat something and drink at my health.*

Marsala, Porta Garibaldi. This is where I should wait for Ringo. I leave the bags on the ground, and I look around. It starts to get hot, I'm tired, and I'd like to freshen up. I observe the signage. Around Porta Garibaldi, there's Via dei Mille, and behind It, there's Via Quarto; passing Porta Garibaldi, I find Via Giuseppe Garibaldi and instead, on my right, after Via dei Vespri, follows Via Mazzini; there's a Piazza del Popolo also here and a Via Palestro, a Via Cavour. Little imagination, the names of the streets are the same in all the cities, and the meaning of the journey by ferry is caught: fatigue.

Immersed in these tribulations, I walk the streets of Marsala, when a scooter almost overwhelms me, unbalancing me: - *Rick Nola, street actor, fuck! And where were you?*

I look at this fool with sunglasses and beard who sniggers in front of my face: - *What the fuck are you laughing? You almost kill me!*

- *Rick Nola* - he continues, screaming – *are really you?*

He must have noticed my perplexity, when he lowered his glasses as if to be identified, putting himself in profile: - *Ringo, I'm!*

- *Oh, hi... how did you recognize me?*
- *The photo in the profile.*
- *Ah, yes. I have not seen your photos, and I couldn't have recognized you.*
- *No, but because now I have a beard.*

- *What does the beard have to do with it... Oh well, which way do we go?*

Ringo has a contagious enthusiasm, and in a few moments, he manages to thin out the clouds which were about to piss on my head. It's a challenge to stay in balance on the scooter with two bags on the sides, but in a few minutes, we're at Ringo's house. Second floor, forty square meters and my bed already placed in the small entrance. Maximum Sicilian efficiency.

- *I'll make you a nice coffee.*

- *Thank you...*

- *This blend comes from Costa Rica. I take it to the herbalist. If you wanna take a shower, towels and the bathrobe are on the dresser at the entrance.*

I feel comfortable. A diploma is hung on the wall: Silvio D'Amico Academy of Dramatic Arts - First Level Academic Diploma to Salvatore Nicotra.

- *Did you study at the Academy too?*

- *Yes. I was the boyfriend of Arianna, Thomas's sister when I studied in Rome, but we remained friends.*

- *Ah, yes... Arianna.*

- *Riccardo, I have to go. I work at the discount store. You know how it's: I have to pay the rent! Get some rest. There's television and stereo. If you open the shelf, you can find all my CDs. I left you the sauce: do you like seafood?*

- *Yes, thank you... and Thomas? When did you hear him?*

- *The day before yesterday. He warned me of your arrival. He will be here in a few days.*

- *Yes. Now I rest, and then later I call him.*

- *You can use the phone in living room.*



## EIGHT

Marsala, Via Sardegna 15. I go out on the terrace to see a glimpse of the city. The breeze which comes from the sea lightens the journey's tiredness. I call Thomas, but his cell phone is disconnected.

I look around in his the house. A poster of Ringo Starr in the living room and a picture of Ringo Starr in the kitchen. In the entrance stands a blow-up of the battery with the word *Starr*.

On the shelf of the living room, in random order, blues and country music CDs and some jazz box set. I put a CD of John Lee Hooker. The intercom rings. Ringo is back from work: - *Did I wake you up?* – He asks climbing the stairs. - *I didn't wanna look for the keys.*

- *Don't worry; I didn't sleep* – I reply. He goes into the kitchen to make a coffee with zabaglione. He's whistling and moving in time imitating Lee Hooker's solos.

- *There are pictures of Ringo Starr everywhere* - I tell him.

