

Presolini

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Pier Paolo Pasolini
Boys of life
(1955)

Itabook n. 118

The novel, which earned Pasolini a trial for pornography and the role of provocateur of the respectable society, tells the story of the day of a group of very young Roman underclasses. Moved by primordial needs (hunger, fear, the search for solidarity), the "boys of life" swarm from the suburbs of 1950s Rome towards the centre, in a picaresque itinerary made up of multiple encounters, comic, tragic and grotesque events . The young people alternate gratuitous violence with pathetic generosity, carrying out a sort of initiatory rite in a contradictory Rome.

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I THE FERROBEDO

And underneath the Mazzini monument...

Popular song

It was a very hot July day. Riccetto, who was due to make his first communion and confirmation, had already gotten up at five; but as he went down Via Donna Olimpia in his long gray trousers and white blouse, rather than a communicant or a soldier of Jesus he looked like a kid when he goes off along the Tiber to pick up. With a company of males like him, all dressed in white, he went down to the church of Divine Providence, where at nine Don Pizzuto gave him communion and at eleven the Bishop confirmed him. Riccetto, however, was in a great hurry to cut: from Monteverde down to the Trastevere station you could only hear a single continuous noise of cars. You could hear the horns and the engines revving up the climbs and curves, filling the suburbs already scorched by the early morning sun with a deafening roar. As soon as the Bishop's sermon was over, Don Pizzuto and two or three young clerics took the boys into the recreation yard to take photographs: the Bishop walked among them blessing the boys' families who knelt as he passed. Riccetto felt annoyed, there in the middle, and decided to leave everyone behind: he went out through the empty church, but at the door he met his companion who said to him: - Aòh, when are you going? - I'm going home, - said Riccetto, - I'm hungry. - Come to my house, no, to the son of a slut, - the friend shouted after him, - who is there for lunch -. But Riccetto didn't get away with it at all and ran away on the asphalt that was boiling in the sun. All of Rome was a single roar: only up there, there was silence, but it was as charged as a mine. Riccetto went to change.

From Monteverde Vecchio to the Granatieri the road is short: just pass the Prato, and cut between the buildings under construction around the Viale dei Quattro Venti: avalanches of rubbish, houses not yet finished and already in ruins, large muddy earthworks, embankments full of filth. Via Abate Ugone was a stone's throw away. The crowd down the quiet, asphalted streets of Monteverde Vecchio was all descending in the direction of the skyscrapers: we could already see the trucks too, endless columns,

mixed with vans, motorcycles, armored cars. Riccetto embarked among the crowd that was rushing towards the warehouses.

The Ferrobedò down there was like an immense courtyard, a fenced prairie, sunken in a valley, the size of a square or a cattle market: doors opened along the rectangular fence: on one side there were regular little houses of wood, on the other the warehouses. Riccetto with the herd of people crossed the long Ferrobedò, among the screaming crowd, and arrived in front of one of the houses. But there were four Germans there who wouldn't let them pass. Next to the door there was an overturned table: Riccetto glued it to himself and ran towards the exit. As soon as he was outside he met a young man who said to him: - What are you doing? – I'll take it home, I'll take it with me, – replied Riccetto. – Come with me, fool, let's go get the best stuff.

“I'm coming now,” said Riccetto. He threw the table and someone else who was passing by took it.

With the young man he returned to Ferrobedò and went into the warehouses: there they took a lot of canapetti. Then the young man said: – Come here and glue the nails. So among the ropes, nails and other things, Riccetto made five return trips to Donna Olimpia. The sun was breaking the stones, in the midst of after lunch, but the Ferrobedò continued to be full of people who competed with the trucks launched down Trastevere, Porta Portese, the Mattatoio, San Paolo, echoing the fiery air. Upon returning from the fifth journey, Riccetto and the young man saw a horse with a cart near the fence, between two houses. They approached to see if they could attempt the coup. In the meantime, Riccetto had discovered a cache of weapons in a small house and had put a machine gun over his shoulder and two pistols on his waist. Thus armed to the teeth he mounted the horse.

But a German came and chased them away.

While Riccetto was traveling with bags of canapetti up and down from Donna Olimpia to the warehouses, Marcello was with the other males in the Buon Pastore block. The tub was teeming with kids taking a bath, making a lot of noise. On the dirty lawns all around others were playing with a ball.

Agnolo asked: – Where is Riccetto staying?

“He's off to communion, he's off,” shouted Marcello.

– His little soul! – said Agnolo.

“Mo will be at lunch with his friend,” added Marcello.

Up there at the Good Shepherd pool, nothing was known yet. The sun beat down silently on the Madonna del Riposo, Casaletto and, behind, Primavalle. When they returned from the bathroom they passed through the Prato, where there was a German camp.

They began to observe, but a motorcycle with a wheelchair passed by, and the German in the wheelchair shouted to the males: – Rausch, infected area –. The Military Hospital was nearby. – And what do we care? – Marcello shouted: the motorcycle had slowed down in the meantime, the German jumped out of the wheelchair and gave Marcello a pizza which made him turn the other way. With his mouth all swollen, Marcello turned like a snake and, sliding down the slope with his companions, gave him a raspberry: in the flight they made, laughing and screaming, they arrived directly in front of the Barracks. There they met other companions. – And what are you doing there? – said these, all dirty and foolish.

- Why? – asked Agnolo, – what is there to do? – Annate ar Ferrobedò, if you want to see something –. They went there in a hurry and as soon as they arrived they immediately headed through the chaos towards the mechanical workshop. – Let's dismantle the engine – shouted Agnolo. Marcello, however, left the mechanical workshop and found himself alone in the middle of the chaos, in front of the tar pit. He was about to fall into it, and drown like an Indian in quicksand, when he was stopped by a scream: - To Marcè, watch out, to Marcè! – It was that boy of a slut Riccetto with some other friends. So he went around with them. They entered a warehouse and plundered cans of grease, lathe belts and iron. Marcello took half a quintal home and threw the goods in a small courtyard, where her mother couldn't see them immediately. She hadn't come home since the morning: her mother beat him. "Now you're gone, you wretch," she shouted at him, cracking him. "I'm off to take a bath, I'm off," said Marcello, who was a little dazed and thin as a cricket, trying to ward off the blows. Then his older brother came and saw the warehouse in the courtyard. - Big ass, - he shouted at him, - I'm stealing this merchandise, I'm a slut's son -. So Marcello went back down to Ferrobedò with his brother, and this time they took car tires away from a wagon. Evening was already falling and the sun was hotter than ever: Ferrobedò was already more crowded than a fair, we couldn't move anymore. Every now and then someone shouted: - Run away, run away, there are Germans there - to make the others run away and steal everything themselves.

The next day Riccetto and Marcello, who had taken a liking to it, went down together to the Caciara, the General Markets, which were closed. All around was a large mass of people and Germans, walking back and forth shooting in the air. But more than the Germans who prevented entry and broke the ... it was the Apai. But the crowd grew more and more, pressing against the gates, banging, shouting, calling the dead. The attack began and even those stinking Italians gave up. The streets around the Markets were black with people, the Markets empty like a cemetery, under a sun that crumbled them: as soon as the gates were opened, they filled up in an instant.

At the General Markets there was nothing, not even a cabbage stalk. The crowd began wandering around the warehouses, under the sheds, in the shops, because they didn't want to resign themselves to being left empty-handed. Finally a group of young men discovered a cellar that seemed full: from the railings you could see piles of tires and tubulars, tarpaulins, tarpaulins, and, on the shelves, some wheels of cheese. The word spread immediately: five or six hundred people rushed after the leading group. The door was broken down, and everyone threw themselves in, crushing each other. Riccetto and Marcello were in the middle. They were swallowed by the suction of the crowd, almost without touching the ground with their feet, through the door. We went down a spiral staircase: the crowd behind pushed, and some women screamed half-stifled. The spiral staircase was overflowing with people. A thin iron railing gave way, split, and a woman fell down screaming and hit her head on a step at the bottom. Those left outside continued to push. "She's dead," shouted a man from the back of the cellar. "She's dead," some of the women started screaming in fear; it was impossible to enter or exit. Marcello continued to go down the steps. After all, he made a leap over the corpse, rushed into the cellar and filled the bag with tires together with the other young people who took everything they could. Riccetto had disappeared, perhaps he had escaped. The crowd had dispersed. Marcello climbed over the dead woman again and ran towards the house.

At the White Bridge there was the militia. They stopped him and took his stuff. But he didn't leave there and stood aside dejectedly with the empty bag. From Caciara shortly afterwards Riccetto also went up to the Ponte Bianco. – Well? – He told him. - I had taken the tires and now they stole

them from me, - replied Marcello with a black face. – What are these assholes doing, why aren't they doing that... theirs! – shouted Riccetto.

Behind the Ponte Bianco there were no houses but an entire immense construction area, at the end of which, around the furrow of the Viale dei Quattro Venti, as deep as a torrent, stretched out limed Monteverde. Riccetto and Marcello sat down in the sun on a nearby lawn, black and bare, to watch the Apai cheat people. After a while, however, the group of young men arrived at the Bridge with bags full of cheeses. The Apai tried to stop them, but they attacked them head-on, began to argue badly with certain faces that the Apai thought it was better to leave alone: they left their belongings to the young men, and also gave them back to Marcello and the others who had they were very close to what they had stolen from them. Jumping with satisfaction and calculating what they would have gained, Riccetto and Marcello took the road to Donna Olimpia, and all the others dispersed too. At the White Bridge, with the Apai, only the smell of filth heated by the sun remained.

On the clearing of beaten earth under the Monte di Splendore, a hump of two or three meters that blocked Monteverde and Ferrobedò from view, and, on the horizon, the line of the sea, when the children were now tired of playing, a on Saturday, some older young men stood in front of the goal with the ball at their feet. They formed a circle and began to dribble, hitting the ball with the instep, so as to make it slide low to the ground, without effect, with nice sharp taps. After a while they were all wet with sweat, but they didn't want to take off their party jackets or their blue wool sweaters with black or yellow stripes, because of the completely casual and playful air with which they had started playing. But since the kids who were around might perhaps have thought that they were fanatics playing under that sun, dressed like that, they laughed and made fun of each other, but in such a way as to take away any desire to joke from the others.

Between passes and stops we had a chat. – Kill how limp you are today, Alvà! – shouted a dark-haired man, his hair smeared with brilliantine. – 'And women,' he then said, doing an overturn. - Fuck you..., - Alvaro replied, with a face full of bones, which seemed all bruised, and a big head that if a louse had wanted to go around him he would have died of old age.

He tried to make a finesse by hitting the ball with his heel, but he made a smooth shot, and the ball rolled away towards Riccetto and the others who were lounging around on the dirty grass.

Agnolo the redhead stood up and without haste threw the ball back towards the young men. – You don't want to waste it, you know, – shouted Rocco, referring to Alvaro, – tonight we'll have to spend tons of it.

– They go to the pipes, – Agnolo said to the others. At that moment the three o'clock sirens sounded at Ferrobedò and the other distant factories, down towards Testaccio, the Port, San Paolo. Riccetto and Marcello got up and without saying anything to anyone they went down via Ozanam, and, under the hot sun, they made their way to the Ponte Bianco, to attack the 13th or 28th. They had started with the Ferrobedò, they had continued with the Americans, and now they were going to waste. It is true that Riccetto had been working for some time: he had been hired as a boy in the truck service by someone from Monteverde Nuovo. But then he had stolen half a sack from the master, and he had sent him away. So they spent the afternoons doing nothing, at Donna Olimpia, on Monte di Casadio, with the other boys who played in the little hump yellowed in the sun, and later with the women who came to hang out our clothes on the burnt grass. Or they went to play football there on the open space between the Skyscrapers and the Monte di Splendore, among hundreds of males playing in the courtyards invaded by the sun, on the dry lawns, in via Ozanam or via Donna Olimpia, in front of the Franceschi elementary schools full of displaced people and evicted.

Ponte Garibaldi, when Riccetto and Marcello got there by jumping off the buffers, was completely empty under the African sun: but under its pylons, the Ciriola was swarming with bathers. Riccetto and Marcello, alone on the entire bridge, with their cucchia on the red-hot iron railing, remained for a while watching the rivermen sunbathing on the float, or playing cards, or acting as a current. Then after arguing a bit about the itinerary, they got back on the old half-empty tram which was creaking and scraping towards San Paolo. At the Ostia station they stopped walking doggystyle between the bar tables, at the newsagent and the stalls or between the ticket office walkways to collect some stubs. But they were already bored, the heat made them breathless, and woe betide if there hadn't been that little breeze coming from the sea. – To Riccè, – said Marcello, half pissed off, – why

don't we go for a swim too? - And let's go, - he said with his mouth crooked and Riccetto shrugging his shoulders.

Behind the Paolino Park and the golden facade of San Paolo, the Tiber flowed beyond a large embankment full of billboards: and it was empty, without factories, without boats, without bathers, and on the right it was all bristling with cranes, antennas and chimneys, with the enormous gasometer against the sky, and the whole neighborhood of Monteverde, on the horizon, above the putrid and burnt embankments, with its old villas like little boxes vanished in the light. Right below there were the pillars of an unbuilt bridge with dirty water forming eddies around it, the shore towards San Paolo was full of reeds and thickets. Riccetto and Marcello ran down the middle and arrived under the first pylon, on the water. But they went swimming further towards the sea, half a kilometer further down, where the Tiber began a long curve.

Riccetto was standing naked, lying on the weeds, with his hands under his head looking into the air.

- Have you ever been to Ostia? - he asked Marcello all at once. - Damn you, - replied Marcello, - don't you know that I was born there? - But he died there - Riccetto said with a grimace, looking at him - you never told me that, you know! - Well? - said the other. - Have you ever been on a ship in the middle of the sea? - Riccetto asked curiously. - Of course, Marcello said slyly. - Where? - Riccetto continued. - Kill it, Riccè, - said Marcello happily, how many things you know! And if you remember, I wasn't even there for three years, I wasn't even there! - I know you've been on the ship like me, you idiot! - Riccetto said contemptuously - "I'm a c...", the other quickly retorted, "I was going around on my uncle's sailing boat every day! - Fuck you..., go! - Riccetto said, smacking his mouth. - He zeeeeppi them, - he said then he, looking over the water, - zeeeeppi them! - Some debris, a dirty box and a urinal passed along the surface of the current. Riccetto and Marcello went to the edge of the oil-black river. - I would love to take a boat trip! - said Riccetto with a heartfelt expression, looking at the box as it went to its destiny swinging among the rubbish. - Don't you know that they are Ciriola and they rent out boats? - said Marcello. - Yes, and whoever gets away with it - Riccetto said darkly. - Damn, if we go to the pipes too, what do you care - said Marcello, excited by the idea; - Agnoletto has already made up for the tire remover - Aòh, - said Riccetto, - I'm okay with that!

They stayed there until late, lying with their heads on their shorts stained by dust and sweat: no matter who made them, they made the effort to leave. All around was full of bushes and dry reeds; but under the water there was also gravel and gravel. They enjoyed throwing harps on the water and even when they finally decided to leave, they continued, half undressed, to haul them up, towards the other bank or against the swallows that skimmed the surface of the river.

They even threw whole handfuls of gravel, shouting and having fun: the pebbles fell everywhere on the bushes. But suddenly they heard a cry, as if someone was calling them. They turned and in the already slightly dark air, not far away, they saw a black man, kneeling on the grass. Riccetto and Marcello, who had immediately understood the situation, cut, but as soon as they were at a certain distance, they took another handful of gravel and threw it towards those bushes.

Then with her tits half out, pissed off, the slut stood up and started screaming at them.

– And shut up, – shouted Riccetto sardonically with his hands like a funnel, – you're losing like ducks, you ugly slut! – But at that moment the black man stood up like a beast, and holding his trousers with one hand and a knife with the other, he started running after him. Riccetto and Marcello escaped shouting for help, among the thickets, towards the embankment, up the steep slope: once they reached the top, they had the strength to look back for a moment and saw the black man at the bottom who was waving the knife in air and screamed. Riccetto and Marcello ran down again, and looking at each other they couldn't stop laughing; Riccetto even started rolling on the ground in the dust; laughing, he looked at Marcello and shouted: - Oh God, what has come over you with paralysis in Marcè?

With that flight, they had reached the Tiber riverfront right in the direction of the façade of San Paolo which was still shining faintly in the sun. They went down towards the Paolino Park, which at the end among the small trees was swarming with workers and soldiers coming down on their free exit from Cecchignola, and they skirted the basilica, along an empty and poorly lit stretch of road. A blind man with his back against the wall and his legs abandoned on the pavement was asking for alms.

Riccetto and Marcello sat down next to them on the edge of the sidewalk, to get out of breath, and the old man, hearing people nearby, began his

complaint. He had his legs spread wide, and between him was his cap full of money. Riccetto bumped Marcello with his elbow, pointing at him. – Take it easy, – muttered Marcello. When the panting had calmed down a bit, Riccetto bumped his elbow again, with an annoyed look, making a gesture with his hand as if to say: - Well, what are we doing? – Marcello shrugged his shoulders to tell him to make do, and Riccetto gave him a look of compassion, blushing with anger. Then he said to him softly: "Wait for me over there." Marcello got up and went to wait for him on the other side of the road, among the trees. When Marcello was far away, Riccetto waited a moment while no one passed, approached the blind man, grabbed the handful of money from his cap and ran away. As soon as they were safe, they started counting the money under a street lamp: there was almost half a bag.

The next morning, the Nuns' convent and other buildings on Via Garibaldi remained without water.

Riccetto and Marcello had found Agnolo at Donna Olimpia in front of the Giorgio Franceschi elementary school who was kicking the ball with other boys with no other lighting than that of the moon. They told him to go get the tire remover, and he didn't have to be told again. Then the three of them went down together, through San Pancrazio, down towards Trastevere, in search of a quiet place: they found it in via Manara, which at that time was completely deserted, and they were able to start working around a manhole cover without anyone going to bother him. They didn't get alarmed even when a balcony above suddenly opened up and an old woman, half appenninuous and all painted, started shouting: - What are you doing down there? – Riccetto raised his head for a moment and said to her: – Sir, it's nothing, it's the mystery of the blocked sewer! – They had already finished, they took the top and bottom of the manhole cover, Agnolo and Riccetto glued it on, and they went away slowly towards a ruined house under the Janiculum, which was an old gymnasium in ruins. It was dark, but Agnolo was practical and found the sledgehammer in a corner of the large room, and with it they smashed the manhole cover.

Now it was a matter of finding the buyer; but this time too Agnolo took care of it. They went down Vicolo dei Cinque, which, except for a few drunks, was completely deserted. Under the rag-picker's windows, Agnolo put his hands in a funnel around his mouth and started calling: - To Antò! – The rag-picker appeared, then came down and made them enter the shop,

where he weighed the cast iron and gave him two thousand seven hundred lire, for the seventy kilos that he weighed. Now that they were there they wanted to make it complete. Agnolo ran into the gym to get the hatchet, and they went towards the steps of the Janiculum. There they uncovered a sewer and lowered themselves into it. With the handle of the hatchet they crushed the pipe to stop the water, then cut it, detaching five or six meters of it. In the gym they crushed it all up, breaking it into many small pieces, put it in a sack and took it to the rag-picker, who paid them one hundred and fifty lire per kilo. With their pockets full of money they all happily went back up to the Skyscrapers around midnight. Up there Alvaro, Rocco and the other young men were playing cards at the bottom of the stairwell, crouching or hurrying in silence on the ground floor landing of Rocco's house, which opened onto one of the many internal courtyards. To go home, Agnolo had to pass by there, and Riccetto and Marcello accompanied him. So they stopped to play with the big boys. After just over half an hour they had lost all the dough. To be able to go and have fun on the boat at Ciriola's, fortunately he still had half a sack stolen from the blind man, which Riccetto had hidden inside his shoes.

– Here's the pipinara! – said a young man on the raft as he saw them going down the hot sidewalk. Riccetto couldn't resist the temptation to immediately swing a little on the cannohay. But he immediately jumped down to join the others who had already gone down the short gangway and were giving the fifty lire to Orazio's wife, in the factory that was floating on the water of the Tiber. Giggetto received them badly. “Put yourselves here,” he said: and he showed all three of them a single locker. They remained undecided. – And what are you waiting for? – Giggetto snapped, stretching out an arm with an open hand towards them as if to show how unworthy their behavior was. - That? now I have to come and undress, now?

- Damn him, - Agnolo muttered between his teeth: and he turned the blouse over his head, taking it off without waiting any longer. Meanwhile, Giggetto continued: - These pain-in-the-ass kids... they could kill you all, you and whoever you need... - Dejected, the three pain-in-the-ass kids undressed and remained naked with their clothes in their hands. – Well? – shouted the lifeguard, coming out from behind the stall, – mo? – They didn't know how to do it. Giggetto snatched the clothes from his hand, threw them

into the cupboard and locked it. His little son looked at the three new ones with a grin. The other young men who lingered, some naked, some with their underwear hanging down, some combing their hair in front of the mirror, some singing, looked at them out of the corner of their eyes as if to say: - Kill how gay I am -. As soon as they had knotted the ends of their briefs that were too large for them, they dashed out of the changing room and went to gather next to the iron railing of the float. They were immediately kicked out of there too. Orazio himself had come out of the central ward where the coffin was, with his paralytic leg and his face stained with blood. - Damn you, - he shouted - how many times do I have to say that no one can stand there unless the railing breaks? – They ran away, passing in front of the shower mat, followed by the shouts of Horace who continued to shout for ten minutes sitting on his wicker chair. In there some young men were playing cards, others were sitting with their legs on the limping tables smoking. Along the small walkway that joined the float to the shore, Agnolo's little dog was waiting for them with his tongue hanging out, all cheerfully. This consoled the three miscreants, who started running along the wall, followed by the dog. They stopped for a while near the trampoline, then continued running towards Ponte Sisto. It was still very early: not even half past one, and there was nothing but sunshine in Rome.

From the Dome, behind Ponte Sisto, to the Tiber Island behind Ponte Garibaldi, the air was as tense as the skin of a drum. In that silence, between the walls that smelled like urinals in the heat of the sun, the Tiber flowed yellow as if it were being pushed by the waste it was full of coming down. The first to arrive, after the six or seven employees who had always remained still on the raft had left around two o'clock, were the curly-haired people from Piazza Giudia. Then the people from Trastevere came, down from Ponte Sisto, in long lines, half naked, screaming and laughing, always ready to beat someone up. Ciriola filled himself, outside, on the dirty beach and inside, in the changing rooms, in the coffin, on the raft. He was a vermin. Two dozen kids were gathered around the trampoline. The first caposotti, the brushes, the roe deer began. The diving board was only one and a half meters high, a little more, and even six-year-olds could dive into it. Someone, passing through Ponte Sisto, stopped to look. Even at the top of the wall along the Tiber, astride the shoulders over which the plane trees overhung, some young boy with no money to climb down was watching.

Most were still lying on the sand or on the bit of rusty grass that remained under the wall.

– Last one first! – shouted a small, hairy brunette to those who were hurriedly around, standing up: but only Nicchiola listened to him, who set off with his back bent and twisted, and let himself fall into the yellow water with his legs and arms wide slamming with the butt. The others, clicking their tongues with an air of contempt, said to the dark-haired boy: - Get up! -, then, after a while, lolling around listlessly, they got up and moved like a flock of sheep, up towards the sandy area under the cannohay, in front of the float, to look at Rubbish, who with his feet on the sand red-hot, and red with exertion under the two balls, he was lifting the fifty-pound weight amid a regiment of kids. Only Riccetto, Marcello, Agnolo and a few others remained at the trampoline, with the dog, who was everyone's favorite. – Well? – Agnolo said with a threatening look to the other two. 'Your damn thing,' said Riccetto, 'are you in a hurry?' 'But what's the matter with you,' said Agnolo, 'and what did we come for?' "Now let's take a bath," said Riccetto, and went to the diving board to look at the water.

The little dog followed him. Riccetto turned: - Are you coming too? - He said to him affectionately and cheerfully, - are you coming too? – The dog, looking at his face, wagged his tail.

