

Primula Galantucci lives in a small town in the province of Como, her hometown, which she often mentions in her works. She had had a passion for writing since her primary school days when she won a scholarship for a theme entitled “Lo schiaffo del vento”(The Slap of the Wind). Primula took part in various poetry and literary competitions with great success. Unfortunately, she did not complete her law studies for work reasons but continued to study literary, linguistic, and psychological subjects independently.

She has been a volunteer of the Italian Red Cross for eight years and had to leave the association because she became a businesswoman by starting various offices. She attended various creative writing courses that gave her new ideas to continue writing her debut novel: “Accade tutto in un attimo” published by Chiado Books in 2019. In 2020 she published, with Chiado Books Publisher, her second novel, “The Non-existence of Time”, both of which are receiving multiple honourable mentions and national and international awards. In August, he published the short story “L’amico Pinocchio”. In November 2021, she published her third novel. She is a businesswoman, owner, and partner of two agencies, one for insurance and the other for car practices, located in the provinces of Como and Lecco.

She is so fond of music that she has studied piano and jazz singing.

Appointment at the elm

His wounds in the fight with his third victim had finally healed. It had been quite a struggle to fight that witch with the bandy nails who had no intention of surrendering to his will. He’d had to sedate her for a long time before freeing himself from her clutches. He’d still come out of it a bit bruised, with several abrasions on his arms and deep scratches on his cheeks. Still, now, at last, after two long months, the wounds were healing; at least he’d managed to hide the patches on his scalp that had caused the violent tearing off of an entire lock of his hair: he’d had to shave it almost with a brush and throw to the wind his discoloured braids that he’d managed to obtain with difficulty, as he wanted, after years of treatment. Because of that girl who had destroyed his hair, he had to hide his scalp under a cap to leave the house again, so his anger had become unmanageable. The only satisfaction he could derive from it was the thought that he had paid dearly for it anyway, that ferocious beast, and now he would certainly no longer be able to harm him in any way.

Sandor was no longer the submissive boy he had been in the past. Now he knew well how to defend himself, and the only thing that made him feel genuinely gratified was revenge, the desire to hurt his prey to death, which had become almost a need and had now reached the most senseless peak of his desire. It was not easy to lure his victims, but he had always managed to do so without arousing any suspicion, and he was confident that, in the place where he had decided to hide them, no one

would ever find them. The technique with which he managed to recruit them was always the same: he would start a conversation on social networks with many girls who met his requirements, and as soon as he managed to get in touch with them, he would invite them to meet him in person and offer him an ice-cream, their meeting point was the park of Villa Olmo and more precisely in the vicinity of the old plant with its centuries-old trunk and lush, shady foliage. Although he had to be scrupulously careful, watching out for hidden cameras and deflecting the possible investigations of those nerdy cops the authorities had unleashed all over the city, Sandor still managed to act unnoticed. He could spot the cops from a distance. They were often in plain clothes, but he had worked in a private police station for a few years before his life changed for good. He knew all the techniques they generally used, the methods of espionage, and the characteristics that private investigators had to have when they were looking for clues or suspects. He had no lack of imagination, and this time he had come up with a truly flawless plan. However, the only characteristic, which had to correspond to what would distinguish his prey, could not be overlooked to prey on her: she had to be a dark-haired girl with short hair and, an essential feature, she had to have one or more tattoos on her body.

Sandor loved tattoos; he loved discovering the body parts where they surfaced and were engraved, even better if they coloured them. He loved to stop and think about the time it had taken to draw them, so precise and without smudging; he felt the needles full of colour hitting the skin, going in and out quickly as the tattoo pen moved, tracing the lines of the sketch it was projecting and injecting it onto the part to be tattooed. He imagined he felt the intensity of that tingling, which became a sharp pain that suddenly faded as the needle moved to another side; the skin tearing as it let in the dye that slowly seeped in and mixed with the red colour of blood. He thought of the tattoo artist's steady hand and his almost carnal exaltation in imprinting his work of art on a human body. Instead, he liked to strip them from his victims' skin to preserve them so that they would live forever without suffering skin ageing as the epithelial tissue wrinkled. He preserved them with wax and formalin procedures. He then immortalised them in blocks of transparent synthetic resin so that they would last forever, not before he had numbered and catalogued them in his register called "Brown tattoos".

He was only seventeen years old when he fell victim to his tormentor, who had tricked him into offering to work for him in the backroom of a well-known gift shop in Bellagio. It's where he made models of various shapes out of acrylic material filled with pebbles he picked up on the public beach in San Giovanni, by the lake. He had invented a process whereby he would melt a certain type of resin by heating it and then mixing it with acrylic material. When it had cooled down properly, he would insert the stones, modelling it and giving it the shape of an object or an animal, which he would then leave to cool in the freezer until the consistency became so solid that it could no longer be changed.