- *Yes, it's a matter of six years ago. A young director wrote a story about the Beatles. He was a fan of them. The plot was a supposition focused on the relationship between the four after the dissolution of the band.*

*I was a cabaret in a club. I entered the scene with sunglasses; he, the director, came there by chance and saw me with a big nose, a beard and glasses; in the end, he wanted to know me to give me the part of Ringo. But do you know we've been in London for a couple of weeks?*

- *Really?*

- *Yes...what a crazy thing! Hyde Park, do you know? On Sundays we used Speakers, and people stopped. We had a dozen evenings in a pub.*

- *Cool.*
- *Wait, it's not over. There was a contest of lookalike. A guy from Manchester looks like the lookalike of Ringo and wins. So, I take a picture with him, and I wrote the dedication. It's the photo in the kitchen.*
- *This photo?*
- *Yes, that photo. Turn it, unplug it.*

I take the photo, I detach it gently, I turn it around, and there am written: *to my good friend Salvatore, peace and love, Ringo.*

- *Did you write it yourself?*
- *Yes.*
- *And this isn't Ringo Starr?*
- *No. Could I have chosen another stage name?*

Marsala, Via Sardegna 15. Two days have passed since my arrival in Sicily, and I have no news about Thomas. Our friends in Rome didn't hear him. His cellphone continues to be detached, and I can't find the address of the residence in Piedmont.

Waiting for his arrival, I go out for a walk. Some high school students, who I think they have skipped lessons, roam the city. I stop to get a coffee and a cannolo at the bar. I'm annoyed by the silence and the absence of Thomas. I call Willy again.

- *Hi. Do you have any news?*
- *No, Rick. I'm sorry. I can't find any Polonghera estate.*
- *How is it possible?*
- *I don't know. But it will only be a misunderstanding. How are you there?*
- *Good. The city is the right background. Thomas was right.*
- *Okay, Rick. As soon as I have news, I call you back.*
- *Yes, thanks. Later I'll hear Roby to see if she at least knows something. I greet you, Willy.*

I kept walking. I reviewed the monologues mentally, and I'm impressed. I recall the fall in love with the landscapes of Sicily the guys of Garibaldi saw for the first time, like me now. I imagine the days full of fibrillation, enthusiasm, fear of dying, and that tangle of feelings which meant above all to prove how rich and life is precious. I light a cigarette, and I stop to call Roby2.

- *My dear, how are you?* - She said.
- *Still no news?* I ask.
- *No, and you?*
- *Nothing, I also called Wilby, but even he couldn't contact him.*
- *Oh, Rick, there must be an explanation. This is an unforeseen difficulty...*
- *Ok, I greet you. We stay in touch, Ok?*

I walk. I relive the moment of that first landing. Chronicles report when entering the city, some of the places asked Garibaldi's troops for news, asking if the man had really been in their midst. Indicating him, they approached him to kiss his hands, meeting the general's scorn: *I'm a man who eats, drinks and shit like everyone else.* And so saying, he only asked them only a hug, kissing them first.

I'm going back to Ringo's house. He notices my disappointment.

- *News?*
- *I don't understand. His cell phone is off, and we can't find any family address...*
- *Well... it's strange. When I heard him, I was on the train, and it seemed very excited...*
- *Indeed...*
- *Just a moment* - Ringo says.
- *What's up?* - I ask.
- *Arianna. Why don't we call her? Do you think his sister doesn't know where Thomas is?*
- *You're a genius, Ringo. Do you have the number?*

Ringo search in his address book. Find the number, then he called and passed me the phone.

- *Hello, Arianna? I'm Riccardo.*
- *Riccardo! What a pleasure! How are you?*
- *Well, I'm in Sicily.*
- *Ah, in Sicily! Nice!*
- *Well... yes... but... Do you know something about Thomas?*
- *He's out. Did you know about the big news?*
- *No.*
- *Dad has included him in a company of a stable theater in the suburbs of Turin. The artistic director is a family friend. Oh, Riccardo: you can't understand how happy Thomas was. Do you realize? Stable Theater! We gave him this surprise.*

*In short, he needs to find a solution! And tell me about yourself, how are you going?*

*- Arianna... I'm in Sicily. I... I was waiting for your brother to...*

*- Riccardo? I can't hear you, Riccardo... as soon as Thomas comes back, he'll call you back, all right? Riccardo?*

I ended the phone calling. I don't have to explain anything to Ringo. He's near me, and Arianna's voice was too bright. He pats me on the shoulder. *Riccardo...* he says. I don't care. I go to my room and prepare my stuff. There's a funeral silence in the house.