– You're turning yourself upside down, huh? – said Riccetto. He grabbed it by the fur and pushed it to the edge: but the dog pulled back. - Don't worry, - said Riccetto, - well, I won't make you do it upside down, go! – The dog continued to look at him anxiously. – But what do you want from me? – continued Riccetto with an air of protection, bending down, – you ugly bastard of a spinone! – He caressed him, scratched his neck, put his hand between his teeth, pulled him. – Bad luck, bad luck! – He shouted at him affectionately. However, the dog, feeling himself being pulled, was a little scared and jumped back.

– None, – Riccetto then told him, – I won't throw you into the river! – Do you do this in Riccè? – Agnolo shouted at him ironically. “Let me take a piss first,” replied Riccetto and ran to piss against the wall: the dog came up behind him and stood watching him with shining eyes and a restless tail.

Agnolo then took a running start and dived. – Damn you! – Marcello shouted as he saw him fall on his stomach. “Kill me,” shouted Agnolo, rising with his head in the middle of the river, “what nonsense! – Now I'll

see how he dives! – Riccetto shouted, and threw himself into the water. – How did I do it? – He shouted as he resurfaced at Marcello. – With wide legs, – said Marcello. – Let's try again, Riccetto said and climbed up the bank.

At that moment, those who were making a fuss around the Monnezza who was lifting the weights moved en masse towards the trampoline: they came down with a confident and mocking grin, spitting, with the smaller ones jumping around or rolling around hugging each other on the pavement. There were more than fifty of them, and they invaded the small patch of dirty grass around the diving board: Rubbish went first, blond as straw and full of red squeaks, and made a pike with the seven beauties: Remo followed him, Shameless, Pecetto, Ciccione, Pallante, but also the smaller ones, who didn't make us look slim at all, and indeed Ercoletto, from Vicolo dei Cinque, was perhaps the best of all: he dived running from the springboard on tiptoe and arms open, light, as if dancing. Riccetto and the others retreated to sit on the burnt grass and watched in silence. They were like little pieces of bread in the middle of an anthill: and we were disheartened by having to listen to the caciara in a corner. Everyone was standing, with their waists dirty with mud, their briefs stuck to their flesh and their faces sarcastic, looking at each other and shouting the dead: with his evil face, round as an egg, the Fat Man left, and slipping on the edge of the board, as he fell into the water, he shouted with a ferocious laugh: – Damn him! –, and Remo on the shore, shaking his head, cheerfully muttered: – Damn you, what a force you are! – Even the Dachshund next door, along the sidewalk, was grinning when a wad of mud landed in his curls. – Damn you! – He shouted, turning furiously. But he didn't find out who had done it, because everyone was looking towards the river, laughing. After a while he splashed another wad on his head. “The hell with you,” he shouted. He went to take Remo head on. “What the hell,” he said to him with an offended face, “your damn thing, and your grandfather's!” – But after a while the whole air was crossed by hundreds of pieces of mud thrown at full force: someone, in the mud up to their knees, threw entire handfuls of them from bottom to top against the ledge, causing a rain of mud: others sat indifferently, a little apart, and threw the loot treacherously, making them whistle like whips. – To the soul of your bastards! – shouted Remo, in the middle of the fray, pressing his eye in a rage with his hand, and ran to throw himself into the water to remove the mud stuck between

his eyelids: seeing him diving in, Rubbish went after him, shouting this time: – First there. 'we hit,' and he threw himself into the water, curling up and rolling in the air, and falling onto the surface of the current with a great bang of his back, knees and elbows. – Damn him! – the Shameless laughed, frowning. He went and made the same one. – Ballante! – He shouted. “And who will do it to me,” said Pallas. “A coward,” shouted Shameless and Rubbish from the water.

- But damn them, - Riccetto was muttering aside, meanwhile - Well, what are we doing? – Agnolo said harshly. The only one of the three who knew how to row was Marcello: it was up to him to begin the maneuver. They went to sit on the pile of old beat-up sandals. – To Marcè, – said Agnolo, – we're waiting for you, come on. Marcello got up and went to wander around Guaione, who was standing half drunk at the bottom of the float doing work with his pocketknife. – How much does a boat cost? – He asked him point blank. "It's half past time," replied Guaione without raising his eyes. – There's a date, what? – said Marcello. – Now when he comes back. He's out. – Does it take much, in Guaiò? – asked Marcello after a while. – But the damn thing about you, – said Guaione, raising his white drunken eyes, – what do I know! When he comes back –. Then he glanced across the river towards Ponte Sisto. “Here it is,” he said. – Do you pay immediately or later? – Immediately, mejo. “I'm going to get the deaf people,” shouted Marcello. But he hadn't counted on Giggetto. This was a good lifeguard with the grown-ups: but with the little ones, if they had all drowned he would have signed his name. Marcello stood there for a while trying to get people to listen to him, but he didn't get along at all. He went back up to the pile of sandals, disconcerted. “How the hell can he catch deaf people,” he said. – Go see the lifeguard, no, you asshole! – I know, – explained Marcello, – but he doesn't listen to me, he doesn't listen to me! – What an asshole you are – Agnolo snapped angrily. - See this, - Marcello replied vibrantly, extending his open hand towards him, as Giggetto had done with them shortly before, - why aren't you going? "Now you're fighting," Riccetto philosophized. – I would really give that asshole a punch! – said Agnolo. – But I've already told you, but why don't you try it, following a paragula! – Agnolo went off to face Giggetto and immediately afterwards he returned with a penny and a half and a national team lit between his lips. They went to wait for the boat at the railing, and as soon as the boat landed

and the other boys had gotten off, the three got on board. It was the first time that Riccetto and Agnolo sailed.

The boat didn't move at first. The more Marcello rowed, the more it stayed still. Then slowly she began to detach herself from the float, going here and there as if she were drunk. 'Oh, unfortunate man,' Agnoletto shouted at the top of his voice, 'what do you know how to row?' – The boat seemed crazy and was going randomly a little up and a little down, a little towards Ponte Sisto, a little towards Ponte Garibaldi. But the current dragged it to the left towards Ponte Garibaldi, even if by chance the bow turned the other way, and Guaione, appearing at the railing of the float, began to shout something with the strings in his neck bursting – This asshole, – Agnolo kept shouting at Marcello, – now they're coming to Fiumicino! – Don't bother me... – said Marcello, killing himself on the oars which were either banging out of the water or sinking in up to the handle, – you try it, come on! – I'm not from Ostia! Agnolo shouted. Meanwhile the Ciriola remained at a distance, wobbling at the stern of the little boat: under the green of the plane trees the wall began to appear in its entire length from Ponte Sisto to Ponte Garibaldi, and the boys scattered along the shore, some on the swing, some on the trampoline, some on the raft, became smaller and smaller and their voices could no longer be distinguished.

The Tiber dragged the boat towards Ponte Garibaldi like one of the wooden boxes or carcasses that drifted along the surface of the current; and under Ponte Garibaldi you could see the water foaming and swirling among the shallows and rocks of the Tiber Island. Guaione had noticed it, and continued to scream with his rusty voice from the raft: the little boat had now reached the height of the gallinero where, inside the fence of poles, the males who didn't know how to swim were splashing about. Called by Guaione's shouts, Orazio and some other slackers emerged from the central barrack to watch the scene. Orazio also began to gesticulate: the young men laughed. Riccetto stood looking at Marcello with his eyelashes pulled at him and his arms crossed. – What are you doing so skinny? – He said. But Marcello was recovering. The boat was now heading fairly steadily towards the other shore, and the oars managed to catch the current. “Namo de llà,” Agnoletto then said. – And what am I doing? – Marcello replied disgustedly, who was pouring sweat like a fountain.

As much as the bank of the Ciriola was hit by the sun, it was equally filled with a gray and feeble shadow: on the black rocks, covered with two

fingers of fat, brushwood and small green brambles grew, and the water, here and there, it was full of waste that barely moved. Finally they touched it, skirting the rocks, and since there was almost no current there, Marcello managed to push the boat up towards Ponte Sisto. However, the left-handed oar, like this, crashed against the rocks, and Marcello was busy handling it so that it didn't break or slip away from him on the water. – Let's fall in the middle, and that's it – Riccetto repeated without paying any attention to Marcello's efforts. He liked going to the center of the river to feel right in the middle of the water, out to sea, and it angered him that if he raised his eyes just a little he could see Ponte Sisto there, just a stone's throw away, gray against the dazzling mirror of the water, and the Janiculum, and the Dome of St. Peter's, big and white like a cloud. They arrived slowly under Ponte Sisto: there, under the pillar on the right, the river widened and stagnated, deep, green and dirty. Since at that point there was no danger of being carried away by the current, Agnolo wanted to try rowing himself, but no matter what: the oars banged in the air or hit the water making certain splashes that filled the whole boat. – Fuck you..., – Riccetto shouted, indignant, while Marcello, dead of tiredness, was struggling on the two inches of warm water that filled the hull. Seeing Agnolo, who was losing his mind for nothing, two boys, who had gone down to fish with a rod from the ladder on the Fontanone side, began to tease him and laugh among themselves. Agnolo out of breath shouted at him: – What do you want from me! – They were silent for a while, and then:

– Who taught you how to row? But can't you see that you're laughing even at the walls?

– Who taught me how to row? – replied Agnolo. – I'm c...!

– You put it on...! – they made ready.

– Your! – Agnolo shouted, red as a chili pepper.

– Asshole! – the kids shouted.

– A fiji de na bocch...! – shouted Agnolo.

Meanwhile he continued to row without the boat moving forward an inch. On the other pylon, on the left, there were other Fiji de na bona donna: they were stretched out between the grooves of the stone, like lizards half-sunbathing themselves. The cries of the children woke them up. They stood up, all white with dust, and gathered on the edge of the pier towards the boat. – A barcheroliii, – one shouted, – wait for us! – What does that guy

want? – Riccetto said suspiciously. A second climbed by the rings up to the middle of the pylon, and with a scream, he turned upside down: the others dived from where they were, and they all began to swim across the river, arm in arm. After a few minutes they were there with their hair in their eyes, their faces pale, and their hands clutching the edges of the boat. - What do you want? – said Marcello. - He came by boat, they said, - why wouldn't you want us? – They were all bigger, and the others had to keep their bodies. They got on, and without wasting time one said to Agnolo: - Come on - and took the oars from him. – Let's go over the bridge, – he added, looking Agnolo straight in his eyes as if to say: “Are you okay with that?” – Let's go beyond the bridge, – said Agnolo. He immediately started rowing at full speed: but under the pier the current was strong, and the boat was loaded. It took more than a quarter of an hour to cover those few metres.

old village
from gray roofs under the dull sky
I invoke you...

sang the four from Vicolo del Bologna, hurriedly on the boat, as loudly as they could to be heard by passers-by on Ponte Sisto and along the Tiber. The boat, too full, continued, sinking to the brim in the water.

Riccetto continued to lie, without paying any attention to the newcomers, on his nose, on the flooded bottom of the boat, with his head just over the edge: and he always continued to pretend to be far out to sea, out of sight of the mainland. – Here they are pirate! – one of the people from Trastevere, standing in lace on the boat, shouted with his hands like a funnel on his old thief's face: the others continued to sing wildly. Suddenly Riccetto turned on one elbow to better observe something that had attracted his attention, on the surface of the water, near the shore, almost under the arches of Ponte Sisto. He couldn't quite figure out that it was him. The water trembled at that point, making many small circles as if it were being rinsed by a hand: and in fact in the center you could see what looked like a small black rag.

“What's the matter,” Riccetto then said, standing up. Everyone looked in that direction, into the almost still water, under the last arch. – It's a swallow, fuck..., – said Marcello. There were many swallows, flying close to the walls, under the arches of the bridge, over the open river, skimming

the water with their chests. The current had dragged the boat back a little, and it was in fact seen that it was indeed a swallow that was drowning. She flapped her wings, hopped. Riccetto was on his knees on the edge of the boat, leaning forward. – Asshole, can't you see what you're doing back there? – Agnolo told him. “Look,” Riccetto shouted, “he's drowning! – The one from Trastevere who was rowing remained with his oars raised on the water and the current was slowly pushing the boat back towards the point where the swallow was crashing. But after a while he lost patience and started rowing again. – Aòh, a moro, – Riccetto shouted, pointing his hand at him, – who told you to row? – The other clicked his tongue contemptuously and the bigger one said: – What do you care? Riccetto looked towards the swallow, which was still moving, jerkily, suddenly flapping its wings. Then without saying anything he jumped into the water and began swimming towards her. The others started shouting after him and laughing: but the one with the oars continued to row against the current, on the opposite side. Riccetto moved away, dragged strongly by the water: they saw him shrinking, reaching with his arms close to the swallow, on the mirror of stagnant water, and trying to catch it. – To Riccettooo, – shouted Marcello at the top of his lungs, – why don't you take her? – Riccetto must have heard it, because his voice could just be heard shouting: – Me pùncica! “The damn thing is yours,” Marcello shouted, laughing. Riccetto tried to catch the swallow, which ran away from him flapping its wings and both of them were now dragged towards the pylon by the current which was becoming strong and full of eddies down there. “To Riccetto,” shouted his companions from the boat, “and lose it! – But at that moment Riccetto had decided to catch her and was swimming with one hand towards the shore. – Let's go back, come on, – said Marcello to the one who was rowing. They turned. Riccetto was waiting for them, sitting on the dirty grass on the bank, with the swallow in his hands. “And what did you save her for?” Marcello told him, “she was so beautiful to see her that she would die! – Riccetto didn't answer him immediately. – She's all soaked, – he said after a while, – let's wait for her to dry! – It didn't take long for her to dry: after five minutes she was there flying back among her companions, over the Tiber, and Riccetto no longer distinguished her from the others.

II THE RICCETTO

Summer 1946. On the corner of Via delle Zoccolette, in the rain, Riccetto sees a group of people, and slowly approaches them. In the middle of the group of thirteen or fourteen people and the shiny umbrellas, an umbrella much larger than the usual one was open, black, with three cards lined up on top, the ace of coins, the ace of cups and a six. A Neapolitan shuffled them, and people bet five hundred, one thousand and even two thousand lire on the cards. Riccetto remained there for half an hour watching the game; a gentleman, who played avidly, lost at every bet, while others, also Neapolitans, sometimes lost and sometimes won. When that first tripod broke up, it was already late. Riccetto approached the Neapolitan who was shuffling the cards and said:

– Aòh, will you allow me to say a word? – Yes, – replied the other, holding out his spoon.

– What, are you from Naples?

- Yes.

– Am I playing the game or are you doing in Naples?

- Yes.

– And how does this game play?

– Well... it's difficult, but you'll learn after a while.

– 'Or will you learn me too?

– Yes, – said the Neapolitan, – but...

He started laughing with the air of someone who is making a deal, and thinks to himself: "Oh, let's get it sorted out, I've got you for today!" He wiped his rain-soaked face, young and wrinkled, with his big lips hanging like a chicken's ass. He looked Riccetto in his eyes. - Well, I'll tell you, of course, - he said, seeing that the other was silent, - but I want a reward - Of course, - Riccetto replied seriously. But in the meantime a new group of people was about to form around the umbrella; among these there were always the Neapolitans from before. - Now wait, - the Neapolitan winked, while he rearranged the cards on the umbrella. Riccetto sat down in a corner and started watching the game again. Two hours passed, it started to rain

and by now it was almost dark. The Neapolitan finally decided to break away, closed the umbrella, put the cards in his pocket and took a look at his companions: there were two of them, one blond and half toothless, another basset with a three-quarter plaid checkered, like a Jew, they listened cordially to their companion who told them he had something to do, and cheerfully went away with their tools, also nodding to Riccetto. – Let's go, – said the Neapolitan. The Riccetto was in gear, they took the tram, got off at the Ponte Bianco, and in just a few steps they were at Donna Olimpia. Riccetto's mother, sitting in the middle of the only room that made up her house, with four beds at the corners of the walls, which weren't even walls but partitions, looked at the two and said: - Who is this? "Not my friend," Riccetto replied dryly, without fussing at all, completely authoritative. But since she continued to be there to bother him, and was a never-ending meddler, Riccetto looked into the next room, which was the one where Agnolo was staying with his family, if he wasn't there. none of the big ones. In fact there were only two or three of the smaller ones who were whining, with snot under their noses. He and the Neapolitan went over there and sat down on the bed of Agnolo and his little brothers, who were sleeping standing up, sitting on the blanket that was all singed by the iron. The Neapolitan began the lesson: - There are five of us, - he said, - one makes the map and the others stand around pretending to be passers-by. Let's say I'm the one who draws the map and I start the game, and the friends, standing around the umbrella, form the trio. People begin to approach and at that point a companion takes off to open the tripod, and a passerby takes his place... At first it is uncertain whether he is playing or not. The buddy instead plays: he bets a thousand, two thousand, second, as he likes; while he hunts for the money, the one who makes the card, I, let's say, change the card for him, but the card that I change for him, I give the good one to his friend, and I send the bad one in the middle. So you who don't understand the game don't see that I changed it, and you bet too. But I say: «If he loses you I don't care at all», and the buddy instead insists, no that we win, no that we lose, no that we win, no that we lose. "Well, both of you raise your cards." So the buddy wins, and the guy loses. When the gaggio has already lost a lot, the buddy plays again and bets let's say a thousand... – The Neapolitan went on for a while to explain what that game was like, and Riccetto was there listening as he chattered and chatted and didn't understand us. a Madonna. When he had finished, he said to him: – Oh,

dear, mind you, I didn't understand you, you know! I should be so kind as to start over again, yes you don't mind, eh! – But at that moment Agnolo's mother arrived. - Sorry, Sister Celeste, - said Riccetto, cutting in, followed by the other, - I had to say a word to this friend of mine! – Sora Celeste, black and hairy like a dirty bush, said nothing, and the two companions quickly went downstairs, going to sit on the steps of the Franceschi school. There the Neapolitan began again with the explanation, warming up as he chatted and becoming as red in the face as a plate of fettuccine: he stood up, in front of Riccetto who always said yes, looking him in the eyes with an almost angry expression as he spoke, spoke, and he looked at him even more intently when he fell silent for a moment to give more weight to what he had said, half questioning and half inspired, standing bent on his knees, with his legs wide apart, his belly forward, and his hands suspended and open like a goalkeeper when he is waiting for a sloping ball.

Then he made a "pct" with his big lips like a starving man from Porta Capuana, as if the profound and enlightening thought that passed through his brain should also enlighten Riccetto.

He did all this to earn half a sack. Riccetto didn't even understand a thing this time... Meanwhile it was getting dark, the thousands of rows and diagonals of windows and balconies of the skyscrapers had lit up, the radios were going full blast and from inside the kitchens you could hear the noise of dishes and women's voices screaming, arguing or singing. There in front of the step where the two companions were sitting, there were queues of people going about his business, some returning all dirty from work, others leaving home already dressed, to go for a walk with their friends.

- Let's have a drink, come on, - Riccetto then said generously, like a man of thirty, knowing his chicken, and imagining, rightly, that his throat was dry. At that proposal, the other felt like he was giving everything back to the world, and, overcome by enthusiasm, after having said, regarding the drink, simply and almost indifferently, "Namo," he began to speak again as if nothing had happened, and while they were walking towards Monteverde Nuovo, alongside Riccetto, he made a big fuss to show how the person holding the map in the middle of the tripod on the open umbrella was behaving, or the buddy who was betting now winning, now losing, or the gaggio, a stupid guy, but quite knowledgeable and therefore respectable, who among all those of the trio, decided to play, and with greatness he bet a

thousand, two thousand... The Neapolitan - who was a Salerno native - imitated his gestures and his face to perfection and with a certain deference.

They went to Monteverde Nuovo because Riccetto didn't want to let Donna Olimpia know about his affairs, where everyone was a disgusting meddler. – 'A person who sees seems to be looking,' he said expertly to the Neapolitan, to justify that walk up the slope, first along a stretch of road full of mounds and asphalt crusts, and then along a path between trampled meadows with high the barracks of the evicted. Even there and then in Monteverde Nuovo, all the confusion, great joy, the Saturday night chaos. The two went to a small tavern right on the large market square and the tram terminus, just beyond Delle Terrazze. The little inn had a pergola and a fence of woven reeds, where it was already dark. They sat on the battered benches and ordered half a liter of Frascati. After the first sips they were already half done. The Neapolitan began again for the fourth time with the explanation; but by now Riccetto was pissed, and he didn't feel like listening anymore. And even the Neapolitan was tired of repeating the same things. While Riccetto was talking, he looked at him with a slightly resigned, slightly sarcastic smile, and the other little by little let it go; so, all happy, they began to talk about other things. They were both straight, and they had things to tell each other, about life in Rome and Naples, about Italians and Americans, with a lot of mutual respect and giving each other a lot of credit, while at the same time, deep down, as soon as they could, they would have a bit of a banter, and, in the depths of his conscience, one considered the other an idiot, completely satisfied when he spoke, annoyed when he had to listen.

But as he drank the Neapolitan he became more and more strange: at the end of the second glass it was as if they had rubbed his face with sandpaper, and had erased his features: his face had become like a piece of scalded flesh, with half-closed eyes that seemed to be blinded by a great light that who knows where it came from, and their big lips hanging down stuck together. When he spoke he acted like a whine: with his eyes still, laughing, in contradiction to the serious and deeply felt words he uttered. By now she only spoke his dialect. He was there, bent over, huddled between his shoulders, wet with sweat, with that pulpy and swollen face, looking straight at Riccetto, with a look that shone with brotherly love. – Oh no, – he said, – I'll tell you something! – What do you tell me? – said Riccetto who had also left.

But the Neapolitan smiled sadly, shaking his head, and was silent for a while. Then he said: – It is something of extreme gravity. I want to tell you, because you are a friend! – Both of them were moved by this declaration. The Neapolitan was silent, and Riccetto encouraged him with a serious and dignified air: - Then tell me what you owe me from today, yes you, eh! I don't insist.

– I'm telling you, – said the Neapolitan, – but you have to promise me something!

- That? – Riccetto said promptly.

– Not to talk to anyone, – said the Neapolitan solemnly, completely speechless.

Riccetto understood the situation; he became even more serious, puffed out his chest, and put a hand on it: - My word of honor, - said he.

The Neapolitan, as if he felt himself being remade - with his eyes continuing to laugh on their own, inside their two slits - began to tell his story. He said that it was he who killed an old woman and two of her spinster daughters in Via Chiaja, with an iron bar, and then burned them. It took him more than a quarter of an hour to tell this rant, repeating one thing two or three times and making a complete mess. Riccetto didn't let himself be impressed at all, immediately realizing that they were drunken shots: but he listened carefully, giving him space and pretending to believe them, so as to then have the right to tell his stories too. And how many things he had to tell that had happened to him in those two years, after the arrival of the Americans!

In those two years Riccetto had made himself a complete slut. If he really wasn't like that little boy who was his companion and one day when they were together at Delle Terrazze, someone came to him and said: - Come on, go home, your mother won't move anymore - and the next day, when Riccetto he asked him: – How is your mother? – He smiled a little and said: – she IS dead. - That? – said Riccetto. – She's dead, she's dead, – confirmed the other, amused by Riccetto's surprise. If he wasn't exactly like that, well, he was half a species. At his age he had already met so many hundreds of people of every condition and every race, that by now one or the other was the same: and he too could almost have behaved like that guy who lived near the Rotonda who one day, with a friend of his had beaten up a fag, to steal from him a couple of thousand lire, and when his companion said to

him: - Oh, we killed him - without even looking at him, he replied: - What do I care.

Ricchetto had abandoned himself to the wave of memories: and while the Neapolitan was silent, moved by his confession, with that face like a roasted dog, it was his turn to reminisce. But he was telling the truth though.

Since they had first started talking about the Americans, Ricchetto resumed that reasoning. – Listen to this piece! – He said, all cheerful and worldly. And he began to tell two or three pieces, one funnier than the other, always from the time when the Americans were there, in which he always appeared as the coolest slut of all.