Sandor had served a few days in Bassone prison because he was caught with a few grams of heroin in his jacket pocket, and when he was stopped, he was lost. He had started as a game and had not been able to get sober completely. He thought he could control his body even in abstinence but could not control his mind. He felt out of control, marginalised, and he felt inferior to others. He needed to work and earn money, so he took any job he could get. His boss had hired him because he would do whatever he told him to do without retaliation; otherwise, he would report him, and he would end up back in the slammer. He tortured him while keeping him chained up and continued to take advantage of him despite Sandor's screams. The last time he had seen him, he had been branded with the same object he used to brand his products with his initials. He had been tattooed with the initials of his employer's first and last name. He had screamed, so strong was the pain he had felt, feeling the red-hot iron burning and scratching his backside.

Still, when he had been freed from the chains that had held him down during the operation, Sandor had poured an entire bottle of acid in his tormentor's face. He had blinded him so that he would no longer be able to see the massacre of his shitty initials. While he was struggling with the pain, he felt he had hit him with a sharp awl, killing him instantly. He had left in silence, running, after having

erased the prints and any other evidence of his presence in that place, scared and in pain, he had returned to Como by ferry and holed up in his old house.

A few days later, plucking up courage, he decided to cut into his skin and cut away forever the symbol on his backside that marked the reprehensible slavery to which he had been subjected for so long. He'd had a high fever for two days and was in excruciating pain every time he had to disinfect the wound. He'd taken antibiotics and some painkillers and managed to dodge an almost certain infection and come through it all fine. He was finally able to walk without any more pain in his leg, even if he was left with a big mark and an ugly scar, and from that moment on, he had decided he wanted to collect tattoos. He wanted to do it in the most authentic and long-lasting way possible... So his victims had to be aware and proud to be part of his prestigious catalogue. Those who refused and rebelled, for example, with Vania the last time, were sedated by him and then woken up after the operation because Sandor wanted them to see their tattoos immortalized before with their own eyes being killed and disappeared forever.

That day Sandor finally felt in good shape, as well as having fixed his haircut, the scars left on his face by Vania's sharp nails had almost completely disappeared. He had applied a layer of foundation found in her handbag, and after putting on his trekking outfit, he had gone out for his afternoon jog to keep his muscles fit and strong, to test the terrain, and to meet Giulia.

Giulia was a girl in her thirties. They met as usual on Facebook and after snooping through her contacts, looking at all the photos with and without clothes, finding out which places she had visited and all the posts and interactions with her friends, he was sure he had understood her tastes. He was, therefore, convinced he knew her perfectly and that she was just the woman he was looking for. He had created a new fake profile, with a photo he had found somewhere, in which he described his artistic skills as a sculptor, portraying himself as a model young man with a quiet and gentle personality. Then he had asked Giulia to be his friend, and they had started chatting on social networks, eventually exchanging their mobile phone numbers for private messages. He was good at wooing the women he wanted to make fall into his trap. So after an endless exchange of messages that had lasted about two months, just long enough for him to recover, he had decided that the time had finally come to meet her in person. He had invited her to have ice cream with him and had arranged to meet her at the usual place: Olmo.

He had started walking out of his one-room flat hidden in an alley of the walled city and had begun to run, passing under Porta Torre, heading towards Viale Varese, and running through the promenade of the gardens under the maple trees. He couldn't even hear the rustle of the dry leaves and gravel crushed by his Adidas; his headphones were blaring Radiohead's "Creep", his favourite song.

When you were here before, I couldn't look you in the eye. You're just like an angel. Your skin makes me cry... When you were here before, I couldn't even look you in the eye; you're just like an angel, your skin makes me cry...

Nothing could distract his attention when he heard that song coming straight from his headphones to his brain.

You float like a feather in a beautiful world, I wish I was special, You're so fukin' special... You float like a feather, in a beautiful world, and I wish I was special, You're so damn special...

The singer's magnetic voice and especially the attack of the electric guitar always gave him an adrenaline rush. He liked to listen to that song repeatedly, to get the right charge and get into his darkest fantasies, effects comparable only to a pear shot directly into the vein.

But I'm a creep; I'm a weirdo; what the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here... But I'm a creep; I'm a weirdo; what the hell am I doing here? This place doesn't belong to me...

At the junction with Via Garibaldi, Sandor had proceeded along Viale Cavallotti and crossed the tree-lined avenues towards the Volta Temple.

I don't care if it hurts, I want to have control, I want a perfect body, I want a perfect soul, I want you to notice when I'm not around, you're so fuckin' special, I wish I was special... I don't care if it hurts, but I want to be in control, I want a perfect body, I want a perfect soul, I want you to notice when I'm not around, you're so fuckin' special, I wish I were special too...

Distracted by his music, he had walked quickly past a girl who had stopped by the lakeside gardens to tie her shoes, and when he bumped into her unintentionally, he dropped her pouch on the ground. He'd apologised, she'd bent down to pick it up, and Sandor had noticed a large tattoo of an eagle with coloured feathers on his lower back the moment the T-shirt had been lifted and his back slightly exposed.

But I'm a loser; I'm a monster, what the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here...

He didn't have such a beautiful tattoo. He would have loved to collect it among his exhibits. So he had pretended to sit on a bench while he kept an eye on his movements, even if he couldn't linger too long because he had to meet Giulia...