*- I'll take you to the station.*

*- No. I need to walk. I'm going alone. Thanks for everything, Ringo.*

I go down the stairs, and I'm in the street. I walk. I see only the steps which separate me from the station. It's an earthquake of my soul so violent even the sky falls down, in the gashes of the earth.

Inside me, a primordial scream rises. I wanna cry, curse, hit and hurt me. The pleasure of dying. I don't understand for what obscure reason I try to call my brother. His phone is off; he will be informed of my call. But he'll not call, he has never done it all these years. Alone, far from home, without comfort. I have the same torment of my debut when I fall on the stage screaming to my mother in front of the audience and the company.

I still walk, the phone rings and even the ringtone of the messages. Willy, Mary, Roby: they're looking for me. I off it. I have nothing to say to anyone.

Rome, Via Appia 397. After a year from my trip to Sicily, I came back to work at the market. I haven't talked about the story of Thomas, but friends know it. Its there, locked inside. It kills me every time I think of it. I unload boxes, vans. I unload everything which allows me to escape my anger for life.

In carnival period the idea of a show was born and the managers of the kiosks, unanimously, gave me the responsibility of the initiative. Later, thanks the interest, it was decided to continue the commercial comedy daily. It's a kind of live carousel, a kilo of fruit and a monologue for free. It's business, in short, but also fun. Vanda collaborated with Marta *la formaggiara* and seemed she had forgotten the past grudge due to secrets only they know.

A neighborhood newspaper has dedicated an article to us. *They recite and sing in the kiosks of the market, among fruit baskets and fish boxes, among the light which reflects on the wet asphalt to hide the suicide. This will not be the Stardust, but they are poor and blissful stars of dust.*

Al Sapone says he still feels like a friend of mine, and I have to go back to working on the scenes, or not to work, according to the points of view. I have learned to avoid friends who try to make you feel guilty when your things seem to take a positive turn, and in bad times, however, they never leave you, reminding they have always been there for you: it's as if you were a friend, you must wish you always bad moments.

These dynamics have broken our group. Willy and Mary continue to have parties, but with other people and it's not important who they are, Mary and Willy just wanna have people around them.

Sometimes I meet Roby. It always happens in hours lost in the middle of the night.

A week ago, I was going to the supermarket where my brother works. When I saw him, I stayed there watching him work. I thought about the time flowing, to all of us who go our way. I didn't approach him, but Enrico also looked up. We look at ourselves from afar, for a few moments. Maybe an increase in blood pressure called us back, and our old disagreements seemed to be soothe. Then, someone looked for him at the microphone, and I went away. The deepest wound of our lives is caused by the lack of people with whom we have lived little. I keep trivial and simple memories of my parents. Nothing transcendental.

My presence for Enrico and his for me evoke a pain that we try to placate, avoiding each other. Something remained at a time when, too young, we had to grow up fast without having yet the attitude. Our paths split up as soon as we thought we could walk alone and we weren't able to imagine a crossing to meet every now and then.

Life or daily comedy... we pretended to lie only to ourselves. Every so often, sometimes I also think about Thomas Albergari. We no longer heard each other. Despite the poison inside me, the only thing I can't remove is to have fed a hope in vain. You feel like an asshole when you think to have been really happy, even if only for a moment. But it's still one of my best days.



## THE AUTHOR

He doesn't like people too sweet because they raise other people's glycaemia.

[www.enricomattioli.com/enrico-mattioli-3/](http://www.enricomattioli.com/enrico-mattioli-3/)

To purchase the paper version of the book, click on the link

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B085RR61TM>