The Neapolitan looked at him thoughtfully, nodding his head, with a tired smile. Then he suddenly puffed out his chest, and without changing his expression, still looking straight at Ricchetto, he began: - I have to atone! – And on for another quarter of an hour, him this time, with that off-stage coaxing of his crime. Ricchetto let him vent a little, as was right, also looking at him and laughing. Then as soon as he lost his gab a little and started to blurt out, he hung up:

– The Americans were good!... They made me a little angry, but they were useful to me! But damn the Poles, they were wicked, really wicked you know! Aòh, I remember that once upon a time, I was in Toraccia, we went to hang out in the Polish camp. We were walking, there near the caves, we heard screams, we went near there, there were two whores who were arguing with these Poles, who wanted them deaf. So then while someone comes out of the cave and we hide, and one stays inside with these two sluts. And perhaps these if they believed that it had gone to more deaf people. But instead that one arrived with a can. So before entering the cave, unscrew it and take off the cap. Then he pours it into a bin, then calls that friend of his, that other Pole, and right at the entrance of the cave I throw this petrol on 'e two hoes. The other one lights a match and sets it on fire. We hear screams, screams, we go there and see these two sluts all on fire.

Then it was up to the Neapolitan again, but by now he had gotten so worked up that he couldn't even open his eyes anymore. – What if we do antra lallera? – Ricchetto asked jokingly. Yes, that maybe he didn't even hear, and he just laughed for a while. – How do you like water for the garden? – He asked, now ready to spend the Ricchetto, cheerfully. By now they were

both tired of standing there talking. It was Riccetto who took the initiative: – Aaaa... what, – he said, – what if we want to? – The Neapolitan chuckled again with his eyes lowered; then he stood up and walked straight towards the exit in the middle of the wall of woven reeds. It was already dark: everyone had already had dinner, and had managed to leave the house to get some fresh air. Some young men were fleeing on motorbikes around the square, from the all-lit Delle Terrazze at the end of the half-empty tram shelter. While Riccetto paid, the Neapolitan conscientiously carried out some complicated operations: he sneezed, blew his nose between his fingers, pissed, then they went together under the shelter to wait for the tram that was supposed to take the Neapolitan back into Rome.

– What do you dress in? – asked Riccetto waiting. The Neapolitan then showed off a witty and diabolical smile, but he remained silent. Riccetto insisted: - Well, won't you tell me? – He said with a slightly offended look. The Neapolitan took his hand and held it tightly between his warm and swollen ones. "You are a friend," he began solemnly, and once again with a lot of assurances of friendship, oaths and declarations. Riccetto, however, wasn't so caught up in his enthusiasm, because he was so hungry and so sleepy that he could no longer stand up. In conclusion, the Neapolitan's situation was this: he and his companions had only come to Rome for a few days in search of fortune. For this reason the Neapolitan had adapted to that job with Riccetto for half a day. Otherwise, when would there have been, the year of the f...! Millions were made with the map game, they were made. Meanwhile he and his companions slept in a cave down on the Tiber escarpment, in Testaccio. Riccetto understood which one: and pricked up his ears. – But then, – he said, seeing great possibilities, – you need someone to help you a little... who will teach you the best places...

The Neapolitan hugged him, then put his index finger against his nose, and signaled Riccetto to keep quiet, as they already understood each other. He liked that gesture, and he repeated it two or three times: then he took Riccetto's hand again and began again with the oaths of friendship, going back to certain confused and majestic general principles that Riccetto, who had a much clearer and more a much more concrete plan in his head, he found it difficult to follow. - Yes, yes! – He said. A tram had passed, and another had passed: on the third, finally, the Neapolitan with half a sack in his pocket got on, and they made a bet for the next day, repeating it two or three times, down at the Ponte Sublicio.

Finally Riccetto had found a profession: not like Marcello, who had recently started working as a bartender, or like Agnolo, who worked as a painter with his brother: but something much better, something that made him rise in rank to the point of considering himself now on a par, for example, with Rocco and Alvaro, who had gradually moved from stealing manhole covers to much more demanding and responsible jobs, despite the fact that, in conclusion, they never had a penny in their pocket and they had two louse faces worse than before. By now Riccetto had more fun with the two of them than with the rookies of his age, that is, those who had reached the age of fourteen. They couldn't afford to go and have fun with someone who was always in the thick of it, without them having a brecola in their pocket, or at most with two or three nickels. To tell the honest truth, even Rocco and Alvaro, sometimes, and more than sometimes, were blank: but it was a completely different thing! That it was really something completely different, Riccetto was able to understand well that Sunday when he went to Ostia with them, geared up like a god.

In fact, things didn't go badly with the map at first. Riccetto and the people from Salerno would go and settle in some nice little corner, near Campo dei Fiori or Ponte Vittorio, or in Prati, and then, when instead of the umbrella they could have a banquet and three pieces instead of cards of wood well planed with an elastic band, two without paper and one with a small square of paper inserted into the elastic band, also in Piazza di Spagna or in some other elegant place: then they would cheerfully begin to wax the passers-by, and make a nice trio of people all dressed up and grainy. Riccetto was only, in name, the kid, the one who ran the banquet, but in reality he had a more delicate task: and he got a body a day, and even more. But one Saturday evening, which was already the beginning of June, while they were busying themselves in Via dei Pettinari, the guards arrived all at once, running down from Ponte Sisto: Riccetto was the first to see them and immediately cut them down. via delle Zoccolette: a guard shouted at him: - Stop or I'll shoot -: he turned, saw that he actually had a revolver in his hand, but thought: "You won't want to kill me, I hope", and continued running until he reached via Arenula and disappeared along the alleys of Piazza Giudia. The other three however were caught. They took them to the police station, the next day they sent them back to the village with the expulsion order, and good night. On the evening of that same Saturday, in any case, Riccetto went down into the cave on the slope of Ponte Sublicio,

which was the cellar of an old palace from a few centuries earlier, he left behind the pile of clothes that were all clothing of the three unfortunates, and he went to remove the two or three bricks that covered the hole where the savings of a month's work were hidden: fifty sacks.

For this reason, that first Sunday in June, Riccetto was all grainy and playful.

It was a beautiful morning, with the sun burning, free and cheerful, beating down on the clean, cool Skyscrapers, across miles and miles of blue, and raining gold on all sides. On the repainted humps of Monte di Splendore or Casadio, on the facades of the buildings, on the internal courtyards, on the sidewalks: and in the midst of all that gold and that freshness, the people dressed to the nines swarmed in the center of Donna Olimpia, at the doors of the blocks of flats, around the newsagent's kiosk...

Riccetto had left the house early, all neat and clean and with the back pocket of his trousers bulging out. He immediately saw, in the midst of a gathering of young men, who were arguing and shouting in front of the door of the Case Nòve, Rocco and Alvaro: in work clothes, because they still had to wash, with certain canvas breeches bulging on the crotch and tightened at the ankle, that, inside, their little legs moved like flowers in the vase, crossed like those of the soldiers in the photographs: and with those two faces, up there, that looked like two pieces from the criminal museum preserved in oil. Riccetto approached them, leaving aside the kids his age, who were kicking a little further down the ball they had stolen from a crying boy. Seeing him, Alvaro turned his face towards him with the bones bruised by hammer blows, which when he smiled each moved in his own direction, and said, distractedly: - Life smiles on you, yes?

“Of course,” Riccetto said no less eloquently.

He was so confident and so cheerful that Alvaro looked at him with some interest.

– What are you doing today? – did Riccetto himself.

– Well, – said Alvaro, taking his time, with an expression on one side tired, on the other allusive and mysterious.

– What, if we go to Ostia? – said Riccetto, – today I'm stuck.

– Eh! – He said, moving all the bones of Alvaro's face up and down. – You'll have two piots, you'll have it!

Even Rocco listened to the speech with interest.

– Yes, two piots! – Riccetto said, vibrating all over.

"I have fifty bags," he said after a while. – Fifty sacks! – She repeated, lowering her voice and placing a funnel-shaped hand on the edge of her mouth.

Alvaro, imitated by Rocco, was seized by a burst of laughter, so much so that he had to sit down on the step and almost rolled on the floor. Riccetto waited a little, amused, for it to pass, then took him by the collar of his shirt with two fingers and said: - There you go -. They went around a corner, and Riccetto showed him the fifty bills. The two buddies said: – Aòh, you really have it! – and they made a resigned expression that meant: “Lucky you!”

– What, are you coming to Ostia? – Riccetto then said.

– And let's go to Ostia, – replied Rocco.

– But first if we have to wash, it will change, – said Alvaro. “Come on, I'll wait for you,” said Riccetto. The other two looked at each other. – Aòh, – said Alvaro after a while, hesitating, with his bones crumbling with satisfaction under his rind, – to Riccè, how would you feel in case of a life in Ostia? – Riccetto immediately rose to the occasion: – Of course, – he said, – let's make up for it! – 'Let's fix it, 'let's fix it,' said Rocco. “Then we'll be back here in half an hour,” said Alvaro. They went into the courtyard of the Case Nòve, but instead of going up to the house, or going to get the half bag for the ticket and the cabin, they turned through the smaller entrance on the right which opened onto Ozanam street, and entered the tobacconist's shop. where the telephone was. They went to the telephone with an official air: Alvaro dialed the number, and Rocco, having put out the fifteen lire, followed the call, full of participation.

– Hello, – said Alvaro, – why call me Nadia out of kindness? Yes, Nadia, he is a friend of hers –. The one who had received the phone call went to call Nadia and, in the meantime, Alvaro took a look at Rocco, leaning with one shoulder, concentrated, against the peeling wall.

– Hello, – he then said, like a polite person, – are you Nadia? Listen here... There would be a little business... What do you have time for today?... to come to Ostia... to Ostia, yes... What?... yes, aòh, what, I know Am I a chatterbox?... But it's safe, it's safe!... Wait for us, Marechiaro, you've got it, Marechiaro... There's a track there, right there in front... Yes, yes, like 'artra vorta... At three three and a quarter... Okay... I salute you,

aaaa what! – He hooked up the phone, and followed by Rocco, red with satisfaction, he left the tobacconist.

Nadia stood long on the sand, still, with a face full of hatred against the sun, the wind, the sea, and all those people who had come to sit on the beach like an invasion of flies on a cleared table. There were thousands of them, from Battistini to Lido, from Lido to Marechiaro, from Marechiaro to Principe, from Principe to Ondina, for dozens of establishments, some were lying on their backs, some on their stomachs down, but these were mostly more elderly people: the young people, the males with the baggy or tight panties that showed all shapes, the females, the stupid ones, with the tight little costumes and all hair - they walked up and down without ever stopping, as if they had the nervous guy. And everyone called each other, shouted, shouted, made fun of each other, played, went in and out of the cabins, called the lifeguard, there was even a band of youngsters from Trastevere, with Mexican hats on their heads, who played in front of the cabin, with the accordion , the guitar and the castanets; and their sambas merged with the rumbas of the Marechiaro loudspeaker that boomed against the sea. Nadia was lying there in the middle with a black costume, and with lots of hair, black like the devil's, that twisted sweaty under her armpits, and black, like coal, she also had hair and those eyes that burned with poison .

She was in her forties, quite large, with certain tinkles and firm thighs that made lots of folds with shiny, tight pieces of fat that seemed to have been inflated with a pump. She had the madonnas, because she was tired of being in that chaos of fanatics, since she didn't even bathe in the sea at all: she had bathed in the morning, at the Mattonato, in the bathhouse of sister Anita. Riccetto, Alvaro and Rocco hadn't even been there for ten minutes, and she already wanted to leave about her business.

– What's bothering you, Nadia? – Alvaro told her calmly, seeing that she was nervous. At those words she blurted out all at once: - Let's go, - she said, - let's do what we have to do, something quick, and have a good night! What are we waiting for here, you say?

– Eeeeh, damn what you got, – said Rocco. She made an offended face, and she turned around like a viper, with her mouth pulled down and her eyes that had turned to stone with anger, gray like those of heart patients: - Do you want to have intigne? – He said, looking furiously at Alvaro in her eyes. - Of course? – said Alvaro. – Come on then, what are you waiting for?

– she concluded fiercely, with that red mouth that looked like a crack in hell. Alvaro continued to look at her with his eyes shining cheerfully with good-natured irony - You know that today you haven't received anything yet - he said, making the gesture of treading something with the palm of her hand. – I look like a libbidinosa! – She added cheerfully.

"But he's going to be killed," she hissed, enraged, heavier than a slaughterhouse porter.

– We'll satisfy you now, go on, – conceded Rocco, following in Alvaro's wake. – We had some pennies here!

– Even Riccetto, you know, – said Alvaro, – with all that he's a kid. You have to see how much weapon, you have to see!

Riccetto remained impassive, on his knees as he had been, with his legs slightly apart on the sand: he too had a Mexican hat on his head, placed behind his ears so that his curls splashed across his forehead, and held in place with a string that passed under his throat.

– Let's go, come on, – Alvaro finally conceded, nodding towards the shed with his chin. She hid her satisfaction under a disgusted and dignified look, and, placing her hands on the ground and turning with her ass in the air, she began to lift, little by little, the quintal of fat distributed in packs and packs here and there from her tits to her calves.

– Stop! – ordered Alvaro, – I'll go ahead. He got up and went forward, disappearing among the umbrellas, the deckchairs and the masses of bathers. After a while Nadia, having risen to her knees before her, stood up at her feet, and she went behind her, planting her frogs in her burning sand.

Riccetto and Rocco remained there, waiting their turn. Rocco stretched out with his hands under his neck, with his usual foolish face. Riccetto, seeing as both he and Alvaro had never talked about taking a bath all morning, and had been busy with their backs against the sheds, looking at the beautiful sorceresses churned out by Trastevere or by Prati, by Maranella or from the Quarticciolo, asked him: – To Rocco, what, do you know?

– How, I don't know! – said the other without getting upset. Yes, you can see me inside the water, I'm a mermaid!

– So while we wait, let's take a bath, come on! – said Riccetto.

- I don't like it, I don't like it, - said Rocco, yawning, and go away, if you don't like it.

- I do it, you know, - said Riccetto, decisively, and with a bit of emotion. He took off his sombrero, and ran towards the surf. He stood there thinking about it for half an hour, first putting one foot in the water and taking it off, then the other and taking it off, then going forward until the water reached his knees, doing a step every time the wave came, which it seemed like they were giving him a kick in the ass. The whole stretch of water in front of him was full of people, who almost didn't fit, with a bluebottle bobbing up and down between their heads. Finally he made up his mind and threw himself all in like a little duck. The bath he took consisted of standing cold and standing there, with water up to their heads, watching some males climbing their skin onto a pole and doing their lace from there.

When he returned there in front of the Marechiaro track, the others had already done both. Mo was up to him, but he sat there again, put his Mexican hat back on his head, and said nothing. Alvaro spoke instead, shaking his jaws: 'Aòh,' he said to him, 'to Riccetto, before you get sick too, you don't think it would be appropriate to offer anything... Aòh, I'm not getting started, you know..' But do you know that the two of us were just deaf for the train and the cabin... - Of course, - replied Riccetto: he ran to the cabin, took the loot out of his trouser pocket of the bills, he slipped one out, succeeded and signaled his company to move. They all got up and went to the coffin together to drink a Coke.

The sun was already setting a little, and the confusion had increased further: the sea blazed like a sword, behind the charnel house. The cabins and cabins rang with thousands of shouts, and the showers were filled with young men and boys, like carcasses covered in ants. Those of the orchestra were playing at full volume and Marechiaro's phonograph was ringing. - Riccetto, - Alvaro observed after a while, - is up to you now.

Riccetto immediately stood up, without saying a word, at the bell to go with Nadia to the cabin: the other three laughed when they saw him, including Nadia, who was a little consoled there sitting at the table. - Pay first, no - Alvaro said good-naturedly, with a certain kindness, not wanting to take too much advantage of Riccetto's mistake. - I forgot, I forgot - Riccetto justified himself, laughing, while he was unmolding us: he paid and went on, as Alvaro had done. The cabin was hotter now that the air and

sand had cooled down a bit: it felt like being in an oven. The clothes smelled a little, especially the pedals, but there was a good smell of salt and grease. After a while, as Riccetto had already gotten used to the shade inside, and was already horny, Nadia's hand scraped against the door, and Riccetto opened it: she slipped in, taking with her the buttocks that when a dead hand, like Arenula or Farnese, patted them, felt them coming out of the chair splayed like the tail of a python. Riccetto was there in the middle, with a Mexican hat on his head. She quietly undid her bra and panties of the two-piece, she removed them from her sweaty flesh, and Riccetto, seeing her, also took off his panties. – Work, come on, – he ordered her in a low voice.

But while they were doing what they had to do, and Nadia was holding the little boy tightly in her arms with her face buried between her tits, she slowly slid one hand up his trousers hanging against the wall, put it in the back pocket, he removed the bundle of money and put it inside his bag that was hanging nearby.

Riccetto lived at the Giorgio Franceschi elementary school. Coming up from the Ponte Bianco road, which on the right has an escarpment with the houses of Monteverde Vecchio at the top, you first see the Ferrobedò on the left, sunk in its valley, then you arrive at Donna Olimpia, also known as the Skyscrapers. And the first building on the right, when arriving, are the schools. On the cracked asphalt an even more cracked façade rises, with a row of white square columns in the center and at the corners four massive buildings, like towers, two or three stories high.

First the Germans had been there, then the Canadians, then the displaced and lastly the evicted, like the Riccetto family.

Marcello, on the other hand, lived in the Skyscrapers a little further on: as big as mountain chains, with thousands of windows, in rows, in circles, diagonally, on the streets, on the courtyards, on the steps, to the north, to the south, in full alone, in the shade, closed or wide open, empty or fluttering with laundry, silent or full of the noise of women or the whining of children. All around there were still abandoned meadows, full of humps and mounds, full of creatures playing with the zinalini dirty with snot or half naked.

Then on Sunday you couldn't see anything but creatures; not the youngsters and young men, because they went to Rome to have fun, or,

those who were bundled up, like Riccetto, in Ostia, all their lives! Marcello, who was left alone at Donna Olimpia, without a brecola, poor boy, was dying of boredom. He was lolling around with his hands in his pockets from the courtyards of the skyscrapers where he had been playing doggy style with some kids aged eight or nine, who after a while, however, got bored and went off to play. to the Indians in Mount Splendor. He was alone in all of Donna Olimpia, in the clearing in the center of the blocks of flats, with the sun burning. He crossed the street, quickly climbed the four battered steps of the schools, and took the stairs of the building on the right. Riccetto's family did not live inside the classrooms, like the evacuees or those who had settled there first: but in a corridor, one of those where the classrooms open, which had been divided with partitions into many small rooms, leaving only a small strip along the windows overlooking the courtyard: where Marcello was now running. Inside those sorts of rooms you could see the newly made cots and cots, because the women with all those children only had time to hurry up a little after lunch: and rickety tables, torn chairs, stoves, boxes, sewing machines, children's clothes put to dry on strings. At that time there was almost no one inside the schools: the young people certainly weren't, and the old people were staying in the tavern, under the basements of the skyscrapers, so there was only a few elderly women in the house.

– To sister Adele! – shouted Marcello, coming forward along that strip of corridor that remained along the windows, – to Sister Adele!

- What do you want? – Sora Adele's voice shouted already impatiently, from inside one of those rooms, between the partitions. Marcello went to the little flapping door.

– Has your son returned to Sor'Adè? – She asked.

- None, - said Sister Adele, who was bored because it was already the third time in an hour that Marcello had come to ask her about her son. She was sitting on a straw-covered chair, sweating, with the newspaper that had fallen on her feet, and her bottom sprawling all over the place, combing her hair in front of a mirror leaning against the sewing machine.

He had his hair in the middle and two bands of curled and singed hair that were as hard as if they were made of wood on either side of his forehead. She was combing her hair with a frown, frowning and twisting her mouth with tight hairpins, as if it were a girl's hair, and she could afford to be

impatient with it and mistreat it: she was getting ready to go to the pizzeria. with her friends. - Goodbye, Sister Adele, - said Marcello as he left, - tell your son, come back, I'm down there. "He'll find me tomorrow, when he comes back," Sora Adele grumbled to himself, "lovely boy!"

Marcello went back down and found himself once again in the empty street. He was all huddled up, he almost cried, he let off steam by kicking shit. «Damn this asshole, – he thought, almost speaking to himself, – but where would he have gone, I say, where would he have gone, without saying anything to anyone... What if he does that? If I hold back my friends like this?... It makes me angry that I would blind three eyes with two fingers, this son of a slut! » He sat down on a step where there was a bit of shade: in the entire radius in which he could range with his afflicted gaze, only four or five children could be seen sitting on the dust, at the corner of the schools towards the Ferrobedò, who were having fun playing with a pocketknife. After a while Marcello took it and went towards them, standing to look at them, with his hands in his pockets. They didn't think so at all and continued playing without saying a word. After a while one looked up in the direction of the Mount of Splendour, and gazing fixedly with glittering eyes, he began to shriek: – An see Zambua! – Everyone looked towards that point and jumped up and ran away towards the Mount of Splendour. Marcello followed him too, slowly. He arrived beyond the earthworks, on the humps of the Monte that the others had already arrived and had crouched in the shade of a scaffolding on the slope, from where you could see all of Monteverde Nuovo on the right, and, below, half of Rome up to San Paul. They crouched around Zambua, each holding a puppy between their knees, while Zambua followed all their moves with an expert eye. The kids were silent and quiet: they only laughed, and not too loudly, when one of the puppies made a funny move. Every now and then Zambua would take one, as if it were a packet of rags, turn it all over, open its mouth, then throw it back on the ground between the knees of a little boy. The examinee stretched his skin a little, gave a little yelp, and then hopped with his little bowed legs around the boy's bare knees; or he would go boldly wandering down the slope. “Come on, that little slut's son goes,” the amused kids then shouted. One would get up and, also scurrying around like the puppy, would go and catch it again. Then he joked with him, trying to hide, blushing with a little shame, the affectionate impulses that he tore from his heart. – Whose puppies are these? – said Marcello, advancing,

with a superior air, despite showing a certain interest and a certain sympathy for the little dogs. "I'm mine," Zambua said darkly. – And who gave it to you? – With one eye, – Zambua said to him, busy scratching a puppy under the belly, – can't you see what a bitch is there? – The kids laughed. The bitch sat between their legs, as small as a mosquito, and very quiet. – Come on, – Zambua said imperatively. He gathered all the puppies, physically picking them up from between the kids' legs, and shoved them against the bitch's belly. Immediately everyone attached themselves to the breasts and, fat as pigs, began to suck, with the kids all around all amused and excited, urging them on and commenting, laughing. – What, can you give me one? – asked Marcello with an air of feigned indifference. Zambua, busy maintaining a certain order among the feeding dogs, looked at him: – See, – he said. And after a moment: – Can you give her five cents? – You're crazy, – said Marcello, laughing, tapping two fingers against his forehead, – do you know that in the zoo they give you puppies of wolf dogs for not even a penny? – But whatever..., – said Zambua, taking care of his dogs again. The kids were all ears. – Like wolf dogs? – Zambua inquired after a while. – No, I'll tell you right, then – said Marcello promptly, who was expecting that question. – Vallo asks Obberdan, he's the son of the Carzolaro, yes it's not true, – he added – And what does it matter to me, – said Zambua, – yes yes, yes no, there it is! – Two of the little dogs had started growling at each other like two wild beasts and were biting each other by the nose, attracting the attention of the kids who started laughing and also rolling around like puppies on the grass. "Let's do something," said Marcello then. Zambua didn't say a word, but you could tell he was into it. – Alright? – insisted Marcello. – As you think, – Zambua admitted between his teeth. "I like this one better," said Marcello promptly, who in the meantime had already made his choice: and he pointed with his finger to one black and fat one, the cutest of a slut, the one who wanted to feed all his milk. The kids looked at Marcello with envy, and tried to tease the little black dog so that he would bite the others' noses again. Marcello removed one of the two coins he owned from his wallet. – Tié, – he said. Without saying anything, Zambua reached out and made the hundred lire disappear into his pocket. – I'll be right back, wait for me here, eh – said Marcello, and went back down the slope towards the schools. – To Sister Addele, – he shouted again down the corridor, – to Sister Addele.