She's running out again, she's running out, she run, run, run, run. Run... She's running out again, she's running out, she runs, runs, runs, runs. She's running...

She had started to run again, so Sandor had gotten up in a rush and, attracted by the image of the eagle, keeping a safe distance, he had started to follow her.

Whatever makes you happy, whatever you want, you're so fucking special, I wish I was special... Whatever makes you happy, whatever you want, you're so damned special, and I wish I was special too...

Giulia was waiting for him at the Olmo, she had seen all his tattoos in the photos, and she knew them by heart. She had so many that she could indulge herself, and she couldn't wait to touch them with her hands, but that eagle running as fast as the wind had managed to disturb her thoughts.

But I'm a loser; I'm a monster, what the hell am I doing here? This place is not for me...

Giulia had seen him coming from afar. She had just managed to send a text message from her mobile phone, and then, after placing it on the bench where she had sat down to wait for him, she had gone to meet him and greeted him.

I told you to wait for me under the Elm! Sandor had scolded her, wiping the sweat from his forehead with his terrycloth wristband.

He was upset, confused, and pissed off. Giulia's arrival had distracted him, and he had lost sight of his eagle. He could no longer see it; he had let it fly away. It had flown too high, so now he would no longer be able to reach it. He wouldn't allow anyone to ruin his plans, distract him from his thoughts, all the fault of that bitch. Damn it!

He had turned off his iPod, even though the music was still pounding in his ears and brain. At that moment, he felt an overwhelming urge to hit Giulia until she was unconscious, to look for his eagle that had run away, but he couldn't do that until he had brought her home.

...But I'm a loser, I'm a monster, what the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here...

He felt the attack of the electric guitar beats straight into his stomach, into his chest, into his mind.

But I'm a creep, I'm a weirdo, what the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here...

After waiting all this time to make her acquaintance, Giulia had started to make a speech. She had not expected such a rude welcome, and it was beginning to scare her: that nervous expression that had suddenly painted itself on Sandor's face, those bloodshot eyes and then the foundation stains on his face that sweat had melted away, revealing some ugly, ill-concealed scars, they looked like huge scratches!

"Who were you writing to when you saw me coming? I don't want any surprises, is that clear?"

Sandor had begun to lose his temper. He realised he had raised his voice. He had to remain in control, or it might arouse suspicion. He had to stay calm if he wanted to complete the work that awaited him that evening and not risk screwing everything up, but something didn't quite add up in that story, or maybe it was his impression. He had just gotten nervous.

"I wasn't texting anyone at all, you must have seen it wrong, and I didn't have a phone in my hand".

Giulia was trying to keep calm, but she didn't like the guy at all, and if she had been suspicious of him before she met him, she was sure she would delete him from her life immediately.

"Are you accusing me of being a crazy visionary? Are you? But how dare you disrespect me? Who are you to behave this way with me? You have no right to talk to me in that tone".

Sandor couldn't control his anger any longer.

"Show me the phone immediately. That's an order!"

"But how dare you tell me what to do. I have no intention of giving you my mobile phone. Why would I do that then? What a nice claim! Is this the famous idyllic encounter you wanted to win me over with? But you know what? Get lost!"

Giulia turned around and walked towards the bench to retrieve her mobile phone. Sandor was blinded by rage, no one could afford to talk to him like that, and he would punish her severely this time. With a jerk, he grabbed her arm, made her fall to the grass, and held her down, shouting at her to stay still. Giulia tried to free herself with all her strength, but Sandor's grip did not allow her to move a single limb. She had spat in his face, and he had had to let go momentarily to slap her. Giulia's blouse sleeve had ripped as she tried to move, leaving a glimpse of her forearm, and just then, Sandor noticed that she didn't have any tattoos.

"You lied to me, you witch! Where are the tattoos you showed me in the pictures, huh? Talk, or I'll kill you now!"

Sandor had lost his temper completely; as he tried to find a justification for his lies, the suspicion that he had been tricked in some way was growing in him. He didn't accept that someone was lying to him, but she had tricked him, and he didn't understand the sense of it, only at that moment he couldn't waste time thinking, he had to act as quickly as possible and silence her before some passerby saw them. Giulia had tried to kick but was practically immobilised under his grip, so, forcing herself with

the only hand she could move, she put her finger in his eye. So, using the only writing she could move, she put her finger in his eye, and he, even more furious, put his hands around her neck, squeezing harder and harder, so much so that Giulia was beginning to be unable to breathe.

Giulia's mobile phone, which had been resting on the bench not far from them, began to ring incessantly. Sandor had to hurry; he couldn't wait any longer, and that damn phone that wouldn't stop ringing. He had spent all his strength in a final squeeze, and Giulia had lost consciousness. Sandor couldn't take her home, the sun hadn't set yet, and the sky was still evident. They would surely see him, so he had to hide her somewhere. He had carried Giulia's body behind the wall of Villa Olmo; watching out for passersby. There was a trap door to the boiler room, which was underground. He climbed down, holding her on his shoulders, and laid her on the floor. He had to get out of there as soon as possible, then at the latest, he would come back that same evening to collect the body.

But I'm a loser, I'm a monster, what the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here...

After closing the hatch, he ran towards the gate, but at a certain point, he remembered his phone. There might be some message addressed to him, some reference with which they could trace him. He had to go back and get it and disappear by throwing it into the lake. Near the bench there was a girl, Sandor would have pretended to have lost his mobile phone, but when he got closer he recognised her, it was her: his eagle!

Hello, stranger, I must have dropped my mobile phone while I was running.

What makes you so sure you dropped it here? She answered inquiringly.

Sandor was getting more confused; he shouldn't have told her that he might have dropped the phone. He should have said that he had dropped it on that bench. Damn it. He was getting himself into a mess!

"I sat on that bench and then when I started running again, I ran a few metres and realised I had lost it..".

He had gone to the bench, but the phone was gone.

"Did you happen to see it?"

"Actually, I've just found my friend's mobile phone who had warned me to reach her a little while ago, but it's strange that she left it here and disappeared into thin air. Would you help me look for it?"

Sandor didn't know which way to turn. He was starting to get nervous again and thought that the only solution would be to lock her in the trapdoor and come later to get her. She had a nice tattoo. An unmissable tattoo: her eagle!

While he was helping her look for Giulia, under the trees, in the park, near the lido's swimming pool, he had suggested that she enter the villa, which was still open to visitors at that time.

You never know if he's waiting for you in there. He had then added. As they were passing near the trap door, Sandor had seen the eagle again and had taken it by the arm by force, wanting to lock it in there so that it would never escape again.

However, at that very moment, she had turned her gaze to two passersby and made a gesture that Sandor had not interpreted correctly. They rushed towards the two, and Sandor had had to let go.

“Sorry, I was slipping”.

He tried to justify his behaviour.

“Tell us where you’ve hidden it,” one of them had started, looking at him with such contempt that it spilled out of him.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, it’s late, and now I have to go home..”.

He started to walk away, but the girl had held him by the arm.

“Have you decided to give up the search for your phone?”

“I don’t know who you are or what you want from me, but I don’t have time to waste with you”.

One of the two gentlemen had taken something out of his pocket. It looked like handcuffs, but Sandor couldn’t see properly. His eye was starting to hurt.

“Either you tell us where you’ve hidden it, or we’ll be forced to take you with us”.

The other had exclaimed before answering an incoming call on his mobile phone.

Sandor was about to blurt out when his phone started ringing as well. The girl with the eagle had looked him straight in the eye as she instructed him to answer the call by putting the phone on speaker. His two friends were keeping an eye on him, so Sandor had to listen and make everyone listen to the voice on the other end of the phone shouting.

“I’m down here; stop that murdering bastard. He almost strangled me and locked me in this hatch. Please let me out!”

Sandor stared at the phone in astonishment, he didn’t understand why, but something in this story was not right. There was a missing piece to the whole thing that he absolutely could not find, but he was sure he had miscalculated or missed some detail. He probably shouldn’t have returned to retrieve the damn phone, but how come the victim had another mobile phone from which he was now calling him? What kind of game was this? He looked at the girl with the eagle holding Julia’s mobile phone in one hand, and his gaze immediately fell on her wrists: the tattoos that coloured them and that protruded from the cuffs of her blouse had something familiar about them. Sandor couldn’t remember where he had seen them before, but he was almost sure they had something to do with Giulia. He was hunted, absent, feeling nothing but anger at not having that eagle to count among the collection of his most beautiful tattoos.

Don’t turn down a lucky charm

2020 had been a difficult year, and many schools suspended their studies because of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, the music teacher did not want to give up Christmas decorations at his school. Even though there would be no party, as there had been in previous years, he wanted to decorate the hall with bows, garlands, and coloured balls and make it truly magical.

After he had finished turning on all the lights, to see how they looked and get a taste of the Christmas atmosphere, the teacher went out to see how people decorated the tree in the village square this time. All the village women had joined in to embroider many multicoloured crocheted doilies, then stitched them all together to make a hand-embroidered tree. It was starting to get cold, and as the teacher was approaching to go back to school, he was stopped by a gentleman dressed in Father Christmas clothes, with a sleigh full of gifts, who offered him a bar of chocolate. He offered him a bar of chocolate. "Take a small packet!" he said.

The teacher did not want to accept. "No, thanks. Let's leave the gifts to the children". And he left.

He went back to the school, turned off all the lights, and went home. As he closed the door, however, he stumbled upon something lying on the mat, but it was so dark outside that he had to turn the lights back on to find out what it was. He bent down to pick it up, but there was no card with it, so, thinking someone had lost it, he carried it inside, leaving it in the shelter, and then left.