– Ah, okay! – She shouted the one who had just finished getting ready. – Are you still here? – She then said, appearing at the door stuffed like a sausage in her good dress. – Damn it, – she added, changing impatience into good humor, – beautiful boy, if I was in your shoes, you know where I had sent that wretched boy of my boy at this hour! But what is gold? “Where I’m going to go together,” said Marcello coolly. – I know, – said her sister Adele, placing her hand on her chest, with a disheartened and paragonic gesture so that her chin disappeared in the middle of the flab of her throat, – that until midnight he was at home there’s no comeback! If you knew what line it was, and how much it caught from your father, but nothing! “I’ll have to come back again,” said Marcello, who this time was a little less black, comforting himself with the thought that he had a little dog even better than Agnolo’s. – Greetings, Sister Adele! – She, gloved in the gray dress which seemed to have to come off at any moment due to the grease, and with the bands of hard hair on both sides of her forehead, went back into the room to apply a little powder and to take the bag. Marcello rushed down the stairs, all gnawed and blackened, with pieces of twisted pipes coming out of the walls, and went down into the street, but he had barely crossed the threshold a few steps when he heard a great crash behind him, which sounded like a bomb. and he felt a sharp blow from behind, as if someone had treacherously punched him. «I’m the son of a slut!» thought Marcello, falling to the ground on his stomach, with a great noise in his ears and blinded by a cloud of white dust.

Ricetto had just a little bit of change left to buy two three nationals and to take the tram. He made his way up the road to the Cerchi, all alone like a dog, and there he waited for the thirteenth, which was half empty, because it was still early and it was as light and warm as in the middle of the afternoon, while it shouldn’t even have been six. Ricetto went to sit at the back of the car, half out of the window, so that he could be alone with his sad thoughts, and the breeze, as the tram raced along the almost deserted Lungoteveri and along Viale del Re, blew his curls into tufts. on his forehead and stuck around his ears, and made his blouse flap outside his trousers. He stared, without seeing, at the facades of the houses he passed by, all heartbroken, with his face burned by the sun and his eyes that were just about to shine with tears. He descended like a thief to the White Bridge, but as he descended, he remained still, struck by an unexpected scene. Around the spiers of the White Bridge, on the grassy areas, between the

construction sites of the Viale dei Quattro Venti under construction, where usually no one was ever there, and along the little road that went up to Ferrobedò and the Skyscrapers, where only those who lived there and who didn't have calluses on their feet or tight shoes, it was all full of people. - What happened? - Riccetto asked someone standing next to him. - Well, - he said, looking around to see if he could understand something. Riccetto rushed forward, among the people, down the embankment which first descended to a level crossing and then climbed steeply up, turning towards the Ferrobedò. But just at that moment, the screams of sirens were heard at the end of the avenue of the Circonvallazione Gianicolense, towards Trastevere station. Riccetto turned, made his way through the swaying crowd and returned to the Ponte Bianco just in time to see the fire engines and an ambulance pass at full speed towards Monteverde Nuovo. Their scream slowly dispersed among the buildings and construction sites.

Riccetto ran back down towards the level crossing, but met Agnoletto with his bicycle in each hand. Together they made their way through the crowd. - What is it? - Riccetto asked another, because he couldn't resist his curiosity - There will be a fire at Ferrobedò, - said the interrogated person with a grimace, shrugging his shoulders. But as they pushed their way to the level crossing they found a line of agents blocking the passage. Agnolo and Riccetto tried to make themselves heard and to assert the privilege of living in Donna Olimpia, but they had orders not to let anyone pass, and Agnolo and Riccetto also had to go back. They tried to go down the Viale dei Quattro Venti, along the embankment, via a small path dug by the workers which went down beyond the level crossing. But the police were there too. All that remained was to go to Donna Olimpia by going around Monteverde Nuovo. Agnoletto and Riccetto returned to the Ponte Bianco, where there were more and more people, and set off up the slope of the Circonvallazione Gianicolense, carrying each other on the tube a little, and doing long stretches on foot, when the slope was too steep. There were at least two kilometers of road to go to get to the Monteverde Nuovo square, and then another half kilometer downhill, through the meadows, the barracks of the evicted and the construction sites, to get down to Donna Olimpia, on the other side. Riccetto and Agnolo arrived there as evening began to fall. They ran down the first stretch of road, then, even there, they had to stop. Just before the skyscrapers, a large crowd began to move on the street, under the Mount of Splendore, in the internal courtyards of the

buildings. You could hear shouts and calls, and the voices of the people talking crowded together like that were muffled and suffocated. Riccetto and Agnolo, getting off their bicycles, slipped into the crowd without saying a word. – What happened, what happened? – Riccetto asked some acquaintances. They looked at him and said nothing in response, drifting in the midst of the confusion. Then one, while Riccetto was walking ahead, white as a rag, took Agnolo by the sleeve and said to him: - Don't you know that Scole and I collapsed? – At that moment the scream of sirens could be heard from Monteverde Nuovo, and after a moment other fire engines came running down, clearing the crowd, and came to stop next to the others in the middle off the intersection by Donna Olimpia. When the last scream of the siren stopped, the speeches and shouts of the people could be heard louder. In the place where there was the building on the right corner of the schools you could see a large ruin that was still smoking, and below, on the road, a mountain of white rubble and boulders, which impeded passage and completely covered the view. row of white columns, still standing, in the center of the facade. A fire crane was already working above the rubble, and two or three dozen men were digging with pickaxes, in the air that was becoming increasingly dark, shouting orders and calling to each other. All around there was a cordon of guards and the crowd, from a distance, was attentively watching the work of the firefighters; the women of the building opposite, from the windows with the lights already on, were shouting and crying.

Marcello had been taken to the hospital in an ambulance, still all white with dust like a floured fish, and there they had found two broken ribs. They had taken him to a ward that looked out onto some gardens with convalescents sunbathing, they had placed him in a cot between an old liver patient, who was always chatting, laughing and grumbling against the nuns, as if he were always drunk, and another middle-aged man who two or three days later, without ever having said anything, was taken to expire in a special room on the other side of the corridor. In the dead man's place, the next morning they brought another old man, who complained night and day, making the other man get horny, who, like a little boy, made the same noise to him with dirty faces. Marcello didn't feel bad about it. He spent his days especially waiting for mealtime: not because he was very hungry, in fact he

almost always had his share left over, but out of greed: his face brightened when he heard the clanking of scrap metal bins full of soup at the end of the corridor. , pushed by the nun on a kind of cart. He immediately turned his head in that direction, and with a connoisseur's gaze, he looked at what was there that day, observing the ladle, which came out full from the bin, filling the metal plates of the sick in the first beds. They began to eat meticulously, rattling the white iron bedside tables full of vials. You could see their jaws moving and their eyes narrowing and glittering with ill-concealed satisfaction. Most, however, grumbled about the food, acted delicate and always found something to complain about by swallowing those four morsels with an air of resignation. Marcello was among the latter, and the main topic of his conversations with his parents, at the time of the visit, was precisely the food in the hospital, as if his parents didn't know what he ate at home. He had almost everything left over that they brought him: and, in fact, he justified this lack of appetite by saying that the food was bad, that it was badly cooked, that the nuns did it on purpose to give him the most wasteful parts to spite him, while, instead, he advanced it a little because every slightest movement caused him great pain in his broken ribs, and a little because he really wasn't hungry, and he would have been repelled by any food, even restaurant food, which he had dreamed of so many times.

As the days went by, rather than going away, the pain in his ribs and the lack of appetite increased. He became paler and thinner every day, and could almost no longer move between the sheets. Just looking at his eyes made her feel faint. But he didn't think about it, and he tolerated both the pain and the weakness without much complaint.

In the meantime at Donna Olimpia, for better or worse, they had piled the rubble against the schools, clearing the passage, funerals had been held for the dead, and, thanks to the mayor's intervention, the homeless had been accommodated: accommodated so to speak, because they had about ten families crowded into a single room in a friary convent in Casaletto, and the others here and there in the villages, in Tormarancio or Tiburtino, in the houses of the evicted or in the barracks. At Donna Olimpia, two Sundays later, life was back to normal. The young people went out to have fun in Rome, the elderly went to the tavern, one altar boy at a time, and the army of kids invaded lawns and courtyards. Marcello's father and mother, with the other six or seven children, had gone out to visit Marcello at the San Camillo hospital, on foot, because it was no more than half an hour's

journey anyway, going up Monteverde New and going back down the Gianicolense ring road: slowly under the sun, they went up via Ozanam, the husband and wife, with the older daughters, all in silence, and with their heads down, and the little ones around who ran and they were teasing, arguing in low voices. Thus they passed in line, behind the skyscrapers, in front of the Monte di Splendore, where, on the small clearing among the rubbish, the boys began to play football. Agnolo and Oberdan were also there, all dressed up, watching the others, and they were already getting bored of it, sitting there, careful not to get a patch of grass on their trousers. As he saw Marcello's family pass by, Agnolo bumped Oberdan's elbow, and seized by a feeling with which he was already swelling, he said: - Oh, why don't we go and see Marcello too? - Let's go, - said Oberdan promptly, as they didn't know what to do anyway, immediately getting up from the ground and putting on an appropriate face, all fired up for the good intention. The two went without less, from the pitch, through the holes and humps that surrounded it: but some of their friends, who were coming from Monteverde Nuovo, stopped them: - Are you going? – they asked him, with the idea of having them go somewhere with them. The temptation was strong. But Agnolo, by now, replied with a serious look: - Let's go to the hospital to find Marcello. – Who Marcello? – said Lupetto who didn't know him. – Marcello, the boy of trousers, – explained another. – Do you know that he's going to die? – Agnolo then said. – How would he have died, – asked the other incredulously, – but he broke a rib, what if he dies from a broken rib? – Fuck you..., – said Agnolo, – but yes, my sister told me that a rib got inside the liver, I don't know, nor mirza, what do I know... – Come on, to Agnolè, – said Oberdan hastily, – that we are falling behind. "If we see," Lupetto and the others then greeted, swarming down towards Donna Olimpia. Agnolo and Oberdan ran to reach Marcello's family, who was taking the path on the lawn that led to the Monteverde Nuovo square, and without saying anything they followed him through the deserted streets of Sunday afternoon, beaten by the sun, up to the gates. of the hospital.

Marcello was very happy to see them. "They didn't want him to come in," Agnolo told him immediately, still full of indignation against the custodians. Marcello didn't miss the opportunity to express his opinion on the matter: - Here, - he said, - I know everyone by nose! And the mòniche worse than the artri, what do you think...

The effort he had made to speak had made him whiter than the sheet, but he didn't notice.

– Have you seen Zambuaia, what? – He inquired immediately, looking at Agnoletto and Oberdan with his eyes shining with curiosity.

– And who ever sees, – said Agnolo with a certain contempt, who didn't know about the little dog.

– Yes, you see, – insisted Marcello, a little displeased, – tell me to treat my little dog well, and then I'll give you a nice treat. He knows what it's about.

– Okay, – said Agnolo.

– And shut up a little, no, – said Marcello's mother, worried, seeing that her son became tired and pale when he spoke~ Marcello shrugged his shoulders, almost laughing.

– What do you know, – he said instead, with even more enthusiasm, completely satisfied, to his companions, without paying attention to his father and mother who were looking at him at the foot of the bed, – that they give me insurance?

– What insurance? – Agnolo asked unaware.

– 'Insurance for broken ribs, don't you know that there is insurance? – explained Marcello cheerfully.

His face almost colored at the thought of what he would do with the insurance money: he already agreed with his parents. She communicated it with her eyes that shone: - My bicycle is better than yours, - he said to Agnolo.

– Kill, – said Agnolo, raising his eyebrows.

At that moment the old man on the right began to make his complaint, with little moans one like the other, holding his hand on his belly. The old man on the other side who, strangely enough, had been good and good up until that moment, suddenly woke up, turned around making a face with a toothless mouth, and began to do as he did: - Uheeee, uheeee, uheeee , – partly for laughs and partly seriously pissed off. Then he resumed some of his mischief that he was doing while sitting on the bed. Marcello glanced cheerfully at his friends as if to say: – Do you see them? – Then he said in a low voice: – They're always like this.

But as he said these words, perhaps he felt a kind of dizziness, because it almost escaped him too, like a small moan. His mother approached him, tucking in the sheets: - But would you shut up? – She said. Even the sisters who were a little distracted gathered around him, and the little brothers who were already tired of being in there, stopped teasing each other, and clung to the headboard of the bed.

– And Riccetto, what are you doing? – Asked Marcello, as soon as he recovered from his dizziness.

– Well, – said Agnolo, – it will be a fortnight that we won't see it!

– Is it time now? – Marcello inquired.

“I think it's Tibburtino in Pietralata over there,” said Agnolo.

– Marcello remained a bit lost in thought. – And what did he say about her mother when he found out that she had died? – He asked.

'What did he say,' said Agnolo, 'he burst out crying, oh well.

- Ouch, - Marcello grimaced in pain, feeling a stronger pain in his side. His mother was frightened, and she took him by the hand, wiping the sweat from his forehead and neck with her handkerchief.

Marcello was almost shocked by his weakness and illness; and his parents knew that by now the doctors had not given him more than two or three days. Seeing him so white, the father went to call a nun, and her mother dropped to her knees against the edge of the bed, still holding her son by the hand and starting to cry in silence. The father returned with the nun, who looked at him, passed a hand over his forehead, and with a dull look, as he left, said: "We must have patience." At those words her mother raised her head a little, looked around her and began to cry louder: – My fijo, my fijo, – she said between sobs, – poor my fijo ...

Marcello reopened his eyes, and saw his mother crying and shouting like that, with everyone else around, some crying, some looking at him with different eyes than usual. Agnolo and Oberdan were now apart, at the end of the bed, because they had left the place closest to Marcello to his family.

– What's wrong with you? – said Marcello in a faint voice

The mother continued to cry even more desperately, unable to contain herself, and trying to stifle her sobs against the sheets.

Marcello looked around better, as if he were thinking intensely about something.

'Ah, but then,' he said after a while, 'I really owe it to myself!'

Nobody said anything to him. – But then, – continued Marcello, looking intently at those around him, – I must really die...

Agnolo and the other remained silent and frowning. After a few minutes of silence, Agnolo gathered courage, approached the bed and touched Marcello on the shoulder: - We bid farewell to you, in Marcè, - he said, - if we had to leave, now, we had an episode with friends.

– I greet you, in Agnolè! – Marcello said in a weak but firm voice. Then after thinking for a moment, he added again: - And everyone say goodbye to me down at Donna Olimpia, yes, I really won't be going back there anymore... And tell them they don't get so upset!

Agnolo pushed Oberdan by the shoulder, and they went down the now almost dark lane, without saying a word.

THIRD NIGHT AT VILLA BORGHESE

On the Tiburtina station overpass, two boys were pushing a cart with some armchairs on it. It was morning, and on the bridge the old buses, the one for Monte Sacro, the one for Tiburtino III, the one for Settecamini, and the 409 which turned immediately under the bridge, down Casal Bertone and Acqua Bullicante, towards Porta Furba, were changing gear scraping through the crowd, among the tricycles and carts of the stracciaroli, the bicycles of the children and the big red carts of the burini who were calmly returning from the markets towards the vegetable gardens on the outskirts. Even the peeling sidewalks on the sides of the bridge were all full of people: columns of workers, idlers, mothers of families who got off the tram at Portonaccio, right under the walls of the Verano and who dragged their bags full of artichokes and pork rinds, towards the huts of Via Tiburtina, or towards some skyscraper, recently built, among the wreckage, among the construction sites, the scrap metal and wood depots, the large factories of Fiorentini or Romana Compensati. Right at the top of the bridge, among the sea of cars and pedestrians, the two boys who were dragging the cart jerkily, without paying attention to the bumps it made on the potholes in the pavement, and going as slowly as they could, stopped and began to sit on the edges of the cart. One took a cigarette from the bottom of his pocket and lit it. The other, leaning on the armband of an armchair, with red and white banners, waited his turn to take a puff, and because of the heat he took off his black T-shirt from under his trousers. But the other continued to smoke without paying attention. – Aòh, – he then said, – do you give this shit to you? "Now, just keep quiet," said the other, handing it to him. There was so much coming and going on the bridge that their voices could barely be heard. There had even been a train, which passed whistling under the overpass, without slowing down at the low station, with all those bundles of tracks that were lost in the dust and the sun, against the thousands of houses that were being built in the valley behind the Nomentana. Smoking the cigarette that his companion had just handed him, the one in the black t-shirt hoisted himself onto one of the two armchairs that were on top of the cart, and lay down there as long as he

could, with his legs spread wide and his curly head resting on the backrest. . So he began to blissfully inhale those two centimeters of national that he held between his fingers, while around him, at the top of the bridge, the traffic of pedestrians and cars increased as midday advanced.

The other one also got on the cart, and lay down on the second armchair, with his hands on the seat of his trousers. “Damn,” he said, “I’m dying of weakness, I haven’t had a great day since yesterday morning.” But in the chaos, two long whistles could be distinguished at the end of the bridge. The two people in the seats, recognizing them, turned sideways, and in fact, at the bend of the tram at the end of the Portonaccio square, cheerfully weaving between the cars and buses that emerged in rows onto the bridge, they saw two other criminals like them who were leaving. they came up pushing a little cart all sweaty. As well as whistling, they gesticulated and shouted at the two tall men in the seats. They arrived downstairs, with the cart full of rubbish, which smelled like a sewer. They were all torn and dirty, with an inch of dust and sweat on their faces, but with their hair all well combed, as if they had just come out of some hairdresser back then. One was a dark and slender young man, handsome even in that way, with eyes as black as coal and nice round cheeks with a tan between olive and pink, the other was a half-redhead with a flabby face full of squeaks. – What, did you become a sheep farmer, in cuggi? – The one with the black t-shirt asked the first one, without moving an inch from how he was sprawled in the armchair with his hands on his stomach and his cigarette butt glued to his lower lip. – Fuck you..., to Riccè, – he replied. Riccetto - it was he who was the boy in the armchair - cunningly frowned and misted his gaze, pressing his chin against his throat, with an air of knowing things. Caciotta, the other one who was with Riccetto lying on the armchair, got up and, curious as a little boy, went to look at what was in the two friends' cart. He made a face of contempt and let out a forced laugh. – Uàh, uàh, uàh, – he laughed, turning over and sitting down on the edge of the pavement. The others looked at him waiting for him to stop, also taking on an almost laughing expression. “Yes, you can pay twenty-six lire, I’ll take a break from my neck,” said Caciotta at the end. The one whom Riccetto had called cousin, seeing that this was what Caciotta wanted to get at, clicked his tongue and gave him a little push and without saying anything took the cart by the shafts and started to leave. The other, the half-redhead, who was called Begalone, followed him, looking out of the corner of his eye at the

laughing Caciotta still sitting on the ground between the feet of passers-by. – At twenty-six lire, – he told him, – if we see tonight who has the most money in his pocket. – Pff, pff, pff, – Caciotta exploded. The Begalone stopped with his big faded Saracen head askew, and looked serious, weighing the words: – If you're starving, will you come and we'll offer you a drink? – Come on, – Riccetto readily accepted, having been watching the scene without saying anything from the top of his armchair. He jumped down and, helped by Caciotta, began to push the cart of the two rag-pickers. Without another word, they went straight down the other side of the bridge, towards the Tiburtina, and stopped in front of an inn with a pergola, between two or three hovels, under a skyscraper. The four of them went in and drank the liter of white wine, thirsty as they were from having pushed the cart all morning: Alduccio and Begalone then had dry and burnt throats from those four or five hours they had spent in the sun fall into a landslide of rubbish under a railway bridge. After they had swallowed the first mouthfuls, they were already all exhausted. – Annàmise to sell the armchairs, to Riccè, – said Caciotta, leaning against the counter with his legs crossed, – and let's get everything done... – And then let's get it to come, – he said with a competent air Riccetto. – But your damn thing, – said Begalone, – go to Porta Portese, no! – Riccetto yawned, and then looked at Caciotta with sleepy eyes: – Shall we go to Cacio? – He said. The other drank the glass of wine in one gulp, finished getting drunk, and hastily leaving the tavern, shouted, raising his hand: "I salute you, such ugly people." Riccetto also finished drinking, wetting his black shirt and coughing, and followed Caciotta.

From there to Porta Portese there was certainly no less than four or five kilometers of road to go. It was a Saturday morning, and the August sun was intoxicating. Riccetto and Caciotta, moreover, had to walk around so as not to pass through San Lorenzo, where the shop of the boss who had sent them early in the morning to deliver the armchairs to Casal Bertone was located. "We wish we couldn't find this merchandise where we came from," said Caciotta with false pessimism, while in reality he was walking briskly and full of hope. – Let's find, let's find – Riccetto replied grinning, taking a piece of cigarette out of his pocket. – How much do you think we can make up for it in Riccè? – Caciotta asked naively. – We can do just about thirty bags, replied the other. "And whoever goes home anymore," he added, cheerfully taking the last puffs from his cigarette. In any case, his house

was a so to speak: going there or not going there was the same thing, he didn't eat, he slept, on a bench in the public gardens it was the same. Was that a house too? Meanwhile Riccetto couldn't see his aunt: and neither could Alduccio, who was her son. Uncle was a drunkard who bothered everyone all day long. And then how can two complete families, with four children one and six the other, all fit into just two rooms, narrow, small, and without even a toilet, which was down below in the middle of the courtyard of the lot? Riccetto had found himself in this way of life for more than a year after the school misfortune, when he went to live in Tiburtino, with his relatives there.

They went to sell the armchairs to Antonio, the rag-picker from Vicolo dei Cinque, to whom Riccetto, Marcello and Agnolo, had sold the pieces of manhole covers three or four years earlier. They made about fifteen bags of it, and went to get new clothes. A little ashamed and a little without looking anyone in the face, they went to Campo dei Fiori where they sold tube trousers for a thousand, fifteen hundred lire, and beautiful gajarde shirts for less than two thousand: they also made themselves a pair of pointed shoes, white and black, and Caciotta the sunglasses he had dreamed of for so long; then limping from the pain in their feet which were swollen from the walk from Portonaccio to there, they went in search of a place to leave the bundle of old clothes. It was a word to find a place in those parts. They left him in the toilet of a little bar near Ponte Garibaldi, taking it carelessly, and thinking to themselves, as they passed the counter under the gaze of the bartenders: "Yes, well, we'll find him again, right there he'll be there."

They went to eat pizza and a crouton at Silvio's in Via del Corso. It was already late and it was time to think about how to spend the afternoon, what the hell! Bundled up as they were, all they had to do was choose: the Metropolitan or the Europa, the Barberini or the Capranichetta, the Adriano or the Sistina. In any case, they went out immediately, because those who go around lick and those who stay at home have dry tongues. They were all happy and joking, not even remotely thinking that the joys of this world are short, and luck turns... They bought the Paese Sera, to consult the shows page, and, arguing, they tore it up, because everyone wanted to read him: finally, pissed off, they agreed on the Sistina.

– I really like having fun! – said Caciotta, emerging cheerfully from the cinema, four hours later, after they had seen the film twice. He adjusted his

sunglasses on his nose, and as he slouched along the pavement of Via Due Macelli, he purposely poked at passers-by.

– How bad! – She shouted at some lady who, seeing him coming on top of her, looked at him acting irritably. Then if hers, by chance, turned over again, goodbye: balanced on the pavement, with her hand on the left corner of her mouth, hers would scream even louder:

– How ugly, how stupid, how bad you are!

Some guys couldn't see them, but they really couldn't see them. – Look at these! - shouted for example Caciotta, looking at himself, a beautiful, tall woman with a bottom that never ended, who was coming down together with a four-eyed short-haired man: when Riccetto and Caciotta passed in front of him, rubbing them, grinning and bending over until their fagots almost touched the ground of the nose, they began to go - Pffff, pffff, - spluttering like two idiots. The four-eyed man turned three-quarters: so who could hold them anymore? – How strong! – shouted Caciotta But a lady was actually heading towards them, and then they, taja!, took off running, all cheerful, up towards Villa Borghese, which of all the places where there were benches to sleep, was the one where one he could have entertained her better. Taking the Porta Pinciana side, they went down the avenue that ran alongside the riding track, full of cars and passers-by until late. At the end of this avenue, after the Ginestre roundabout, there was another one that led down to the parapets of the Pincio and the Casina Valadier. Two rows of oleanders, on rectangular flowerbeds, running thinly between the avenue and the sidewalk, covered with their shadows the benches against the fence, with the embankment on the riding track behind them. He stood on the benches taking in the fresh air of the people. – I want to rest a little, – Riccetto said carefree, and they went off to stretch out on their backs, singing full of gratitude towards life, on the dry grass of the embankment, waiting for it to come a little later. When they happily returned to the avenue the benches were already a little emptier, and there was less walking: but real life began then. Here and there you could see some old men in shirt sleeves; or some group of young people, some with jackets on sloping shoulders, some with a colored Americana. They were mostly sitting, sitting down, with their knees drawn together like women, or with their legs crossed, one arm resting on their lap, slightly bent forward, and they smoked in small nervous puffs, holding the cigarette with all four fingers. of the outstretched hand. Then further on on another bench, still

under the shade of an oleander, you could see a gentleman talking with a young dark-haired man, wearing one of those low-cut blue t-shirts that can be bought for half a sack in Porta Portese; and further still, other silhouettes, among the trees, under the headlights. "My friend can see all her thighs," said Caciotta suddenly, looking straight across the avenue, where, under the glare of light that cut the shadows from the street lamp, a woman was sitting on the bench with the blood-colored skirt above the knees. "See," said Riccetto, immediately intrigued. "A fijo de na bona donna," they shouted to Caciotta from a nearby bench. – Well? – He made a young man with skin as black as a frying pan, and his hair, even blacker, with greasy and dirty curls. He was sitting with his legs apart in the middle of a bench, with two companions at his side.

– What if he picks up? – Caciotta said excitedly, sitting down nearby.

– But what a pick-up, what a pick-up – said the Negro ironically, in a loud voice, to be heard by two large men, who passed by carrying with them two of the stars of Villa Borghese, full of good humor. "But what the hell with you," Riccetto sputtered after them. – I present to you my friend, – said Caciotta, introducing Riccetto to the others. They shook hands. In the background, the two big-bellies and the scaje continued to make a fuss, lighting their cigarettes: the Negro and the others ran away with their eyes crooked. The smaller of the Negro's two companions spoke softly to the other, a large, big-headed man with cheerful eyes. – And get up, to Calabrè, – he replied peacefully. – You're doing well this evening, eh Cappellò? – Caciotta asked him, to taste the soil. – Of course? – said Cappellone with his mouth as wide as a bench, and ran wild on the bench, stretching his feet almost to the flowerbed.

The Calabrian was entirely occupied with the seriousness of their business, and did not look at the two new men. "Let me touch it," he said, in his hoarse voice due to the cold he had always had since he slept every night on the Chiarina, there in Villa Borghese: he was about twenty years old, but his black and chubby face looked like that of a bastard of fifteen. He touched Cappellone's swollen pockets with his hand. – Fuck you..., go on, – he said with a jerk, – that's it, okay? – And he took a revolver out of his pocket. "He's crazy," said the Negro. Laughing, the Big Hat made her disappear inside his tough dusty trousers. "Kill them," said Caciotta. – It's a Berretta, what? – Riccetto asked as he approached. But they didn't answer him. The Calabrese said, continuing his survey in a monotone voice, and

with a dull, paragonal look: – Is it in pen? – What do I care for in pen, in block, – said Cappellone. – And Woodpecker has it, no! – said the Negro angrily, holding out an arm towards the Calabrian. “Now that guy's got drunk and doesn't care about anything,” the Calabrian said sulkily. “And go and find him,” said Cappellone. – Let's go, – said the Calabrian. Cappellone got up from the bench and stretched, laughing. Riccetto and Caciotta followed Calabrese and Cappellone, who shuffled idly down the avenue; the Negro on the other hand, as soon as they got up, said: – Who's going to do it to me if he's so happy here! He – he He stretched out on his stomach on the bench, stretched one leg over it, and then the other.

The avenue that led towards Porta Pinciana was still full of women, dressed-up young men, foreigners, who were strolling around to the sound of jazz from the Casina delle Rose. But at the exit of Villa Borghese, in front of the arches of the Gate, the avenue which still ran alongside the riding track and descended along the Muro Torto, was all dark and silent: scoundrels were pushing along it, orienting themselves with a mischievous expression, now two or three soldiers, now a young man on a Lambretta, and they immediately disappeared into the darkness of the trees that covered him. On the right there was always the fence that divided the avenue from the embankment, and further down, in the darkness, before the large expanse entirely illuminated by the moon, the two fences that delimited the sand path. The clearings were all yellow and crushed, because during the day the kids went there to play football and the servants went for a walk, and now they went down there in gangs, towards the riding school full of squared hedges, burnt by the smell of the horses' piss, entire departments of the army. They rose from the shade of the plane trees piled up in the center of the plain, or from the chaos of nets and bushes of the riding stables, and went up across the track sailors from Tarentine, or from Salerno, blacks and buckets, tank drivers from Cispadane with their arms hanging and their trousers hanging or kids from Prati or Flaminio, all senseless. And they left behind them, down there at the end, the most complete silence. When Riccetto, Caciotta and the other two regulars from Villa Borghese arrived there, it was already late, and the silence between a descent and an ascent began to increase. – Er Picchio, – announced the Calabrian, as if he had spotted him. – Where's the guess? – said Cappellone. – What, are you deaf too? – said the Calabrian. “But the damn thing is yours,” said Cappellone, sitting down, as if he intended to stay there for an

hour, on the fence posts. In fact, behind the track, down at the end, almost at the height of the chestnut trees, between the metal fences and the darkest thickets of the riding school, he could hear a voice screaming at breakneck speed. Little by little, as he approached, he got stronger.

– Paragule! Paragule! – She screamed. Then he silenced himself for a little while, but she immediately started again:

– Paragule! – She repeated, and every time, that word seemed to be shouted by someone who was getting more and more angry. The one who was shouting, as far as one could understand without seeing him, had to stop every now and then, turn sideways towards the riding stables, and in that position shout. Or maybe he walked slowly, stumbling every now and then, with his head turned backwards. He must have also put his hands in a funnel around his mouth, and he was shouting so loudly that he felt the phlegm rubbing his throat:

– Paraguleeee, paraguleeee!

Then he would pause a little longer, to take a few steps or to spit. At first, since she shouted, dragging her u a little, it seemed like she was making fun of her. But then the lowering of her voice made it clearer and clearer that he was shouting in real anger, in anger, spraying saliva. They must have heard that cry in the middle of the riding track, all the way up the avenue, up to the Casina delle Rose. He was silent, rested for a while, then hung up, as if he couldn't find any other words for her anger than this one: – A pparagule!

He was now almost under the fence and you could make out his shape, which was wobbling, trembling from head to toe as if the north wind was blowing. He didn't keep his hands still for a moment: he slipped his shirt on and off under his trousers, tightened his belt, pulled the chewing gum he was chewing between his teeth, fixed his hair that fell in front of his eyes.

“A dirty paragule,” he shouted louder, to those who in the meantime were crouching diplomatically at the back of the bushes, in sacred contemplation; he sat up all at once, then stood up and began to come up again, still facing backwards. After a few steps he stopped again, hesitating inside the shirt that hung loosely over his trousers, and began a long tirade, full of complications, chewing his words along with the gum, and spitting out touches of saliva.

- To Picchio, - Cappellone interrupted him from above, - they're standing by, they're talking to themselves, so I'm not making a mistake, eh Pì? – The

Woodpecker turned upwards without saying anything, then looked back towards the bottom of the prairie, where they stood as silent as sphinxes, shouting once again: – A paragule! Then he came up the path between the fences across the track. He arrived on the avenue where the others were and sat down among them on the small nailed trunks. He chewed, opening his entire mouth wide, making his jaws creak and saliva drip. – What did you do, Pì? – Said the Calabrian with his eyes finally smiling at him, like those of a beast that he eats.

– Damn them, – the Woodpecker shouted loudly, sprinting. As he shouted and chewed, all the skin on his small, dry face wrinkled.

- They don't want to fuck me, - he shouted.

– Do you do this advice in Picchio? – said Cappellone. The Calabrian was grinning with a swollen face. The Woodpecker stood up and swerved and put his hands in a funnel in front of his mouth, and turned to the clearing that lay beneath them, he did it again:

– A paragule!

– 'In pen? – he said, trying to start investigating the Calabrian: the Woodpecker looked at him as if without even noticing him, askance. "Why, I wear earrings on my nose," he began shouting again at the prostitutes, "why wasn't I even going to give you five cents?" Paragulee! – He pointed his arm in their direction: – I'll see you tomorrow evening, I'll see you! – What are you doing in Picchio? – said Cappellone. – What je fo-o? – Said the Woodpecker, chewing and sniffing at him, – I know 'c... they know'. – It's here, – he then said, turning to the Calabrian, looking at him out of the corner of his eye and stretching his eyebrows with an air of resignation.

The Calabrian took the pen and looked at it in the light. – Who did you steal it from? – asked Riccetto, observing her.

– To a boy about to go around, – chewed the Woodpecker.

– But what kind of boy, – said Cappellone, – but yes, you told us he was an American.

The Woodpecker didn't listen to him.

– And what are you doing? – Riccetto said, shrugging his shoulders.

– Kill it, – said the Calabrian, – who can't get half a body?

- If it's! – said Riccetto.

– What, – said the Calabrian, – how much do you want to charge?

– But it doesn't make me laugh, and get up – Riccetto retorted.

"Let's have a blast," cried the Woodpecker all at once, waking up and jumping to his feet, so dry that if the wind rose he would fly.

– It's in gear, – said the Calabrian.

– But what a mess, – said the Woodpecker, chewing and blowing, – I have three pieces!

Riccetto and Caciotta sat waiting to see how things developed.

"Namo," he said hoarsely, nodding shakily towards Porta Pinciana the Woodpecker. – And let's go, – said Cappellone, following him with the Calabrese. Riccetto and Caciotta didn't move. – Let's go to Moretti, – Cappellone told them.

When they were under the arches of Porta Pinciana, they found the Negro and another hedgehog, small, with a swollen face, like a delinquent and two porcelain eyes, who was one of the Acqua Bullicante, named Lenzetta, who the others already knew. . – Aòh, – said the Cappellone, – two from Tibburtino, one from Acqua Bullicante, two from Primavalle, a straggler, and er Picchio here from Valle dell'Inferno: we could form the League of the withered from the Borgate de Roma!

All seven of them went to a pizzeria to get a liter of Picchio's parmesan, near Termini station; then they went back up Via Veneto, with their shirts flapping outside their trousers, or in their undershirts, with their t-shirts twisted around their necks, shouting, singing and tackling the rich people who at that hour were still walking around all dressed up, with their 'Alfa waiting for them. Villa Borghese was now almost empty. You could barely hear the violins from the Casina delle Rose. As soon as they were in front of the riding track, the Woodpecker woke up again and began to shout again at the top of his lungs: – A paragule! – He climbed over the fence, went down the slope and as soon as he was on the grass of the clearing, he fell down with his mouth on the dust, and fell asleep.

'I've got myself infatuated, damn it,' said Riccetto, 'with all those beautiful tough bags from Via Veneto.

"Let's go down there and see if they're still there," said Caciotta.

- See, - said the Calabrese, - those go to the deaf! the grain!

– What, can't we keep them deaf? – said Caciotta triumphantly. The others pricked up their ears.

“Let's go then,” said the Negro, grinning under the wool that fell curly over his ears, “and what are we waiting for?”

They crossed the entire clearing, under the moon, reached the riding school and searched: but the whores had already left.

– The caravan must have passed by – the Calabrian said shrewdly.

– All right, – said Caciotta, – tonight... – and continued his speech by shaking his hand with his index finger and thumb extended.

Lenzetta jokingly slapped his buttock.

– See, – he said, – what a cut...to!

– That's a damn thing! – corrected Caciotta.

– What's behind you? – asked the one from Acqua Bullicante, Lenzetta.

– Why, no, – said Caciotta, sketching, – and there's a piece left over for you.

– He cheated you, – concluded the Negro as if saying «amen». They climbed up the other side of the clearing and turned back onto the avenue where they had met. But he was too busy to sleep there. They went into the middle of the gardens towards the Casina Valadier, each one stretched out on a bench and took a nap.

The night quickly passed: the circular trains had not yet begun to move under the Muro Torto, and all of Rome was still immersed in sleep, as the sun was already beating down on the meadows and groves of Villa Borghese, with a white white light that he pasted on the walls and on the small busts along the flowerbeds.

Ricchetto was woken up by a sort of strange coolness in his feet. He turned around a little on the bench, tried to take his nap again, but then raised his head again to see what the hell was happening to his slices. A ray of sunlight, fresh and dazzling, falling slantwise through the bushes, illuminated his punctured pedals.

– What, did I take off my shoes yesterday evening? – Ricchetto asked himself out loud, jumping up to sit down.

– No, I didn't take them off, – he answered himself, looking under the bench, on the grass, among the bushes. – To Caciotta, to Caciotta, – she began to scream, shaking Caciotta who was still sleeping, – they stole my shoes!

– What did you do? – said the sleepy Caciotta.

“They stole my shoes,” Riccetto shouted. – And deaf ones too! – He said, putting his hands in his pockets. Although he was still asleep, Caciotta also looked in his pocket: there wasn't even a bag left, and his glasses had disappeared. – Damn you! – Riccetto shouted desperately. The others had also woken up, and were standing there watching from afar.

“I didn't have a lira,” said the man from Acqua Bullicante, Lenzetta, sitting on his bench. The Calabrian, on the other hand, watched silently with his swollen face, shaking his head, with his eyes full of the expression of someone who knows how things are, but he doesn't want to talk. Riccetto and Caciotta left without saying anything and without even looking at the others, who were acting stupid, giving a worried and innocent look to their shady faces, so much so that no one could dare say anything about them. In all of Villa Borghese, blanced by the already hot sun, not a soul could be seen. They went down to the meadow of the riding track and crossed it. At the end, on the other side, on his stomach, the Woodpecker was still sleeping. He was holding a pair of blue and white rag shoes, all frayed and with holes in the soles. Riccetto slowly took them off and put them on, even though they were a little tight; then they went down Porta Pinciana.

That day they went to eat with the friars. Of course, because despite having walked around Piazza Vittorio all morning, they hadn't earned a penny.

White with hunger, they passed blindly under the scaffolding of the station, and arrived at Via Marsala, where at number two hundred and ten there was a small door with "Refectory" written on it, of the Sacred Heart or of the Blessed Virgin, one of those names there. They put their noses in first, then their heads, taking a step forward and a half behind, dressed as they were, and only Riccetto with his rag shoes: and they found themselves inside a small corridor that led into a dirt courtyard, full of many penitents like the two of them, who played basketball, and it was clear that they did it just to make the friars happy. Riccetto and Caciotta took a look at each other to see what their faces were like, and they almost broke down when they saw how pitiful they looked. Instead they started giggling, and shouldering their shoulders, with cheerful, unpunished faces, they turned in.

A fat brother of a friar came towards him all sweaty and wild, and they swerved a little, thinking to themselves: "What does this want?" But the friar said in a loud voice: - Do you want to eat, boys? – Riccetto turned away so as not to be seen laughing, while Caciotta, who had already been there once before, said: – Yes, father. At the word "father" Riccetto couldn't hold himself any longer and began to gurgle, so much so that he had to pretend to tie one of those dirty shoes he had to hide his face. The friar said: - Come forward, - and took them into an entrance, on the other side of the courtyard, where there was a small table with a register and a book of coupons. Pulling up his skirts so that his big belly could almost be seen, the friar asked him to tell him his personal details. – The what? – said Riccetto, surprised but completely helpful, putting himself at his full disposal. When they found out what the hell these "general information" were, they gave them false ones, and, in return, respectfully took the coupon from the friar's hands.

Riccetto was very happy to see how things were going smoothly, and was almost a little moved in his unusual embarrassment. – When is it big? – He asked, full of expectation. – Well, soon, – replied Caciotta. Meanwhile the other stragglers continued to play that pimp game, all tied up. – Aòh, let's play too, – said Riccetto, determined, with every intention of asserting his rights. They went into the middle of the courtyard, argued a bit with the others who were worse equipped than them, and started playing without knowing basketball at all, which was a game they had never heard of. For the whole half hour they played, Riccetto did nothing but be careful not to shout "fuck you...".

Then the friars called them by clapping their hands and made them enter a large room at the end of the coupon entrance, where there were tables ten meters each with benches around them: they gave them two dry loaves for one and two bowls of pasta and beans, they made him say: In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and they made them eat it.

Riccetto and Caciotta went there for about ten days. Only midday though, because the friars closed up shop in the evening. So many times the two would only eat one shift a day. In the evening they made do. Either with the money they made in the morning at the station or at the market in Piazza Vittorio, or by stealing something for the stalls. Finally one evening fortune smiled on him, and they sent the friars out of trouble... It was on a circular road, where a lady had got on with a bag with a purse inside: that purse,

through the window of the pizzicarolo in via Merulana where the lady shortly it had first come in, it had shown itself to be swollen in a promising way, and the lady, on leaving, had put it inside the bag which was full to the brim and didn't close properly. Fatally, Riccetto and Caciotta had just thirty lire in their pockets. Fifteen divided them, one of them ran away, chased the circular road already in motion and jumped into it while running. Everyone entered on their own and they went to stand behind the lady. She was clinging to the handrail, glaring at her neighbors. Riccetto stood closer to her, because he was the one who had to work on it, and Caciotta stayed behind him to hide his movements, while Riccetto, slowly opening the bag, took out the purse with his right hand, and he slid it against his side under his left arm, until he held it under his armpit. Then, still sheltered from behind by Caciotta, he made his way through the people, and they got off at the first stop, cutting down through the gardens of Piazza Vittorio, and

an amen could not have been said
as soon as they were gone.

They disappeared down towards San Lorenzo, taking the arch of Santa Bibiana. And while they were in those parts, they thought of going for a little visit to Tiburtino, to see how things had turned out after their escape with the armchairs of the upholsterer in Via dei Volsci...

It was the first evening, and a nice chill made the atmosphere cheerful at the time when the workers return from work and the circular trains pass full like cans of anchovies, and you have to wait three hours under the shelters to be able to hang from the running boards. From San Lorenzo, to Verano, up to Portonaccio there was a whole celebration, a caciara, a choir. Riccetto sang:

How beautiful you are Rome
how beautiful you are Rome in the early evening,

at the top of his lungs, completely reconciled with life, all full of nice plans for the near future, and feeling the money in his pocket: the money, which is the source of all pleasure and all satisfaction in this dirty world. Caciotta followed him, close behind, calm and blissful. They arrived at Portonaccio and began to wait, singing with their hands in their pockets, in

the middle of the large clearing under the overpass for Tiburtino's bus. One had just left, and you wanted to wait for another; when this other one arrived, so many people had already gathered waiting for him that whoever was making him do so made an effort to catch him. They waited a third, and it was the same. They came up from San Pietro, carried by a slightly fresh and slightly warm wind, three or four clouds, it thundered and it rained a little. Riccetto and Caciotta gave up on the buses, which for a while at that hour were a pain to catch, and went for a walk, together with lines of Bersaglieri, behind the Tiburtina station, at the end, between warehouses, earthworks and construction sites, for certain meadows already all soaked, to see if there were any sluts. When they returned to the terminus, under the overpass, the little lights of the Verano were already lit and pulsating reddishly in rows and circles above the walls. The bus was ready: but so was the usual crowd that stormed it. – What time will it be in Cacio? – said Riccetto. – Well, it must be eight, eight and a quarter, – said Caciotta; instead it must have been at least ten by now. “It's late,” said Riccetto, without losing his good mood; – let's go up.

They almost threw two or three old women and two or three old men to the ground, they mistreated the delivery boy, they stepped on a few calluses and they shouldered them left and right, finally placing themselves behind the driver, in the corner. They leaned against it and ironically observed the scenes that happened inside the bus. Then, finally, their companions began to file in and, as soon as they had arrived there, they had cheerfully greeted them.

– Well? – She said Caciotta with a protective and confident air, shaking his hand one by one, – what do we call beautiful?

– Can't you see, – said one, with a dejected look, and his clothes smelling of the workshop, – that we are returning from the work?

– 'O I see, 'o I see,' said Caciotta.

The other continued bitterly: - Now we'll go home, let's eat, and go and sleep, and tomorrow morning we'll have to work again!

Caciotta said: – Yes, yes! – And he looked at them blissfully.

– And how do you walk, in Cacio? – asked a blond man, Ernestino, noticing that special look that Caciotta had.

Caciotta looked at him for a moment longer, with misty eyes; then without saying anything, with his gestures hindered by the crowd, he put his

hand in his pocket, munched on it a little, very calmly, looking straight in the eyes, ironically, and with a detached air, at Ernestino and the other two or three rookies, who they too looked at him with amusement.

Then he slowly took out his wallet, opened it meticulously, and delicately removed a packet of hundred-dollar bills from one of the compartments. Having done this, with an unexpected gesture, he hit Ernestino with the packet of money, two or three times on one side and the other of the face. After that, he put everything back in his wallet which he tiredly stuffed back into his pocket, completely satisfied.

Ernestino's eyes were laughing, amused at having played the victim in Caciotta's outburst: 'What are you doing,' he told him cheerfully, 'I'm just a fool!'

"See, and those we hid," Caciotta said, twisting his mouth and blurring his eyes even more.

Ricetto remained silent, a little dazed, even if he put on a bit of air, because he didn't know much about Ernestino and those others there. They were old friends of Caciotta, who was born and raised in Tiburtino.

With Ernesto and a certain Franco, who was also there, called Penna Bianca, they knew that they were creatures and when Tiburtino and Pietralata were still in the middle of the countryside, with the new lots and the newly built Fort. From time to time, they weren't even eight years old, they left home and stayed away for a few weeks, fasting or eating some onions or some perch picked up at the markets, or some pork rinds taken from someone's bag. mistress. They ran away from home, just like that, for no reason, because they liked to have fun. At the Bersaglieri barracks they found some smokes. And to sleep, for example, they made do under the watermelon tent, right there in front, on top of the watermelons.

The good mood and the state of gratitude towards the life in which Caciotta found himself, due to the money he had in his pocket, made him sentimental and open to re-enactments.

– Aòh, Ernesti, – he said almost sweetly, – do you remember that time about the watermelon?

- How, I don't remember, - said Ernestino, who, having no money in his pocket, remained indifferent.

– To Ricetto, – said Caciotta, pulling him by the sleeve, – listen to this piece... – You remember, to Ernesti, – he said laughing, – who trembles at

night, from and parts of Bagni de Tivoli, there , that we slept with a bat under our heads? – Ernestino laughed. – This watermelon farmer, – explained Caciotta to Riccetto, – there was a pig in Bagni de Tivoli, in a shack in the middle of the fields... Now since we were keeping a good watch on the watermelons, he thought about making some mess. to guard this pig. And there was also a conijo, there in that place. One evening the watermelon farmer's mother arrived and said: "Go to Bagni," she says, "and buy half a kilo of bread." You will understand, two kilometers one way and two kilometers back... It was already dark... Then the mother of the watermelon, while we were on the road, takes this rabbit, kills it, cooks it and eats it. Then she takes the bones, digs a little hole, and puts them in... she's unfortunate! Then we both arrived, and we immediately went to see the conijo and the conijo was no longer there. Then the watermelon farmer, the principal, arrives and says: «Er conijo?» So Ernestino and I said here: "Well, we went to buy some bread and when we came back the conijo was no longer there." So the main question was: «Could there not be just one?» We replied: "Eh, only one is in trouble, we were afraid, and then we both went away." Then the boss, all pissed off, put five hundred lire out of his pocket: "Then you're both fired, and don't let me see you in front of my feet anymore, otherwise I'll piss you off!"

- But what did it matter to us, - he continued happily, - if we went back to Pietralata, to fight with the other kids from the village, so that they would be taken to work in the circus... do you remember Ernesti? ... with the lions... and tigers... And Rondella who ran away from time to time, the Maremma mare, who we ran after all night, through the meadows behind Pietralata and we had her caught that he was bathing on the Aniene! – Riccetto listened to him cheerfully, completely sharing the points of view of Caciotta and his old friends. Even the others agreed, laughing, feeling all their instincts of being a slut that revived in the depths of their soul: among the others from Tiburtino, listening with a disconcerted air, there was one from Pietralata, black in face and hair like a snake, a big crown that the others all reached under his armpits: he stood there next to them, with one hand on the handrail, weak and concentrated, listening to them with a caressing expression on his shady face. It was a certain Amerigo, whom Caciotta knew little more than by sight. The bus jolted along the cobblestones of Tiburtina, making its load of Christians dance so crowded together that a needle couldn't fit through them, and the Tiburtino gang was

increasingly cheerful. – You see what beautiful curls have come from me – Ernestino said in a clipping of the conversation, looking at Riccetto's head. - Don't you know, - Caciotta intervened brilliantly, - why does he get those curls if he farts in his face? - While the others were laughing, Amerigo, without moving too much from where he was, nudged Caciotta with his elbow: - Aaa, what's your name, - he said softly in an almost voiceless voice, - I owe you a word from now on!