The next day the teacher arrived at the school. With the sunlight, he started looking outside in the car park to see if anyone had accidentally lost a note and slipped it on the ground, but it would not be easy to find it because it had snowed that night and the snow had covered everything. He had noticed that the upstairs neighbour was coming, the one who had asked him not to play after a certain time because the music bothered her. He asked her if that package was hers, but she knew nothing about it. So the teacher entered his beautiful decorated school stopped to do the end-of-year accounts, things had not gone so well, and there was not enough money to pay the expenses and salaries of his teachers. He decided to open the package unwrapped it, and it contained a lucky elf and no card.

He put the nice gnome on the piano and went home. As soon as he got home, the teacher realised that he no longer had his mobile phone. He had probably forgotten it at school, but it was forty kilometres away, and he did not want to go back. He was tired and sad, and no one would indeed look for him. He would get his phone back the next day. The next day was Christmas Eve.

Even though he had no classes with his pupils, the teacher had returned to his school just to get his mobile phone. He met his neighbour who, strangely enough, had politely greeted him.

"Good morning, teacher, I wanted to wish you a happy Christmas, and I also wanted to ask you what the title of that wonderful piece you played last night is!" He didn't feel like joking and couldn't remember having played any piece in the evening he didn't want to!

As soon as he opened the door he immediately saw his phone; it was on the floor. It had probably slipped out of his pocket the previous evening as he was going out. There was something strange about it; it looked as if someone had been there at night. Next to the phone was a note and on it only one sentence:

"You don't turn down a lucky charm". Signed Father Christmas.

The teacher had approached the piano and was fascinated by what he saw. The elf was sitting on the stool as if he wanted to play. After placing his hands on the keyboard, he sat down next to him and had started to play the music from the score, which he could not remember having left on the piano stand. It was a beautiful melody, embodying the magic of Christmas, and he could not remember knowing it or having ever played it before. When he had finished playing, the maestro put the score back, closed the piano keyboard, and placed the elf on the piano. He picked up the phone because, strangely enough, many messages were arriving from numbers, not in his address book. He read them;

they all said the same thing.

Merry Christmas teacher, I want to make an appointment with you because I want to enrol in your music school!

The happy teacher could not understand how people with unknown numbers could contact him. There were so many requests, and more were coming in. He then checked his outbox, and there was only one message, but he did not remember sending it himself. The message read:

You can't refuse a lucky charm. I'll give you a music lesson at my school. Attached is an audio clip.

He listened to it several times, the teacher was convinced that he was playing the notes of that beautiful score, but he couldn't remember ever recording it!

A dream named meatball

I dreamt that I was in Como, in Piazza Cavour. It was hot. I was wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt, a light skirt and sandals. There were many people there, and I was trying to figure out why as I stood up on tiptoe to look where everyone's eyes were. Amidst the crowd's cheering, I spotted a procession walking with elegant steps marked by drum rolls. A queen was carried on a throne, covered in red satin, by pages. The guards and attendants wore medieval clothes. I saw Frederick Barbarossa arrive with his crown on his white horse, and I knew I was on the final day of the Palio del Baradello.

Looking at that parade of dresses, hats, and wigs, I noticed a little dog staring at me. I bent down. It was really cute, small and chubby, with a pink and black face, long ears, and fur covering its brown eyes.

"How sweet you are", I said. "Where's your owner?" He looked at me, bellowing something I didn't understand. The ladies and bridesmaids had gone on stage to collect their awards and the flag that would belong to them until next year; then, the ceremony was over, and in a few minutes, the square had emptied. I had arrived at the Sinigaglia stadium, where I had parked, and as soon as I got into my car, I realised that the little dog I had met earlier in the square was on the passenger seat, but how could he have got in? It looked at me with those sweet eyes, begging me not to leave him.

"But what are you doing here? I can't take you home. Have you lost your master?"

No answer, of course.

I stroked him, and he had licked my hand: that was how we had become friends. He wore no collar, no tag, and no identifying mark. I had taken him in my arms.

"Now I'll take you to the place where we met and help you look for your master!"

It yelped but had let me take him without resistance. There wasn't a soul left in the square. I went into a bar to ask if anyone had reported the dog missing, but nobody knew anything. So I went back to the car and drove home in his company. I was sorry to leave him alone, he didn't seem to want to abandon me either, and he was so beautiful! If I hadn't been able to take him back to his owner, I would have gladly kept him. What would my family have told me about the new tenant? Would they accept him?

My family was in the company of some friends, and I had turned up with the little dog following me, wagging its tail and happy. They looked at me quizzically, trying to figure out where I got the dog.

"I met him in the square and then I found him in the car". I tried to explain, but they didn't believe me, so our acquaintance had decided what I should do.

"Phone the kennel, the dog surely belongs to someone, so they can return it to you!" My whole family agreed with her. I hadn't thought of that, but I had already become attached to him, and my idea was to keep him with me. The lady had taken her mobile phone out of her purse and dialled a number.

"I'll take care of it..". she said. Shortly afterward, the person in charge of the municipal kennel showed up. A special device had located the dog's microchip. The small screen showed its name, age, breed, and, unfortunately, the name and telephone number of the owner, who had been contacted immediately. After checking that it had not been abandoned, I gave him my address.