IV BOYS OF LIFE

The people are great savages within society.

L. TOLSTOS

Amerigo was drunk. "Let's choose here at Forte," he said to Caciotta, who was listening to him deferentially. "Let me introduce you to my friend," he then said, just to say something. Amerigo raised his hand as if it were leaden towards Riccetto; he had the collar of his jacket turned up, his face was green under the curls smeared with dust, and his big brown eyes stared glassily. He shook hands tightly, without seeming to, as if there wasn't the slightest doubt between them, that they were both right-wingers. But he immediately forgot about Riccetto, and turning towards Caciotta he said: - Did you understand? - He was a serious boy, but what Caciotta understood in the meantime was that there was little to joke about with him: one day at Farfarelli's he had seen him lifting six chairs tied with one hand, and had inflated them with punches and sent more than one in the hospital in Pietralata. - What did you do? - said Caciotta, as if on an equal footing, among scoundrels. "Let's talk now," said Amerigo, pulling up the collar of his jacket better.

The bus stopped at the Pietralata Fort; from the still open bar a reflection of light skimmed the asphalt crust of the Tiburtina. Amerigo jumped down from the running board, springing on his legs, with a gym-like step, without taking his hands out of his trouser pockets. "Let's go," Caciotta said to Riccetto, who couldn't understand the turn things were taking, and they went after him. "If we do this part on foot," said Amerigo, walking in front of the Bersaglieri barracks towards Tiburtino. As they were a little further down, he grasped Caciotta by the elbow; he walked putting one foot in front of the other with such a mean face that wherever anyone touched him, it seemed as if he would get hurt. He shuffled his steps like a slightly grumpy bowler and instead, in that slouching walk, he could see that he was ready and quick, worse than an animal. With Caciotta and Riccetto he continued to act like a serious boy, who doesn't even think about his strength and his reputation as the best guy in Pietralata: he had the complicit air of someone who is negotiating a deal with a person of equal standing. to him, who does

not work. – Come with me, – he said to Caciotta, – then you'll be happy. – Where? – said Caciotta. Amerigo nodded his head forward, towards Tiburtino. “Here,” he said, “from Fileni.” Caciotta had never heard this name. He remained silent. Amerigo continued, pretending to believe that the other had understood: – Today is Saturday, let's calli, – he said in a dull and somewhat womanly voice, perhaps like his mother, and increasingly yellow in the face. “And let's go,” Caciotta said to the naughty girl; there was nothing else to do anyway, and he now took it as fun.

Ricchetto, on the other hand, stood back with his eyes crooked. As they reached the entrance to Tiburtino III said: – I greet you, a moretti, I spent. – Where are you going? – said Caciotta, stopping. Amerigo too had stopped and was looking sideways with his hands half stuffed in his pockets. – He slept, damn you. I have a zonno that is still two steps away!

Amerigo approached him, looking at him with eyes that seemed bloody, as if laughing; he laughed for the reason that it was not possible to do anything against what he decided.

– A moro, – he said in a low and still calm, persuasive voice, – I already told you, yes you come with me, then you have to thank me... You don't know me... – The Caciotta who he knew him and looked at him amusedly from one side. She knew anyway that Ricchetto would go with them to this Fileni guy.

“I'm sleepy until today,” said Ricchetto.

– But what sleep, what sleep, – said Amerigo, laughing under his furrowed brow, always cheerful at the thought that it was absurd not to follow his advice, – and let's go! – He put his hand on his heart: – Er Caciotta here, can you today, see Cacio? I am someone who no one can do anything about me, and I make a promise, to die, get rid of everything, as I say... Why? Are we all friends here? I'm doing you a favor, just like today, and do you do it to me again, what if we have to give each other a hand? – He had become solemn: not being with him would have made it clear that one was a fool; but Ricchetto was annoyed by that affair between Amerigo and Caciotta, which seemed like a no-brainer to him. Caciotta looked at him with a strange expression: “Do as you think,” he seemed to be saying, “I don't bother.” Ricchetto shrugged. – And who cares about you? – He said to Amerigo, – are you right: go with Caciotta to this place, do you need me there? – But Amerigo didn't know which of the two had the money in his

pocket. He looked at Riccetto with a patient and very serious look. He got under him until his breath, which he smelled of wine, mixed with Riccetto's. But at that moment two well-known shadows were drawn against the yellowish shadow of the first lots of Tiburtino, which came down towards the fountain where they had stopped.

"Li carubba," said Caciotta. – They know me, – he continued, – I know 'those who wanted me will jail' next evening at the Tibburtino cinema!

Amerigo watched them come forward with his sick eyes; he put his hand over his face, and squeezed his forehead between his fingers. He was white as a rag and his mouth was grimacing as if he were about to cry. When the two shadows with the bandolier over their shoulders were a little further away, towards the hamlet, he passed his hand over his forehead one last time. "Oh my God, it hurts so much," he said, "it's like a nail going through my head from side to side." But he had already passed him by.

He approached Riccetto again and put a friendly hand on his shoulder. "To Riccè," he said, "whatever your name is, there's no point in being a fool, come along, it's better." He resumed his expansive and oratory air: - Word, - he said, - that I was worse off than a slut, yes after a day I come to you: to Amerigo, I owe you thanks and I also apologize to you –. Her hand weighed on Riccetto's shoulder like a bonnet.

They went down the main street of Tiburtino, where only at the two bars there was a wisp of light, and in the midst of the peeling and dirty one-storey lots, with a few cloths hanging from the windows, a guitar could still be heard humming. They turned down the covered market, greasy and greenish with fish, crossed two or three of the identical streets that divided the lots, and arrived at one of the houses with a twentieth-century style loggia in front, battered and crumbling. They went up a staircase, then to a stone balcony that overlooked the parallel road, and knocked on a small door, already open and from which a little light was coming out. A hand from inside opened and they found themselves in a kitchen full of silent people clustered around the table. Six or seven played it straight away; the others, pressed against the walls or the bucket full of still dirty dishes, watched.

Amerigo and the other two entered slowly among the crowd of people, who moved aside, making some room, and contenting themselves with having a look at him; then everyone began to look at the cards, from behind

the players' backs. Amerigo stood watching, as if he no longer thought about Caciotta and Riccetto, the game whose hands followed each other quickly with continuous wins or losses, followed by some louder whispers and some comments even made out loud. Caciotta didn't give a damn but even though he was dying of sleep he continued to look around cheerfully while Riccetto, remembering when he was a boy at Donna Olimpia and playing with the money from the pipes, his cheeks had turned red and his eyes were burning. As one hand ended, Amerigo turned a little, not towards his companions, but towards one or another of the elderly people who were around, shaking his head or hissing in a hoarse voice: - Damn him -. In front of him, with hunched shoulders, there was a certain Zinzello, with straight hair styled in Rudi style, a carter, who always lost, and became increasingly harder and wrinkled in the face; finally he got up and another took his place. At that moment Amerigo who was behind him made up his mind. He turned towards Caciotta, and, as if they had already agreed, with confidence, and a bitter expression in his eyes, he said: - Prestemle the bag you have in your back. "It's not my responsibility," said Caciotta.

Amerigo's yellowish eyes focused on Riccetto who was a little further back: "Put these deaf people away," he said to him in a low voice, so as not to drown out the buzz of the kitchen. Riccetto was asleep. - Come on, - said Amerigo hastily, almost exasperated, - I give it to you, what do you think, I'm not stealing from you, you know it, yes.

- And hunting, what do you care, - said Caciotta.

Riccetto said: - Let's take half a penny of the winnings, okay? - And he took out the body, holding it tightly in his hand - Instead of losing me you give back half a body... - he added. - I'm not just stealing from you, - repeated Amerigo, - let's do what you say, come on, - and impatiently took the money from his hand. He put three or four chips on the table, and bet; the cards slipped from one hand to the other as if they were made of oil, a pack here, a pack there, in a minute, and a glance was enough to see whether things had gone well or badly.

Amerigo won that first hand, and barely turned his eyes towards Riccetto who followed with a dark face. Caciotta laughed as wide as his mouth was: 'I'm all out of smoke,' he said, searched his pockets for a butt, found it and lit it. Amerigo also won the second hand; he turned, pocketing, to make some observation to the young man with Rudi's hair, who, speechless, was

standing next to him. He only looked at the other two, with a satisfied look, to keep them quiet. He put all the sheep he won in his pocket. Then immediately he started to do badly and in five or six hands he was left blank. He looked at the other two with his corpse-like gaze. Riccetto had hardened, sorrowful eyes that he was almost on the verge of tears; they didn't say anything. Amerigo began observing the game again, to try to understand it, and make calculations on how it was played; every now and then he exchanged a few words with the carter, explaining the reasons why he too had lost. After a while he turned to Riccetto. "And drive out the other deaf people," he said. – Why, are you crazy, – said Riccetto, – and tomorrow whoever gives me back will we lose ourselves again? – Amerigo was still patient; he was silent for a few moments, then continued: – Come on, give me these deaf people. "But I don't feel like playing yet, I'll see you tomorrow," Riccetto said in a low voice. But he was uncertain; Amerigo looked at him intently. "Allow me to say a word," he said, gripping his arm between his iron fingers as if it were a chock, and making him go out into the crowd of people outside the door of the gallery. It had started to drizzle again, but between the torn clouds the white of the moon was falling on the lots. – You are like a brother to me, – he began, – you owe me to believe, I have what's in my mouth in my heart. Ask whoever you like about Pietralata, about Tibburtino, about me, about Amerigo, that there isn't anyone who doesn't know me, and I'm the most respected boy in the whole village, that I can help anyone, ' oh help, I don't have to worry too much, and yes, I need it again sometimes, what does it have to do with it, that helps me, it's the rule – Riccetto was about to open his mouth. – But why? – Amerigo interrupted him, taking him by the lapel of his jacket with two fingers – But why? – He said again, shaking his head, such was the conviction of what he was saying, – yes, someone asks you for a favor, why do you have to go to ffà? No other time to bring a comparison, if you might need it, is it correct? – You're right, – said Riccetto, – but if I lose these two pieces tomorrow, how big? Amerigo loosened the two fingers that were gripping the collar of his jacket: he put a hand on his forehead, shaking his head hard as if he lacked the words to make such a simple thing understood. "You didn't understand what I wanted from you today," he said; and he started laughing. – Tomorrow, – he continued, – you make an appointment with me; what time can you give me? – Well, what do I know, at three o'clock – said Riccetto. – 'And three, – said Amerigo, – in front of

Farfarelli, okay? – Of course, – said Riccetto. – Tomorrow at three o'clock in front of Farfarelli, – said Amerigo, raising his arms, – if we see and I will give you back your deaf ones. How much do you keep in your pocket? – Well, there must be four fronne – said Riccetto. “Let me see,” said Amerigo, putting his fingers back on his shoulder. Riccetto put the few coins that he kept in his trouser pocket: Amerigo took them from his hand and counted them. Then he returned to the room, without seeing if Riccetto was following him. Caciotta was chatting with the carter, who was following the game. Amerigo extended the money on the table between the backs of the players sitting; and he lost again. He bet another hand, and lost again. This time too, no one said anything. Amerigo justified himself only after a while with the carter and Caciotta. They stayed in there for another half hour, then left, without anyone paying any attention.

On one side the sky was completely cleared up, and certain little damp stars shone there, lost in its grandeur, as in a boundless metal wall, from where, on the earth, a few miserable gusts of wind fell. On the other side, as we turned towards Rome, there was still bad weather, with clouds heavy with rain and lightning, which however continued to shimmer on the horizon strewn with lights. On yet another side the sky stretched out, right there above Tiburtino, as if above the funnel of a courtyard, and the moon rested, frightened, on the shining edges of some stray speck of vapour. Down the identical streets of Tiburtino there was no one by now, and only from the central road could any noise be heard. The three went off spinelessly towards Tiburtina, between the lots, with a few blades of grass on the beaten earth, and Caciotta hummed while the other two dragged their black and white pointy shoes, all frayed, without saying a word. “Now let's say goodbye,” said Riccetto. Amerigo looked at him with his broad face and jaws which, bending, appeared enormous and white in the moonlight. He had no expression, but the swollen mouth that opened like a wound, more bruised than red, and the dissatisfied eyes left no doubt about his thoughts. – Let's come to Tiburtina to meet you, – said Riccetto just to say something, – now we're here, just two steps away, you can even get there from you –. What distorted Amerigo's gaze, more than the actual anger of being displeased, was that one dared to be so reckless as to displease him. But these were conversations with Riccetto that had to be had, and it was necessary to have the patience to have them: and Amerigo tolerated them, but with that discontent so black in his eyes that it sent a shiver down his

spine. He started again with all his good will. – Now let's go again, – he said, – I'm sure that if he wins, now I understand the game, understand what I want from you today –. Riccetto didn't answer anything; he looked at Caciotta, who, due to Giannetta, had a face as white and purple as an onion. – Yes, but there have to be deaf people – he then said hoarsely. Amerigo looked at him impatiently, and it seemed that he was about to shake his head and make a smacking sound with his lips to signify that not only he, but no one else in his place, would be foolish enough to accept that conclusion. He leaned against the gnawed jamb of a silent door. "Now let's get half a sack into the cave," he said as if Riccetto had always admitted that he still had some money, "if we take back everything we lost, and if we make it double." His voice was increasingly dull, in contrast to his body which there, on the door jamb, seemed like the enormous one of the pigs hanging as long as they are on a hook in front of the butcher's shops. Even his eyes had become small and cloudy like those of hanging pigs; and in the grimace of his handsome face you could see that his patience was running out. Riccetto murmured again with his eyebrows drawn like a child: - But yes, I don't have a lira anymore!

Amerigo sat down on the cracked step. – Maybe I'll even do ten years of Reggina Celi, but tonight I have to play, – he said in a low voice. Riccetto thought to himself, trembling, «I know... ours», and kept quiet so as not to give him a reason. But he, after a bit of silence which was supposed to reinforce his words, continued in a more hoarse but stronger voice, thus, to erase the impression, and to start again with the cordial speech: - What, I've already done a few years in the workshop! – Where, at Porta Portese, what? – said Caciotta. – Yes, – said Amerigo. He had turned black, and his round, shriveled lips were trembling. – They imprisoned me for rape, – he said. – Damn, who did you do this to? – said Caciotta. – A sheep, – said Amerigo desperately. – This shepherd saw me in ..., the damn thing about him, and he denounced me –. He was almost on the verge of tears, with his mouth half open and his eyebrows pulled up, on his forehead full of youthful wrinkles among his statuesque curls. – Kill, – he said painfully, – how many have they given me, how many! ... – His voice had become high-pitched, like that of women when they complain about some old injustice that still makes them suffer. - How much it is! – He repeated. – Well, look, – he said, pulling up his shirt from under the waistband of his trousers and showing his back, – there are still signs. – What did they do to you? – said

Caciotta. "The lashes they gave me, the lashes, their mortars," said Amerigo, grinding his teeth. – And look, there are still signs, he repeated, pulling his shirt up tighter to his neck. His back was left bare, wide as a sheet of steel, with blue reflections, under the moon. There were no signs at all on that smooth, tanned flesh. Caciotta bent over it and explored conscientiously along the large bridge of the vertebrae that curved suspended between the waistband of his trousers and the nape of his neck hidden under the shirt; and after taking a good look, he went - mh, mh - getting up again. "You saw," said Amerigo in the weak voice of his mother. – 'If you see a f... – said Caciotta. – How, – said Amerigo, – look better. Caciotta bent over his large back, and he must have seen something there, given the grim look that Amerigo had given him through his painful expression. "Kill them," he said at the top of his lungs. Amerigo pulled down his shirt and, standing up, tucked it under his trousers. The vapor of tears had dried before his eyes, and they were left naked and dry in their brown hue. That whipping and his whining had had the effect of bringing to the discussion topics which, now by mutual agreement, Riccetto could only give up on, and without another word. – Let's go, – said Amerigo, as if it had finally become clear and he had finally been understood. Since Riccetto was still asleep, he went up to him and carefully took the collar of his jacket between his fingers: 'Come on,' he said, 'let's die, let's go. Which, you make me lose 'to madness now ... – he added with a desperate look, as if those had been words that he himself would not have wanted to say, and that the fault, therefore, was entirely Riccetto's. So they went back towards the gambling den, and when they were on the external steps Riccetto, at a glance from Amerigo, took out another half bag without saying anything. Inside the gambling den everything continued as before. No one had noticed either that they had left or that they had returned. However, before Amerigo lost everything again, while he was intent on playing, Riccetto slowly moved away from the crowd of people, along the bucket, and disappeared into the door.

And he did well, because he hadn't even turned out of the door of lot nine, behind the loggia, when the carubbas arrived. He was just in time to see them and cut behind the corner. "The damn things about him," he said to himself in a loud voice as if he were singing, however great was the

satisfaction of not having been cheated; and he started running through the deserted streets between the lots, down towards Via Boccaleone, and then running again towards the Tor Sapienza road. There was no longer a cloud in the sky; on the left the lights were burning, the pylons full of headlights, the spotlights of the power plant, and behind, already far away, Tiburtino, with the new buildings lined up against the black sky. At the end, in the great warmth, the lights of the other villages shone, up to Centocelle, the Borgata Gordiani, Tor de' Schiavi, the Quarticciolo. Step by step, dying of weakness, Riccetto arrived on Prenestina and started waiting for the Quarticciolo bus. He took out the five hundred cards that he had managed to save, and chose the most damaged one to give to the delivery boy.

«And now?» he said when the empty bus dropped him off at Prenestino. She took a look around, pulled up her trousers, and seeing that there was absolutely nothing for him to do there, burst into song aloud philosophically. A few trams arrived from Via Prenestina, stopped a little shiny, under a crooked little tree, then went around behind three or four houses among the dirty lawns, and came to stop again on the other side: meanwhile the people who had got off, sometimes she ran breathlessly towards the buses of the villages stopped in line in front of a little lit café, sometimes she went slowly towards her bed nearby, in Borghetto Prenestino, with many houses as small as dice or chicken coops, white like those of the Arabs, and black like huts, full of rude people from Puglia or Marche, Sardinia or Calabria: young men and old men who at that time returned drunk and covered in rags; or to the villages of hovels piled up in construction areas, between the embankments of the streets overlooking the Prenestina. Riccetto decided to buy three nationals, which he had been wanting to smoke for a while: he crossed the small square, all at ease, and entered the bar counting the money. He came back out with the cigarette glued to his lower lip, his eyes rolling in search of someone with fire. – Can you light me up, when you die? – He said to a young man who was smoking decadently leaning against a pole. Without saying anything he handed him the lit cigarette, Riccetto thanked him with a grim nod of his head, put his hands in his pockets, and went singing up the livid street where the tram turned.

All around rose scaffolding and buildings under construction, and large meadows, scrap yards, building land; from afar, perhaps from Maranella, behind the Pigneto, you could hear the voice of a gramophone augmented

by the loudspeaker. On the Casilina lawn, before the Maranella, there must have been the carosielli: and Riccetto went that way, with his hands in his pockets and his head pulled back between his shoulders due to the passion he put into singing the song to himself.

For a while along the Acqua Bullicante he encountered only a few elderly people who were hurrying home; however, at the level of the little road that turned up, between the walls of two factories, towards the Borgata Gordiani, a line of boys appeared who came forward, filling the road as wide as it was, without haste, shouting and being rude. , in disarray like a swarm of flies on a dirty table. One person gave blows to the head of his companion, making him angry, another one put himself on guard by hitting the air with his left, right, and then with a hook so that his eyes clotted with satisfaction, another instead showed his righteousness by doing the 'indifferent with his hands lazily in his pockets and with the air of saying: "This weakness and who makes you make such efforts!", full of irony towards others; some argued among themselves by sneering, twisting their mouths in disgust, holding out their arms with a click of the tongue, or, in the heat of the discussion, placing their hands in a bowl under their chin, pointing at their chest and remaining in that position for half an hour , full of questioning air towards the opponent. The whole street of Acqua Bullicante, in deep contemplation, was admiring them. Riccetto immediately made a fuss about it. Not that those with their charm were really angry with him: if anything, they wanted to take on the world in general head-on, with the whole race of men who didn't know how to have fun like them. But Riccetto pretended that they were doing the right things while he was there alone, and excluded, for the moment, from a similar company like that, and had to sit there and listen to their chatter good-naturedly. He started whistling louder, without bothering them at all, and went his way: but when he had left them not even twenty steps behind, he heard a whimpering voice inside the ditch overlooking the filthy gardens; he approached and made out a boy with a bare chest crouching on the grass.

"What have you done," he said. But he was crying without saying anything. – Aòh, well? – said Riccetto. As he approached again he noticed that he was completely naked; skinny and covered in dew, he got down on his knees and began to say, whining like little children: - They stripped me and hid my clothes, their damned whores. - Who did it? – said Riccetto. He stood up with his wad straight and all wet with tears: "Those are the ones,"

he said whiningly. Riccetto started running after the group of boys he had met a moment earlier.

– Aòh, a moretti, – he shouted. They stopped and all turned together. – Aòh, what were you doing wearing that little boy's clothes there? – Riccetto said in a firm but still courteous voice. – But they're nearby! – one of them said cheerfully, – now I'll find it –. Riccetto took a few steps back; neither he nor the others had any desire to argue: in fact they felt like allies because they were right-wingers compared to that crying broccoli over there. “Leave it, it's a loser,” said one, tapping his index finger against his nose. Riccetto shrugged: 'Well, poor guy,' he said; However, by now his duty as his defender was over, and in fact he saw the loffio come out of the ditch with his trousers already on and his undershirt in his hand, all in pieces. But the other boys didn't move and in fact one of them stared at Riccetto and laughed. – Are you looking at me? – said Riccetto. He was someone with full, chapped lips, and a delinquent's face, under the small nape of his neck full of curls like a cabbage. – You know me, what? – said Riccetto, who saw him against the light under a streetlight. – Why, I don't know you! – said the other cheerfully. – I know Lenzetta, – he continued, – if we saw each other yesterday evening at Villa Borghese, no! – Ah sorry! – Riccetto said magnanimously, recognizing him and approached him with his hand outstretched. – Where are you going? – He asked. – Where are you, this hunger, – said Lenzetta. The others laughed. – And you? – asked Lenzetta. Riccetto laughed philosophically, turned up the collar of his shirt, and dug his hands deeper into his trouser pockets. – And what do I know, – he said, – I'm still outside the house and heart ... I'll be back soon. – And why? – Lenzetta said amusedly. – What are you doing to jail me? – said Riccetto. – I was playing around in a house in Tibburtino, the police came to me and I know what they're like for those who got caught. Damn them, you know there was also Caciotta there. – Who Caciotta? – said Lenzetta. – The one who was with me, yesterday evening... that redhead there... He'll be in the security room now, damn him. 'But I'm still outside the house,' said Lenzetta, 'and who's going back?' My brother, if he sees me, kills me... - What kind of killer, - said one of the company, - but they caught him on Saturday evening, we'll see you today. – 'I know, 'or I know,' said Lenzetta, 'well, my mother is always at home, no, I can't kill her, because I can't see her. – Now I'm... yours, – said his companion, laughing, threatening with one hand, – your mother at home and your brother at the shop, how do you

do it, you're hurting, now: yes you go home you get caught, yes you they jail beaks, watch out for you! – Everyone laughed. – What do I care! – said Lenzetta. Laughing and bumping into each other, they headed back up towards the Maranella. – Anyway, – said one, – Elina isn't here tonight. – Whoever told you, – said another, disgusted, – it's always there. – See, – said the first, – he had a belly as big as a tub, now he'll be in Poricrinico to do the job. – But how big, how big – said the first defiantly, but it must have been for a maximum of four months. – Four months ago, – said the other, – but he already had a big belly when I fucked him this spring! – See, ten years ago, – said Lenzetta, – but what do you care if we had a piatta 'in all five of me I'm leaving my neck. – What, would it be at first time that we manamo'n white? said one. – I say: fuck faces that we give you a fronna, let's fuck, and we don't give a lira. – I'm the son of a slut! – shouted Lenzetta.

Chatting and chatting they had almost reached Maranella, and they no longer thought about Elina. We could hear the sound of the carosielli's phonograph nearby, but at the same time a buzz of voices, a shuffling, further away, right at the Maranella crossroads, at the tram stop. All the people were going that way, as if something had happened or there was a party, even though it was already late. “They're the ones from the circus, they're dead,” one shouted, starting to run. – But what a circus, what a circus – Lenzetta replied calmly, even though he lazily quickened his pace with the others: a small crowd could be seen coming down from the Casilina, black on the pavement full of potholes and badly lit. At the Cinemetto dei Due Allori she stopped, completely spotted by the lights held in her hand. – It's a procession, fuck you... – said Lenzetta disappointed.

The boys had stopped there at the crossroads where they had arrived in a hurry, unsure whether to go back to the meadow where the carosielli were, perhaps with the blonde's dartboard still open, or to stop and observe that torment there, at the Maranella. They ironically sat down on the edge of the pavement between the legs of the people, who were gathering more and more to watch the procession: one was singing, one was giving blowjobs to another who had been watching, others were rolling around hugging each other in the dust. Meanwhile the procession was approaching. – Damn, – said Riccetto, – I could have stayed with Prenestino, he was better. – And what were you doing? – said Lenzetta. “Elina wasn't there, no,” said Riccetto, paraguously. Coming forward there were all old, haggard women,

with a few old men here and there and a few kids: all of them were holding a cardboard funnel in their hands, with a candle inside so that the night wind wouldn't blow it out. Every now and then they started singing, each on his own. Having reached the crossroads, they stopped, gathered around the pavement under a pizzeria, two young men went to put a small table against the peeling wall, and an old man got on top of it, who began to make a speech against the communists and to exalt the spirit of Christ.

There was a lot of chaos around where Lenzetta, Riccetto and the others had stopped, so much so that the voice of the old man, who spoke Cispadano, could barely be heard. – Listen! – shouted one. – What are you doing, an altar boy, in Mozzo? – said Lenzetta; Mozzone remained silent for a while, with his ears pricked. – Gome barla! – He then said, his voice softened by wonder. Riccetto elbowed Lenzetta: Aòh, – he said to him, – I'm already fed up, you know. – And so on, – said Lenzetta. “Let's go back down,” said Riccetto, nodding towards Prenestino. – Crazy, – said the other. – I keep them deaf, as long as they believe you, – explained Riccetto, – but only for the two of us. Lenzetta first took a look at him, then looked around: – Wait, – he said. The others were distracted. – Arzete, – he then said, – and go down the Bullicante Water, I'll come after you.

Riccetto got up and slowly walked away among the crowd who were watching the old man mockingly; but the next one, less than five minutes later, he played nice, and the procession resumed its march, singing, and turned down towards the center of the village. Lenzetta reached Riccetto running. – And the others? – said Riccetto.

– We unloaded them, – said Lenzetta, – they went to the Carosielli.

Chatting, they walked the entire way along the Acqua Bullicante, while behind them the sambas being played on the phonograph and the songs of the procession began to fade away. There was now only someone returning from Praneste or the Empire towards the Borgata Gordiani, or towards Pigneto, or some drunk who returned home singing now the Red Flag, now the Royal March.

They found Elina in the midst of the shadows of which she was the queen, behind the dirty lawns full of elevators where the trams made their rounds, a few pothole-filled streets, in a clearing dominated by the immense shadows of two or three skyscrapers under construction, behind , and in front of one already built, but still without roads or courtyards in front,

abandoned among the weeds and rubbish. The enormous box with all the illuminated windows stood alone in the middle of the sky, where a few stars sadly twinkled. The Elina was holed up back there, near the fences or thickets that surrounded the parceled-out land, still reduced to enormous garbage dumps, with some hovels and some piles of rubble around or in the middle.

Lenzetta and Riccetto approached the woman who was as small and thick as a roll of coppa, they waited a while to bargain, and, passing between the wires of a fence, they pushed themselves in, among soggy piles of reeds.

It didn't take them long; as soon as they rose again they calmly went to wash a little at a fountain in the middle of the square where the tram terminus was. Lenzetta took care of sleeping. Behind the Gordiani hamlet, in a prairie from where you could see the whole suburb with the hamlets, from Centocelle to Tiburtino, at the end of a vegetable garden soaked in dew, there were some large rusty bins, abandoned there together with other scrap metal, in an enclosure . They were big enough, so much so that you could walk in them on your knees, and as long as a person. Inside one of these Lenzetta had placed some straw; he took a little, and put it in a nearby one. They lay there and slept until ten o'clock the next morning.

Lenzetta hung out around Via Tuscolana, Piazza Re di Roma, Via Taranto, where there were some local markets, some barracks or some friars' canteen. When he was away from home he got by a bit by working (as little as he could) for some fishmonger or some salesman, a bit by hustling around the stalls or on the trams. When he felt like it, he stayed in the suburbs, from the Prenestina hamlet to Quadraro, with a tattered sack to look for old metal or pieces of lead among the rubbish: but he rarely did this because he got back pain from bending over, and then his mouth was left so caked with dust that he barely needed a tube of wine to disinfect it, and that way half of the deaf people he had remedied went away. Even Riccetto wasn't bothered by that problem with the junk repairs, also because it was something for kids; so they only came to the outskirts to sleep in the bins, and spent the whole day inside Rome. Then if one day they got some sheep for the next too, then no matter what they went to work and work hard: they took the bus and went to Acqua Santa. They entered behind four skeletal

bushes along the Appia Nuova, climbed up the slope encrusted with two spans of dust, and between quarries and caves, ridges, burnt meadows, ravines, stubs of towers and carriageways they pushed themselves into the boundless and rugged promised land which was the Holy Water. The hopes were to meet, at the top of a hill, at the crossroads of the cracked paths, some zanoida, stationed waiting for the beardless customers from the slum villages or the first council houses that loomed large in the background; or, stationed at the entrance to a cave, or among the blackberry thickets around a marana, with a newspaper spread beside him and wearing gold glasses, some large German who could take away what they wanted from him. They looked at him, pretended nothing was happening, or started drinking water: and he, behind, up and down the crags and ravines, up to the dirtiest marane, in the way that the great poet of Rome said:

I felt like that faggot was talking to me
Cor fiatone: – Tartaiifel, sor paine,
Pss, you won't care much, I'm tired.

One day the two pains - alone, however - arrived at the marana of the red gate, they found a young boy from Tiburtino, who was simply Alduccio. Riccetto forced his walk a little to happily go and shake his hand. – Ah, he's the one, right? – He said to him cordially while he was undressing. Alduccio was lying in his underwear on the dirty grass in the shade of a patch of reeds. He spoke gallantly. - Er zolito, - he said, - the more you want to get rid of all your troubles ... and put the bandit to death.

“Kill you,” Riccetto said, pulling his undershirt off his shiny head.

- You don't work, don't you know, and do you work when you can? - He chewed the chewing gum with a decadent and contemptuous air.

"Well," said Riccetto, continuing Alduccio's humorous thread, "if we get two Berrettas and start a gang." Alduccio looked at him with the air of someone who isn't joking at all. “That's right,” he said. Lenzetta, who could not bear not to participate in a discussion for more than a minute, and who had pricked up his ears at the word "Berretta", mockingly exclaimed: - But what Berretta, na Cappella, not na Berretta!

Riccetto and Lenzetta also stretched out on the procla of the marana. – Well, – continued Riccetto, – what can you tell me about Tibburtino?

– What I owe you as a reward, – said Alduccio, – I already told you, er zòlito.

– You know Caciotta, you know, the one who lives in lot nine... – said Riccetto.

– Like, 'I know,' replied Alduccio, 'I know, yes...

– What is he doing? – Riccetto inquired. Alduccio's beautiful face had a cheerful expression: and without saying anything, with the pads of his thumb and forefinger he pulled the skin of his cheeks under his eyes. He meant that he was in the shop, in Porta Portese.

“Kill him,” Riccetto muttered, laughing to himself.

– 'Or they caught Fileni in the bizca playing for money,' explained Alduccio.

– 'I know, 'or I know,' said Riccetto astutely, 'I was in for it too.' Alduccio looked at him with interest. “Amerigo is dead,” he said. Riccetto sat up, leaning on his elbows, and looked at his face. The corners of his mouth trembled as if with an amused smile; it was exciting news, and he felt full of curiosity. – What did you do? – He asked. – He's dead, he's dead, – repeated Alduccio, happy to give that unexpected news. – He died yesterday in Poricrinico, – he added. That damn evening that Riccetto had left Fileni's house, Caciotta and the others had gotten caught, but they hadn't put up any resistance. Amerigo, on the other hand, had allowed himself to be carried out held by the arms by two carabinieri, but as soon as he was on the terrace he had slammed them against the wall and had made a leap of two or three meters into the courtyard; he had bruised his knee, but he had still managed to drag himself forward along the wall of the lot: the carabinieri had shot and hit him in the shoulder, and he had still made it to the bank of the Aniene there they were almost about to catch him, but he, bleeding as he was, had thrown himself into the water to cross the river and hide in the gardens on the other bank, to escape towards Ponte Mammolo or Tor Sapienza. But in the middle of the current he had become upset and the carabinieri had caught him and taken him to the police station, soaked in blood and mud like a sponge: so they had to transfer him to the hospital and guard him. After a week his fever had passed, and he tried to kill himself by cutting his wrists with the glass of a glass, but this time too they saved him; then about ten days later, before Alduccio and Riccetto met at the Acqua

Santa, he had thrown himself out of the second floor window: for a week he had agonized, and finally he had gone to the trees pizzuti.

“There are funerals tomorrow,” said Alduccio.

– Damn you! – Riccetto said in a low voice, impressed. Lanzetta, to show that he was not surprised by anything and that his maxim was: always be yours, he began to sing:

Clogs, clogs...

and he thrashed as best he could on the grass with his hands clasped under the fresh broccoli on his head.

Riccetto, on the other hand, thought about it for a while and then decided that it was his duty to take part in Amerigo's funeral: it's true that he barely knew him, but Amerigo was a friend of Caciotta, and in short, it suited him. 'Tomorrow I'm coming to Pietralata,' he said to Alduccio, 'but I don't tell anyone so that my father won't find out.'

Amerigo was lying on the bed in his new blue suit, white shirt and black shoes. They had crossed their arms over his chest, or rather over the double-breasted suit of which he had been so proud for a few Sundays, as he left for Pietralata with his bad walk. He had obtained the money by carrying out a robbery in Via dei Prati Fiscali: he had stolen thirty thousand lire from the boy, and to get some satisfaction he had beaten him bloody: and so he had made himself a blue dress, and was going to I walk around with him in a more beastly mood than usual. You had to pay careful attention to how you looked at him, and his friends from the suburb, cowardly and false with him, knew how to anoint him without showing it too much, but other young people who didn't know him, met in the dance halls of the Communist Party, or at some billiards, they had returned home with swollen eyes and bleeding gums: and lucky for them that Amerigo had been warned about going around with a knife. It was a suit with straight trousers, a short jacket with wide, round shoulders: he kept the collar of his white shirt unbuttoned and his hair combed in a style. Now there, he had patiently allowed himself to be placed, like a victim, with his hands crossed over his double-breasted suit: but his collar was still unbuttoned like a slut, framing his face which had been like a dead man even when he was alive. So much so that he looked like he had just fallen asleep, and he was still scary. Once his nap

was over, he would certainly have run out of patience and would have smashed the faces of those who had dared to treat him like that. He sat there gloomy and silent, on the bed which was too small for him, with a basket of curly hair, still glistening with brilliantine on the grayish pillow.

Ricchetto entered the small room on the ground floor of the lot, with some of his friends from Tiburtino, to see him. In front of the entrance to the lot, which had no door, and had two steps on the right and left, there was a small crowd of people dressed in dark: all the Lucchetti, who had come to fulfill their duty as relatives and protagonists of the day, with the party clothes, which were in bright colours, those of the children and the youngsters, and those of the young people for dancing rather than funerals. The neighbors, who lived on the same lot, ten or twelve in each room - so that there was almost a neighborhood - were further away, and even further away Amerigo's friends, all dressed up : Arduino with his nose and one eye torn off by a hand grenade when he was a boy, the consumptive boy who lived on lot twelve, er Carogna, er Napoletano, er Capece, er fijo de sor'Anita, who played the guitar and sang, especially the nights they returned to the village from some business and stayed up late dividing the money, arguing or taking a walk on the mud under the burning moon on the houses of the evicted. There were also some younger boys, who were leaning lazily against the wall of the house, chatting in a low voice with their classmates, or watching the kids playing football, further away, in a clearing in the middle of Pietralata.

Ricchetto and the others hadn't even entered the room where the dead man was, who they already wanted to spend: it was damp and dark like in winter, and Amerigo's aunts and sisters, fat as they were, filled it so they couldn't. they couldn't even move: they took a look at the dead man, and, ashamed, because they hadn't done so since the day of their first communion, they made the sign of the cross, and went out into the street where the men were talking. In the centre, but distracted, like someone minding his own business, stood Alfio Lucchetti, the youngest uncle, dark like Amerigo, with cheekbones and curls like him, but taller and drier: he was the one who three years earlier had given a bayoneted in the belly of the owner of the bar there at the stop, and now they said he was going to ruin himself for a prostitute he kept in Testaccio. Actually, rather than chatting with the others, he says two or three words every now and then, but with a closed and suggestive expression, shaking his head. And

immediately he dropped the subject, as if he didn't want to let too many people who were listening around know the facts about him. He looked beyond all the heads that formed a circle, with his hands buried in his gray striped trousers under his black jacket, squeezing his molars under his jaws so tightly that they swelled and deflated, as Amerigo did, tall as he raised his hand. touched the light wires.

He was calm and resentful, harboring, in front of everyone, the secret that everyone had more or less unraveled in the village: behind Amerigo's death, there was a whole set of things whose threatening light was reflected on every face around them. Alfio's face had lightened, gray with a beard, and black under the roots of the hair hanging low on his forehead, with the back of his boy's neck on the upturned white collar, the faces of the other uncles and cousins, included in the sense of duty and in the silent resentment that made them the most important figures in Pietralata, determined not to speak, to keep among themselves, within the family, the comments on the state of affairs that had arisen with Amerigo's death, or at most to make some half-revelation with some allusive and threatening words. Then there was, among the other sly ones, the face of Arduino, with the black cloth that hid the healed hole of the eye, but not the remains of the nose, and that of Sora Anita's son, of Carogna, of Capece, with in their oblique eyes their expression of birds of prey, and, at the bottom of their seriousness, a flicker of fat bliss like that of soldiers in the shower. Alduccio immediately caught the half-words spoken between Alfio and the other men. His face was flooded with an edified expression, and he murmured, stretching his mouth and trying to shelter his head between his shoulders: – I know... about him, I know.

– Whose? – Riccetto said attentively, with a curiosity that was finally a little naive. Alduccio didn't answer him.

- From whom, Ardu? To Ardu! - repeated Riccetto.

“About the one who spoke,” he said kindly, absentmindedly listening to Alduccio. Riccetto immediately thought of lot nine and his gambling den, and didn't say a word. He looked at Alfio Lucchetti with supreme respect. In the meantime, he had taken two steps away from the group, and he was standing there silent and confident, with his hands buried in the pockets of his trousers.

The women's cries could be heard inside. The males, on the other hand, showed no signs of being moved, and indeed, if anything, had, embodied in the features of beardless youths or old paragules, a vague expression of amusement. In Pietralata, out of education, there was no one who felt pity for the living, let alone what they felt for the dead.

The priest came in a hurry, without looking anyone in the face. Behind him trotted two creatures as dry as kittens, caught in some of the houses, left here and there in the burnt countryside and the rubbish heaps, of old rubes, on the edge of Pietralata. They trotted inside the cotta, smoldering with their thurible, among the people who in the bright sun were standing here and there between the lots and the houses, or walking, or playing, or shouting. The kids who were kicking the ball, running after him like a swarm of wasps, wearing their beggars' rags, continued to screech in the distance, in the violet light, and in the bar at the stop there was the usual coming and going of those on strike. 'Now. They chatted and shouted like dogs in the half-empty room, or they were leaning, some on the dry trees, some on the door jambs, with a face full of irony, and their thumbs stuck inside their trousers without a belt, pushing them down with the crotch at their knees: others were standing inside the courtyards, under the dirty windows, near the remains of the toilets sold brick by brick to the thugs during the war: now everyone was busy watching the funeral from afar. The priest entered the house, did what he had to do, and shortly afterwards he succeeded, with his two puppies behind him, the whole crowd of women and the coffin carried out by arms. This was loaded into the black car, and the line shuffling slowly set off along Via di Pietralata; he passed in front of the bar, preventing a bus, which was at the stop, from continuing its journey, then in front of the clearing of land with two or three carousels on its humps, the clinic as naked as a prison, the charred lawns, the little houses pink, to the hovels, to some factories so in disarray that they seemed to have just been bombed; and arrived at the slopes of Monte del Pecoraro, near the Tiburtina, at that point completely torn apart by old ruined quarries.

– What are we doing? – Riccetto said to Alduccio, in a low voice, among the people who were walking sprawled, some behind, some ahead, keep aside the car and the priest. "Well, what do I know," said Alduccio, lolling with his hands stuffed in his pockets under the fluttering skirts of his shirt. They came slowly at the tail end of the procession, which went down slowly; but they went even more slowly, and had to hurry every now and

then to catch her; they walked bent forward, worried, as if their feet hurt. - I didn't know, - said Riccetto with a saddened expression, - that funerals bored you a lot, really, really. – Yes! – Alduccio said, giving him a look. Meeting their eyes, and observing their silhouettes, in all that silence of the funeral, he felt like laughing, and they twisted their eyes around him, pulling the strings of his neck to hold back and not make a fool of himself. With that air as tender as oil, the clear outlines of things, the warmth of the breeze in which there was like an April drowsiness, one had the impression that it was a day of celebration: one of the first Sundays of the beautiful season, immediately after Easter, in which we begin to go to Ostia. Even the traffic on the Tiburtina seemed to make no noise, it seemed to be muffled and as if in a glass bell, under the sun, which, faded on the walls and a gray flock of dirt, was burning blonde on the edges of Monte del Pecoraro. Inside the Fort, the Bersaglieri's trumpet cheerfully sounded the hour of rations.

In front of the bar on the corner with Tiburtina, after a brief stop, in the usual disorder, the small procession dispersed. The hearse put into gear, and followed by the taxi with the main Lucchetti, headed at full speed towards the Verano.

V WARM NIGHTS

Full belly, don't believe what I said...

G. G. BELLI

Meanwhile, Lenzetta was waiting for Riccetto and Alduccio, sitting on the dust under a wall, all dressed up, wearing velvet trousers and wearing the red and black American jacket which, according to him, was kicking ass... to the whole Maranella . He was drenched in sweat, because he had kicked the ball twice with some boys who were now continuing to play, down there, in a small field between Via dell'Acqua Bullicante and Pigneto. On the wall, enjoying her walk, crouched on the tin roof of her house which looked like a pen for sheep, sat Elina, with two hoops of fake gold dangling from her ears, and with the youngest baby in her arms. little one who was complaining. Lenzetta didn't bother at all, and he too sat there contemplating her life, every now and then telling the dead to Riccetto who hadn't arrived yet. But he was discreetly cheerful. He sang with the back of his head full of curls leaning against the crumbling wall, every now and then letting loose a touch of hat or dust, because while singing he moved his head with great passion from left to right and from right to left, very slowly. He kept his eyes half closed, and since he was singing in a low voice, as if he were confessing himself, or just wanted to give a little sample of what he could do, anyone who was not even four steps away from him would only have seen his mouth opening and closing, and the strings in his neck pulling until they broke around his throat.

Every moment he interrupted himself, at the height of a warble, to shout something to those who were playing football, mangy and out of breath; there was one, not even thirteen years old, who was playing while smoking a cigarette, and another all tied up who was standing on the ground, raising teasing at those who were running.

– To the death of weakness! – Lenzetta said without raising his voice too much so as not to make it difficult. “But if you can't stand up anymore, why don't you come to us,” replied the goalkeeper, who was unemployed between the posts, stretching his body forward with his shorts half unbuttoned and shiny and putting his hands in a funnel in front of his mouth

with gloves found in some garbage dump. The one who was lying in the middle of the field came up onto the road, throwing the ball and those others who were going crazy after it: he pulled up his trousers, taking off his dirty undershirt completely and letting it wave over his butt, and went meeting another little boy like him, who was coming forward as cheerful as a swallow, with the milk bottle under his arm. They started playing balls not far from the Lenzetta, under the Elina, which, sitting on the bandone roof, was outlined against the white sky like the statue of the Madonna in a procession. "He's the damn thing," Lenzetta said once again, annoyed, towards Riccetto and Alduccio; but with all this he couldn't lose his good mood, willing to not care about anything. The little boy who arrived last, who chirped cheerfully while playing even when he got angry with the other one, who tried to do the right thing, had taken a liking to him, and he began to protect him. The other immediately became good and began to play fair, without trying to cheat the little guy. They crouched down, took aim, and zac, with the palm of their hand pointed at the ground, the ball splashed into the hole. Lenzetta looked paternal. When he won, the little guy did a kind of dance around the milk bottle left on the floor while lying on his back; and he would immediately get back down, with his little legs spread and his butt on his heels, to shoot in the hole.

– Win, eh, finch? – Lenzetta said to him with the air of a benefactor. The other player was bitter: and, embittered, he began to win. – Aòh, well? What are you doing as a robber, as a finch? – Lenzetta said jokingly at the time. Then he passed an empty hearse in front of the whole of Callara, passing under the large buildings and then against the muddy hedges of the Acqua Bullicante.

– Goodbye, my beautiful goodbye! – shouted Lenzetta, in full comment, towards the corpse that she was going to collect somewhere, and he immediately remembered Riccetto, who had also gone to a funeral. 'I'm an asshole,' he said, blushing with anger.

Lenzetta had left home out of fear of his older brother: and he wasn't wrong to have it, because he had done something that even he couldn't understand when he thought about it and would have spat in his own eye. He hadn't behaved badly, in his opinion, in a moral sense... Yes! moral! What did he and his brother care about morality! It had been a question of honor, and, to tell the honest truth, not a trivial stupidity. What the hell had Lenzetta got into his head that night... Well, obviously he was a little

shocked by the beatings they had given him first in the safe room and then in the shop... How he had been brought in the shop - in Regina Coeli, not in Porta Portese, because even though he still looked like a kid, he had already turned eighteen - scratching his curly head, he said: - Now here I am c... mine! – And he wasn't wrong, because one of the first words he heard as soon as he was inside, from a guy who looked like Lazarus who had just emerged from the coffin, was: – What a nice little ass you'll find yourself with, when you die. But luckily for him, his brother, Lenzetta number I, was one of the most authoritative thieves in Regina Coeli: and out of respect for his brother he too was respected, cute as he was. After a few weeks he was released on parole and returned to Torpignattara. The first thing his mother said to him was: - Anyone who doesn't work doesn't earn money, you know! – And let me rest a little, no! – he said, clasping his hands in a bowl under his chin, – I just left the shop, I know! – And that evening he went to have fun with his friends at the «Green Carpet Bar» also called the «Pugnalata Bar» where they met those who called themselves the Maranella beginners, youngsters of about sixteen who had just started to go to clubs and play billiards. He made a little fuss with them, he put on airs because he had been at Regina Coeli and for this reason he was now owed a certain amount of consideration; they drank half a glass of wine each, and went off to sleep completely drunk.