Meatball. That was the dog's name. Meatball kept his eyes down as if he understood that he would have to abandon me. I prepared a bowl of milk and some biscuits to calm him down. When the doorbell rang, Meatball recognised his owners and ran towards them happily. They took him in their arms; they were thrilled to find him. They thought they had lost him forever. I was sad, I had to let him go with them, but I was also happy that Meatball had found his family again. He had looked at me with those sweet eyes and barked goodbye before leaving.

I woke up with the sound of his voice, it was only a dream, but Meatball will always remain in my heart.

The non-existence of time

It's Christmas Eve. I'm walking through the streets of Como to breathe in the Christmas atmosphere that characterises my town with 'La città dei balocchi' (the city of toys), the festive decor with which the city is dressed during this period. Merchants from every region of Italy display their gastronomic delicacies, clothing, and costume jewellery in the typical wooden houses, covered with bamboo that simulates snow, specially prepared. The atmosphere is magical: piped-in music, glittering shop windows, festive decorations, an ice-skating rink in the middle of Piazza Cavour with a view of the lake, animated projections on all the buildings in the centre, and then people strolling around looking for the latest gift, the scent of spiced drinks wafting through the air, lovers exchanging tenderness - everything resembles a fairy tale.

Near a stall displaying pashminas, I meet Silvana, the novel's real protagonist. It's been a few years since we last saw each other: time has changed both of us, in our appearance and character, due to the events that have taken place during this long period. There was no way of finding her anywhere; although I had looked for her, it was as if she had left without leaving a new address. The joy of seeing each other again is so great that we decide to take advantage of the warmth of a cafeteria where we are

sitting to refresh ourselves from the cold temperature outside.

I'm a little regretful that I haven't heard from Silvana in all this time, but she tells me that she had to fight against a nasty illness, from which she has since recovered. She didn't want to see or talk to anyone during the various therapies she had to endure. Now she is well, finally cured. We started telling each other how our respective lives have been during this long period. I told her about my work, the opening of a second office. I told her that I had published my autobiographical novel entitled "Accade tutto in un attimo" (It all happens in an instant).

At this point, Silvana confessed her desire to write her own story and asked me if I would be willing to do it for her. I was honoured by her request, which flattered me, and so, while we sipped tea and hot chocolate, she began to tell me about the most significant stages and passages of her life. I immediately wrote her story. The narration went through different time frames and flashbacks. Silvana told me everything she remembered about her life, starting from her childhood. The central theme is the memory of her youth: the joys, the loves, the sorrows, the loss of her beloved father, and in particular, the conflictual relationship she has always had with her mother. Silvana never understood why, unlike her two older sisters, her mother never showed her affection and even seemed to resent her. Silvana remembered her grandmother's unconditional affection, her father's love, and understanding, who always tried to please her and made her think about her decisions. She continually tried to understand why her mother had no love for her. Silvana revealed her first love, immature as an adolescent, and the passionate love she discovers for an older man. There was also her mother's extra-marital affair with another man, her father's handicraft work, supporting the family's welfare.

As soon as Silvana finished her studies and graduated, she asked her father to give her a trip to Spain as a present. On this trip, she met Claudio and began a relationship with more than just friendship.

Amidst various vicissitudes and her hesitancy about leaving her town in the Veneto to move to Como, where Claudio lived and worked, as he had asked her to do to follow him, Silvana initially decided to break off relations with him. Although she was sorry, she disappeared, never to be found because she did not want to abandon her father, who had become seriously ill in the meantime.

She discovered, however, that she had fallen in love with him and no longer knew how to meet him again. Despite being a playboy, Claudio had lost his head for Silvana after returning from holiday, abruptly leaving his pregnant girlfriend. Having no contact details where he could find Silvana, he began a frantic search by contacting all the telephone numbers in the Veneto region because he had managed to get her surname by chance. The investigation became difficult and exasperating, but in the end, he managed to get contact from a friend of his who, knowing how much Silvana wanted to find him, revealed the place where he could see her.

Silvana is on the beach in Jesolo, and while she was sunbathing and thinking about Claudio, she saw him appear on the beach; it seemed like a hallucination. But it was him, so she ran towards him and decided not to leave him anymore. When her father died, Silvana decided she no longer wanted to stay in her village with her mother and moved to Como. Claudio worked in his father's company. He is not a good businessman, and to satisfy all his vices, rebuked by a couple of friends; he started smuggling money and valuables across the Swiss border to Luxembourg.

When Silvana arrived, the welcome was not what she expected. She is forced to live in a hotel for a few months and then moved into the house he had renovated. She was alone for a while before he started living with her. Life together became more and more difficult for Claudio because he was not used to justifying his behaviour and was not mature enough to take responsibility. On the one hand, his

ex-girlfriend had given birth to his daughter. Now he also had Silvana, who demanded the right attention/ But then there were all his amorous escapades which he was not ready to give up.

Claudio involved Silvana in smuggling without telling her the reason for the trip, including a couple of friends. On their return to customs, they were stopped and searched, and the customs officers discovered some of the stolen goods. The police detained him, and Silvana, unaware of the situation, became angry and forced Claudio to stop smuggling. He was nervous and resented Silvana because she wanted to limit his movements.

In the meantime, he has bought a sailboat and has lost his head over their friend's wife. He continues to smuggle without telling Silvana anything. During one of the trips, he found himself alone with this woman who had taken his mind and discovered that she had the same desires as him. They decided to spend a weekend together on a sailing boat. Silvana learned everything about this affair and left Claudio for good, secretly buying a flat where she moved to live alone. She continued to work and then fell seriously ill.

She had a long period of therapy, hospitalisation, treatment and bone marrow transplant, and chemotherapy. Albeit her suffering, she fought hard to recover.

In the meantime, her mother, who after her father's death did not wait a single day to bring home the man she had secretly loved, and whom Silvana had therefore decided never to see again, aged and no longer self-sufficient. She was taken to an old people's home where she fell ill and died. Silvana decided to go and say her last goodbye. She discovered that her lover's body had also been buried in the family tomb where her father is buried. Silvana went for the last time to see her home, the one where she lived during her youth and which her sisters have meanwhile decided to sell to a construction company that will soon tear it down and build a residential complex in its place. Her town has changed, and she finds it totally different from the last time she was there when she was young. Many memories flood her mind, and when she is finally near the gate of her house she cannot get in because the rusty key has broken off in the latch. She meets an old acquaintance who reminds her of many moments from when she was a child. The next day she managed to get in through a hole in the hedge, and as soon as she opened the door, she found that old family environment that had marked so many good and bad moments, but in any case, linked to a carefree time in the past. He decides to see the interior of the house for the last time before demolition and visit all the rooms, discovering that, despite the wear and tear of time, everything is still as it once was: the furniture, the living room with the staircase leading to the upper floors, the bathroom where she used to hide matches behind the doorframe to smoke in secret from her parents, the nursery with her school books and comics, her grandmother's room with the crank gramophone, her parents' bedroom... As she approached her mother's petineuse in her room which was a forbidden and inaccessible place, Silvana discovered a hole on the side of the mirror. By chance, before leaving, she found a strange key that opens a secret compartment. After opening it, she found inside the photos and letters that her mother had exchanged with her lover many years ago, which had been jealously guarded and explained why Silvana was not accepted when her mother discovered she was pregnant. The love her mother had harboured for the man had been suspended, and then they had been reunited. They were even in death and beyond life.

It all happens in an instant

The clock on the wall just struck 11 p.m. It is a sultry evening at the beginning of August, and three volunteers on duty for the Red Cross of Padua are getting ready for bed. They are chatting and exchanging jokes while a bat, attracted by the light, enters Max's room, and frightened Max calls the

others to help. While the boys, seeing the scene, begin to laugh out loud, the deafening sound of the switchboard brings them back to reality: it's a 911 call, they have to get out in a hurry, there's been an accident: it's a Code Red.

The scenario that awaits them on arrival is nothing short of horrifying. One person is dead, and four people are seriously injured in a car crumpled under a lorry. An entire family is destroyed, and there is blood everywhere, lots of blood. Years later I have never stopped thinking about the accident in which I lost both my parents.

I work for an accountant as an employment consultant. Life has forced me to work at different jobs to get ahead and gain a social position. Still, people, owners, and clients themselves are becoming more and more demanding, demanding the impossible. I feel more and more dissatisfied, and I can't stand the indifference of my colleagues, the social careerism, the indifference of the owners, and the arrogance and rudeness of the clients of the studio I work for. I dream of being able to do something that will reward me morally.

One day, after finishing work, I decided to go for a walk on Lake Como: the lake's waters have always had a relaxing power on me since childhood. I met a French lady who stopped me to ask me for information and told me a short story about her life. It is a touching and romantic story, and she continues on her way, and we say a hasty goodbye. After a while I notice a group of people standing around someone slumped over on the pavement: the sirens of an ambulance arriving, the rush of the rescuers, the doctor defibrillating, and the person who has fainted is, unfortunately, her, that French lady who was talking to me only a few minutes before. It all lasts a fraction of a second, and she is immediately taken to the ambulance. She didn't make it; her heart stopped. I am shocked, sorry, and realise that the time has come to learn some first aid, thinking that if I had been able to give her at least one heart massage, I could have saved her. I bent down to pick up a letter, on the envelope was a name: Sophie. The letter was sent to Sophie by the man she had loved in her youth, who wrote to her on her deathbed asking her to forgive him for never being able to leave his wife to be with her, the only love of his life. Together they had a daughter whom Sophie, in order to return to her family, had had to abandon and leave for adoption in the hospital immediately after giving birth. One day, leaving the office where I work and taking an alternative route because of road works, I came across a poster of the Italian Red Cross recruiting volunteers for the upcoming new course. After various trials and tribulations, doubts, and fears linked to memories of my accident, I decided to enrol, to help those in need and, at the same time to overcome the trauma I had suffered. I remember the worst moments of my past with various flashbacks: from the head-on impact with the truck to the hospital admission, the putting in traction of the fractured femur, and the looks from the nurses who knew what had happened. When all my relatives arrived at the hospital, I realised that there was something they had kept from me and I forced my fiancé to tell me the truth. The excruciating pain of what I learned will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I remember my return home in the ambulance. I would have done anything not to come back; I talked about it with the volunteer who is accompanying me. I confessed to him that I would much rather be in his place than in mine, that I would like to help someone as he is now doing with me, and he told me that we could all become volunteers if we wanted to: all we need to do is follow courses with a bit of commitment and goodwill. From that moment on, I swear to myself that I will attend a course for aspiring volunteers as soon as I can do so.

During the course at the C.R.I., I took care of various tasks before I could get to the rescue of people injured in accidents, such as transporting disabled children, through which I give and receive love. This is where I found a lot of food for thought and tried to cheer up those defenceless little creatures by playing with them. I met Silvia among the aspiring volunteers, a girl who looks after her mother's dialysis. During the session of lessons at the end, the participant was qualified to transport

these patients. Silvia confides in me that the one who adopted her considered her mother and was afraid of losing her. A liking is born between Silvia and Massimo, one of our monitors, who has also recently lost his father. Silvia felt very attracted to Massimo even though she didn't understand why, as he was not the kind of boy she would like to be engaged to. But he is friendly, kind, and something in his manner fascinates her.

One day Silvia is summoned to a notary's office in Como, and, unbeknownst to her, she inherited some property given to her by her biological father to be shared with a brother she never knew existed. She discovered that Massimo was her brother and that Sophie was her birth mother. Unfortunately, his birth parents were both dead, so he could not know them, but at least now he knew who they were. She had a brother she already loved very much.

I describe the three modules of the volunteer course and the gradual qualification process until I finally reach the last step: the examination with the 118 and the final qualification as a volunteer rescue worker. I tell the story of how a shift in the C.R.I. is carried out, talking about an ambulance trip to help a patient in a state of drunkenness.

The novel ends with a flight to Brindisi, where I go to sign the sale of the house that was my grandmother's home and of which I keep the most beautiful memories of my happy and carefree childhood. I describe the flavours and colours of that land, of which nothing belongs to me anymore. I meet my aunt and uncle, whom I haven't seen for many years, and they invite me to stay, but work commitments force me to return immediately to Como. At the airport, I remember my grandmother's love, when in the summer I used to visit her with my family and we stayed together in that house, and I hope that grandmother is not too angry with me, now that her house has been sold. I am detained at the metal detector checkpoint because, inexplicably, the metal detector does not stop beeping as I pass through and I risk missing my plane. I'm afraid I won't be able to leave; I don't understand why the day has been emotionally taxing, and I would like to get home soon. I think this sale marks the end of a chapter in my life, but in the meantime, the searches continue and according to the airport staff, I am certainly carrying some metal object. I think about the accident, the operation, I think about everything that has been in my life, and suddenly, it occurs to me that I have a nail in my femur. I say so, and only then do the airport staff let me through.

Before leaving, I stopped at the services and noticed a girl who had fainted on the floor on my arrival in Milan. I tried to revive her, and she recovered. Now I can feel helpful and am a real rescuer! It is late Outside, my husband is waiting for me in the Milan rain, he is a bit worried about the wait, but the day is over, and I will tell him everything on the way home.

To my father
(You appear to me suddenly and so I think of you)

I did not think of you
I forced it on myself
and for all these years, voluntarily,
I haven't thought about you.
To you who ran away to an unreachable planet
To you who were my first love
Who knew how to give me a caress
To you who gave me life: this life!
I haven't thought of you since

Because otherwise the darkness that surrounds me
would have become darkness
And then an ordinary day
that has no particular date to remember
you suddenly appear to me
In the dull colours of a leaden sky
in a distant scent of incoming rain.
You appear to me with arrogance in the memory of an embrace
in that feeling of not giving in to impotence
of always finding the necessary strength to overcome
the emptiness of everything around us,
the wickedness of those who want to see us defeated.
You suddenly appear to me and so I think of you
and I know that I am not alone.

To my mother
(What I am now I owe to you)

If you had been asked what was for you the most beautiful memory
of your whole life
you would have answered the first time you saw me.
If they asked me what was the worst memory for me
I would answer the last time I saw you.
In between there were 20 years of love.
You taught me how to walk,
you gave me sweetness and the ability to appreciate
even the little things,
to see the goodness in people's eyes,
you taught me to love and to fall in love.
How many times have you and I lost our way
in the depths of a poem
or admiring a sunset that painted its colours
in the distant scent of spring.
Together we have laughed and cried and faced the most difficult
life's most difficult obstacles.
You taught me to grow, to be beautiful inside and out,
to be a woman, charming and elegant.
You made me an educated, intelligent and special person,
who I now know myself to be.
But you didn't teach me to be strong enough
because I always cry when I think of you.
You left too soon
while I still needed you.
I thank you for what you did for me
and for what you made me become.
Without you I would never have existed,
All my life you will live inside me.