Lenzetta slept with his older brother, in a windowless room, one in a bed as old as a gondola, the other on a cot. When it was around midnight, Lenzetta, who couldn't sleep and was drunk on wine, threw the old patched sheets in the air and started singing. The brother slept like a cucuzza, with his mouth half open and the sheets twisted between his legs, but after a while he began to show signs of discomfort: and he suddenly turned over, bringing all the sheets under his belly. Lenzetta, very drunk, continued to sing at full throttle. The other then suddenly woke up and said: – Aòh? – Vaffan... – Lenzetta replied, standing up. The brother realized what was happening, looked at him, gave him a push that pushed him against the wall and hung himself again. The next morning Lenzetta, going down the street, saw his brother waiting for him with the Lambretta. – Get in, – he told him. Lenzetta locco locco obeyed and the other at full speed crossed the Maranella in the midst of the early morning traffic, cut through the alleys of Torpignattara, which at that time one couldn't pass through because there was the market, launched himself to seventy an hour towards the

Mandrione, he passed it, and like a villain he arrived at the Acqua Santa. Mica got out or slowed down the paths covered with four palms of dust, she pushed in in fourth gear, and when they were in the middle of the prairies and caves, under a tower, she turned off the engine, got out and said to Lenzetta: - Put it on. n guard –. They fought for half an hour, and finally Lenzetta, completely deranged, had managed to cut.

Ricchetto and Alduccio were coming away slowly, because they had gotten away with Pietralata, and they were dragging their feet as if they weren't theirs, with their backs straight on their legs as soft as rags, showing off however with a boastful air their weakness of paraguli. You must have traveled at least four kilometres, coming from via Boccaleone, along Prenestina, to Acqua Bullicante, from a prairie full of m..., to a small village of shacks, from a large building as big as a mountain to a small ruined factory . And it wasn't over yet, the most important thing was now, that they had to do the whole Casilina. Lenzetta, fresh as a flower, after having fought well against the two pilgrims and for this having been called a wretch and an asshole, walked ahead at a brisk pace, with the other two limping behind him, pissed off from tiredness and illness. at the feet.

The place there in Via dell'Amba Aradam, Lenzetta had nailed it, was really cool. A little out of the way, right at the point where the road crosses with Viale di San Giovanni, along the green and brown walls, between gardens full of mangy plants and old, slightly run-down stately villas. On an escarpment there was a whole row of low buildings, covered with rusty bands and glittering in the last rays of the sun. Right at the end, there on the corner, there was the smallest workshop, but with a large fenced courtyard all full of iron. There was a great silence, but from inside the barracks, or among the piles of scrap in the depots, you could hear some quiet whistles from the workers, or some voices calling or answering. The three criminals passed in front of the Indian car, one humming and one whistling: only when they were a little further down, under the ruins, did they make some remark, barely opening their mouths: - Kill, - said Ricchetto, - what a bunch of half-axles. ! – What did I tell you? – said Lenzetta triumphantly. – Yes, but it's still day today – said Ricchetto so as not to give him too much satisfaction. – And then, here, without a tricycle you can't do a damn... – See! a tricycle! and add 'o remedies, a tricycle for an idiot,' muttered Lenzetta, twisting his mouth. "Let's go down to Maranella and ask Remo for the stracciarolo," said Alduccio, immediately taking vinegar for the bad

reception his idea had received. Lenzetta looked at him fixedly, frowning with an air of commiseration, then clicked his tongue and didn't even deign him for an answer. – Damn! – He said after a bit of sudden, – what do you want to do with all three of Forlanini? Do it again on foot, from here to Maranella... and back! what gives you the power of the cerebellum? – But whoever tells you to do it will not go there on foot, but whoever is willing to do this proposal! – Alduccio said red and disgusted. – See this! – Well? – the other asked questioningly and was already a little more interested. Riccetto stood listening to the chitchat discussion. – Let's make some money, right? – shouted Alduccio. – If it's! – said Lenzetta disappointed. – Let's go! – said Alduccio. And without even turning around he walked towards San Giovanni. "But now this encephalitic is going," said Lenzetta, trotting after him with Riccetto, "what's gone mad?" "He hasn't gone mad, he hasn't gone mad," said Riccetto.

It didn't take much to figure out what Alduccio's intention was. But when they reached the square of Porta San Giovanni, they found that there wasn't a soul there. Yes, there was someone there on the benches along the low wall overlooking the overhang of the walls, but not the ones the three buddies were looking for. There was a fat woman with fat showing out under her cream silk dress, with her lips still dirty from her husband's sugar, with a face like a boiled fish, and next to her an ugly little thing, perhaps her husband, with a face like a fried fish, poor Christ, who disposed of the tropea. And here and there a few boys and a few servants. By now, behind the low wall that looked like a terrace onto the Tusculan neighborhood, as well as tennis courts and expanses of beaten earth, the evening was now falling, warm and red, making the windows shine on the stacks of pale blue buildings, which seemed like a panorama of Mars: while on this side of the wall, where Alduccio and the others had gone to have fun, the equally melancholy gardens of San Giovanni stretched out, full of flowerbeds and small trees, touched by the last light that fell on the loggias and the statues of the cathedral and the red granite of the obelisk lined with gold.

Discouraged, and showing off their discouragement by sneering, the three criminals stood against the wall: Lenzetta lying on top, belly in the air, with his hands under his dusty neck, singing; Riccetto sitting on the edge with his legs dangling; only Alduccio was standing, leaning his hip and elbow against the wall, and keeping his legs nervously crossed. He was the only one who didn't act bored, and he waited with some hope for events. He

stood there, with one hand deep in his pocket, looking like the sheriff's son, with his large lips shadowed by black down, and his eyes as bright and dark as two mussels dripping with lemon.

And his faith was rewarded. When Lenzetta and Riccetto, who with a sudden decision had gone to have a drink at the fountain, slowly, and wasting time, returned to the wall, they saw Alduccio already ready to leave, completely happy. – Come on, come on – he said: he dug his hand into his pocket and showed three battered men. – Someone passed by, – he explained, – and he gave it to me without anything, out of sympathy, oh well.

– Just a moment, – he added cheerfully. The others didn't stop to look for many explanations: these were things that happened. They wasted no time, and shouting and speaking loudly to make themselves heard, they went to the tram stop, down there, near the San Giovanni gate, and after half an hour they were back at Maranella.

Remo the rag-picker was a mess. The tricycle had already taken him home, into a courtyard full of people like an anthill, in Pigneto, and he had gone to the tavern. He was at a worm-eaten table, red as a lobster under two fingers of black and white beard, and swollen as if instead of blood, under his skin, he had gas. He was chatting with an old man as dry as a stockfish, who was still dark after a hundred years of living in Rome: and, between the two of them, another whose face you couldn't see because he had fallen asleep on the table and he was reduced to a pile of rags. Lenzetta appeared at the door, and gave a professional look inside the room: he immediately looked at Remo, and confidentially: - To Remo, - he paraguined, - will you allow me to speak? – Remo interrupted the intellectual discussion he was having with Neno. 'Excuse me, sir,' he said, 'let me know what this little bastard wants.' The other made the face of someone suddenly left alone, and swallowed a small sip of wine, moving his throat. Outside the door, on the crumbling sidewalk along the tram track, were the other two. - Let me introduce you to some of my friends, - said Lenzetta, increasingly astute and with a reddish face. – Nice to meet you – said the three, shaking hands. “To Re',” said Lenzetta hypocritically, immediately getting onto the topic, “you owe us a favor. – Of course, – said the other, half ironic and polite. – If you had to get a tricycle quickly, yes, it's possible, eh! – Remo said neither yes nor no: he had immediately cleared everything up, and had done his calculations even more quickly: the payment for the tricycle, lent as a favor,

had to be that they would come and sell the stuff to him, and he would have thought about it him to put the price. With a comradely smile he took out a map and, licking and spitting, began to make himself a cigarette: slowly, careful not to get bumped, because in Maranella there at the crossroads of Acqua Bullicante and Casilina there were more comings and goings of cars and of people who in via Veneto...

It must have been eleven, eleven thirty, when Riccetto and the others, taking turns pedaling the tricycle, with one lying inside with his stomach up and his legs dangling on the banks, and another behind at a trot with one hand attached to the seat, after having covered the entire Casilina, they arrived there dead of tiredness.

A hair's breadth from the walls and villas all perforated like family tombs or pagodas of seaside resorts - which the rich had built for themselves in Mussolini's time, when Riccetto knew nothing about it, as he didn't know anything about it even now that 'was in the world - a moon as big as a dustbin appeared to shed light. Alduccio remained outside with the tricycle under the embankment: Riccetto and Lenzetta entered the courtyard belly-first through a hole in the fence near the workshop, among three or four chocks and a bit of crud all flattened and dried. As soon as they crawled under the opening and then stood up like crushed berries on the other side, they were inside and looked around, Lenzetta couldn't stay without making a bit of rhetoric: - Here we are a black paradise of iron! - He said. Satisfaction and fear were painted on the faces of the two gangsters although they did not want to express anything other than proper professional concern, especially Lenzetta, who felt he was the boss of the company. - Come on, - he said, without wasting any more time, in a whisper of voice. And since the other remained a little undecided, with his ears pricked up like a dog, to see if he could hear some foolish noise, he got angry: - A postage stamp, - he said, - come on -. He approached the pile that seemed to him to be the largest, inspected it, took something in his hand, threw it away after examining it in the moonlight, and began wandering among the other piles like a ghost. Riccetto followed him, looking at him too, without making any noise. Leaving aside the piles of tires, wheels and other things that didn't interest them, they found the good section in the middle of the courtyard. And they began the transport: first, one piece at a time, they piled everything up near the hole, then Riccetto came out through the hole, and Lenzetta, who remained inside, passed the stuff to him. When

everything was out, Lenzetta also came out, and together, at full speed, they ran up and down from the embankment to the tricycle, from the tricycle to the embankment, with the neck cords tense and their backs stiff from the effort, red as chili peppers. It didn't seem real to Alduccio to see those piles of car batteries, bronze crowns, iron pipes, axle shafts, and, in the end, even about fifty kilos of lead coming forward: he helped to load, putting the pieces in the bottom of the tricycle while the others came and went. – There's still some stuff to do with it, – he said when he returned from his last trip. – Put this in there!... – said Lenzetta, full of airs; but he had not even finished saying these words when his eyes turned with a dense expression towards Amba Aradam Street. The others fell silent, making a little fuss around the tricycle. Whoever came forward was a guy with a white American girl. When he was near him it became clear that he was a plump young man with a face as smooth as a dindaro and slitted eyes; Lenzetta, seeing that he was the son of a student's father, took off again and, looking at him with his eyes that had gone into the water due to fear, said to him: - What have you got to worry about? – Nothing, – said the other, walking away straight away, as if their banter had been a pure and simple exchange of courtesies, the most natural in the world, at that time and in that situation.

But Lenzetta, turning to those two shoulders who were walking away small and round, insisted: - Aòh, a ciccio, if you don't look at anything, taja, since then I'll make you look at the stars.

And he was silent. However, when he was far enough away he turned sharply and shouted: - These thieves!

"Now he's a spy on someone," Alduccio said, suddenly losing all his confidence, with a frightened voice. "Walk to Ardù and wait for us in front of the hospital," said Lenzetta, also completely dismounted, and started running towards the fat man, while Alduccio pedaled on the other side, and Riccetto didn't know who to follow. The fat man, who certainly didn't imagine that Lenzetta was running after him to apologize and to recommend himself, began to run away like a villain along the walls of Porta Metronia. Then Lenzetta turned around once more, picked up Riccetto who was waiting for him, and then together they followed Alduccio who was sweating and white-faced from the effort. They each took turns a little and pedaling and running they arrived at the Appia

Nuova. – Ouch, – said Lenzetta, throwing himself on his back in the middle of the street right on a tram track.

He stood there with his legs spread and his hands on his chest, like a corpse. “Yes, I'll say goodbye to you in another five metres,” she shouted.

The other two laughingly left the tricycle and did as he did, rolling on the cobblestones of the Appia under the small trees that were lost in two endless rows in the center of the road.

– What, did you shit yourself in Lenzè? – Riccetto shouted with his head between the wheels of the tricycle. At that hour almost no one passed along the street, except the young men on Lambrettas who had taken the mecca to Acqua Santa.

Seeing the couples pass by, sprawled there on the ground in the middle of the street, they shouted:

- Go! - or: - I don't listen to you, you know!

A soldier who was walking with a dirty whore behind him that was sticking to his trousers, wanted to go straight and shouted with a half-Neapolitan dip:

– And get it over with!

They jumped as if they had been pricked in the buttocks with a pin; they half stood up, pointing their elbows to the dust: - A Burino, are you civilized in Rome? – Alduccio shouted.

– 'Do you see that? – added Riccetto, shouting with a didactic air, with his hands like a funnel around his mouth. – That's the Basilica de San Giovanni!

– What, is your country still in fashion today? – Lenzetta shouted to make matters worse, getting down on his knees.

– Let's go, come on, – said Alduccio when they had calmed down a bit, – why should we have a nap here, now?

Lenzetta got up and lit a straw.

“Let me smoke,” said Alduccio, resuming the march. After a few puffs Lenzetta gruffly passed him the butt, and Alduccio, smoking, hadn't even given it four pedal strokes, when crack, crack, crack, the wheel of the tricycle got stuck in the tram track and was reduced to a sieve.

Nope, nothing! A little thing of no importance! What did it take from there to Maranella? And then they had come a long way, Riccetto and

Lenzetta, that day! While Aldo, all angry and enraged, remained there to guard the tricycle and the stuff they had piled up on a pavement on a street that led to the Appia, a little further down, Riccetto and Lenzetta, one step behind the other, they returned to Maranella and went to the cart dealer. But the cart was closed. – Damn you, this bastard! – said Lenzetta, grinding his teeth, towards the packman who who knows where had gone to do damage.

– Oh, like that? does he close at this time? – Riccetto said vengefully, – and we cheat him, so that he learns –. It was after midnight, actually; but they didn't care; they entered the porter's little courtyard and took away his best cart.

– We won't bring it back tomorrow, what? – said Lenzetta, satisfied, above all, that he also had a clear conscience.

On the Appia where they had left Alduccio there wasn't a dog to be seen. But just before reaching the corner of Via Camilla, a shadow came forward which, as it approached, took on the shape of a gaunt old man with a ragged hat on his head: in his hand he held a driveshaft, which , as he saw the two boys, he tried to hide.

Lenzetta blushed like a turkey, and without much fuss accosted him: - Sorry, - he said, - have you found it, that driveshaft? – Riccetto was waiting with his hands on the raised poles of the cart.

The old man took on a sly and confidential look, which sharpened his white face under the floppy brims of his hat. – I'm staying here, – he said, winking, – because a night guard wanted to stay with your companion. I'll help them, they can call someone to guard.

«But screw it..., let's go», thought Lenzetta to himself, but you never know, and headed off at a run, followed by Riccetto and, a little further behind, by the neno with the axle shaft in his hand, towards where they had left Alduccio.

But that Alduccio broccoli wasn't there: they searched behind the doors, against the shutters: – Ardo, Ardo! – they started calling. Finally Alduccio came running out of a dark alley where he had gone to hide.

– What, did a madam come by? – Riccetto inquired.

– Well, what do I know, – said Alduccio, – I immediately went down the alleyway. The three did not continue the investigation and pretended to have believed the old man. This one was standing there next to them, with his legs spread wide, his face unpunished, and always with the driveshaft

clutched in his hand. He smiled and his lips pulled back into his jaws between his toothless gums.

“Let's load, come on,” Riccetto said urgently. While Alduccio was dragging the tricycle into the alley, to a safe point, Riccetto and Lenzetta, helped by the old man, began to load the goods onto the cart. As soon as they loaded it, Riccetto winked at Lenzetta, and he said to Aldo with a thoughtful expression: - Ardo, go ahead with the little cart alone, since everyone seeing us will have fun together -. Aldo reluctantly and protesting a little, obeyed, and, bracing himself and prudently, began to push the cart forward, opening the gear.

The others followed him, at a certain distance, ready, in case of alarm, to cut through the alleys and plant him. Lenzetta looked reddishly at Riccetto, satisfied, and chuckling, with a nod towards Alduccio: – Come on, slave –. Even Riccetto chuckled at that outburst, and, feeling himself associated with a slut, he lit up all over. The old man walked alongside them with great strides, dragging his rag shoes along the pavement. Under his left arm, tightly pressed against his armpit, he held a rolled up sack, which gave him an almost jaunty and sporty look. – Where are you going with this bag? – Lenzetta said to him, just to take care of him, with the other grinning slightly behind him. – I'm going to steal cabbage flowers to give five mouths a meal, – replied the old man. – Five Fiji? – asked Lenzetta. – No, five fije, – replied the old man. Lenzetta and Riccetto pricked up their ears. – And how old are they? – Riccetto inquired indifferently, to test the waters. Meanwhile Lenzetta had started walking with more conviction, like a donkey smelling the stable. - One twenty, one eighteen, one sixteen and two others who are still little girls, - said the old man, with a droopy look, but still having fun.

Riccetto and Lenzetta exchanged looks. They walked a little further, then Lenzetta, slowly nudging Riccetto, stopped to take a piss.

Riccetto also stopped, and stood next to Lenzetta, while the old man, carried forward by his step, went a few more meters ahead, before slowing down.

– Let's unload Arduccio, – Lenzetta whispered quickly.

- And how do you do? – said Riccetto sadly.

– Aòh, sorry, come on, – said Lenzetta impatiently.

Ricchetto was silent for a while, then as if an idea had come to him he said: - I'm in charge of this - and, quickly buttoning himself up, he was about to run towards Aldo, who could be seen ahead, in the distance, like a shadow. But Lenzetta held him back: - Get rid of the deaf people, too - he hissed after him.

“Okay, I'm on it,” Ricchetto repeated, starting off at a run.

Lenzetta, arranging his crotch with a worldly air, joined the old man, and watched out of the corner of his eye what the other two were doing, down there ahead, under a large scaffolding, against the first meadows of the Acqua Santa.

You could see that Ricchetto said yes, and Alduccio said no, Ricchetto said yes, and Alduccio said no. After a while, however, Ricchetto ran back, and Alduccio was seen starting to push again, bent between the poles.

– We did it alone last year in Maranella, – Ricchetto felt obliged to explain to the old man, – that the three of us would see each other together, they might as well have fun!

“You did well,” said the old man.

They were now almost at the height of the Acqua Santa, on the right there were all the deserted prairies and maranes, on the left began via dell'Arco di Travertino, which headed straight towards Porta Furba, and from there to the Mandrione and the Maranella.

At the end of Via dell'Arco di Travertino, here and there there were two large piles of huts which, as you walked down the street, you could enjoy the magnificent view of. They were many pink or white huts, with shacks, hovels, gypsy caravans without wheels, warehouses in between, all mixed together and scattered over the meadows, partly piled up against the walls of the Aqueduct, in the most picturesque disorder.

Among these houses there was one, under the road embankment, a little better than the others, with a branch and a sign in front, where it was written in red in childish letters: "Wine". A little light still came out from a crack in the little door. – It's open, – said Lenzetta, giving a quick glance, to reassure himself, at Ricchetto. Ricchetto quickly winked at him, patting the bottom of his pocket almost on his dick. – What, did you have time to pick these cabbage flowers, sor maè? – said Lenzetta.

– None, I don't care, – the old man said helpfully.

– And then, just in case, the two of us will come and help you, yes, you don't mind, eh! – said Lenzetta.

– Actually, – said the neno, – I'm pleased.

«I believe it», Lenzetta thought to himself. And loudly: – Would you like to accept a drop of wine first, to see you later? So you can lubricate yourself a little, with all this humidity in the meadows!

He didn't ask for anything better, and his eye twinkled cunningly, because, despite playing the part of an asshole, he didn't completely give up on making it clear that they understood each other. In any case, before accepting, out of courtesy, he made some compliments: - But why would you bother? - he said, passing the bag from one armpit to the other. – But what a nuisance – said the two, running down the slope of the embankment, and since the old man was coming down slowly, Lenzetta said to the wall of the inn: – Life is bitter for those who have soft feet.

After five minutes the two scoundrels were already drunk. They began to talk about God and religion. The old man was a witness. It was Riccetto, who, blushing with pleasure at his originality, put a question to Lenzetta, and Lenzetta listened attentively to make us look good:

Aòh,” he said, “tell me something, do you believe in Mary, the one they call the Madonna, there?

– Well, what do I know, – Lenzetta replied promptly, – I've never seen her! – And he looked happily at the old man.

– Well, there are facts, – said the old man, – which demonstrate that the Madonna exists.

But Riccetto had a particular detail of the matter at heart: he put a hand in a fan against his mouth: - You know, yes, - he confided to Lenzetta, - that he was a virgin and had a son.

– Kill it, – said Lenzetta, becoming even redder with both hands outstretched towards him, – what, don't I know?

– What, do you believe in sor maè? – Riccetto asked the old man again. The old man stretched out his face, stuffing it between his shoulders: - And you believe in this matter, in death? – He asked, evading the question. Riccetto, completely satisfied, left: - You have to see, - he said, - according to your points of view... as a human woman she may well have existed, from the point of view of sanctity and virginity she may not even have... Of

sanctity, that may also be true, but of virginity! Now they invented the facts of artificial Fiji with test tubes, but even if a woman makes Fiji with test tubes, we are no longer a virgin... Then we have faith towards Christ, towards God, towards all these... And if you think about faith then you believe in the virginity of the Madonna, but scientifically for me I believe that no one can prove it... – He looked at the others completely satisfied, as always when he repeated this piece, which he had learned from a young man from Tiburtino and seemed ready to punch anyone who came to contradict him. Lenzetta instead clung to the edge of the table with both hands and began to make "Pff pff pff", which sounded like puffs of steam coming out from under a poorly closed lid.

"I'm like a director," he said, barely keeping himself from bursting out laughing.

– To ignorant asshole, – said Riccetto, feeling rightly offended.

"But I'll give you half a liter," shouted Lenzetta, and held out his hand. "Are you okay with that?"

But Riccetto gave a slap on the outstretched hand: - I'll spit in your eye, now! – He told him.

Lenzetta opened his arms: "Why are you talking about Jesus Christ and the Madonna, you're so hungry," he said, with a face that was like a chop. Then, looking at him fixedly, he burst out laughing louder: - But why do you drink milk, - he said, - while you have always drunk pure water from streams! of the black drains!

'Shut up,' Riccetto retorted, 'you've got potatoes at your feet, so you could go and ask for the shit!'

But Lenzetta still looked at him fixedly, and seized by an idea that gave him an irresistible desire to laugh, he shouted, waving both hands with clasped fingers in front of Riccetto: - But do you remember when you tried to look for them? empty little jars, and you sold them for a single penny, please!

Even Riccetto laughed. Lenzetta was dying. He stood up to speak better. - But you don't remember, - he continued, - when you were struggling with motherhood, with the sorting of the starving dead, what you did for two or three little boxes..., - he imitated the gestures of Riccetto, completely dejected, who get the porters to give you a little jar of soup, - ... you'd eat

one up, and the other one you'd stonewall, and sell them to derelicts dying of hunger like you!

At that outburst they both started laughing like crazy people. Lenzetta made a few false movements, and when he jumped and burst out laughing, there was a sharp tap at his feet under the table. Riccetto lowered his eyes and saw the Cappellone's cap on the brick floor, which had fallen from underneath Lenzetta's trousers. «I'm the son of a slut!» he thought. «Then he must have been the one who screwed me and my shoes at Villa Borghese!» Lenzetta quickly bent down under the table and put the revolver back in his belt.

The old man looked like someone who had just been kicked in the ass and, turning around, he saw that the person who had kicked him had twisted his foot and was babbling in pain.

– Do you have a few photographs of your girls? – Lenzetta asked him, getting up, still cheerfully. «Yes, they are ugly», he thought, «we even pay for the liter, and we spend it!» The old man, with his face long and bloated with wine, under the light bulb full of fly shits that made it white, took out his wallet, and after having explored it with his dirty fingers, department by department, showed a photograph of a little girl in a dress. of the first communion.

– Is this how it is now? – asked Riccetto who was a little upset.

– No! No just the way it is now! – said the old man, and put some more into his wallet. He couldn't resist the weakness of showing his identity card: he was there, all cleaned up, with a black collar and suit, and a Rudi-like expression. Bifoni Antonio, late Virgilio, born in Ferentino, on 3-11-1896. Then inside the wallet there were two or three small coins, the communist card, two applications for the ECA and the unemployment card. He finally took out the other photos. Lenzetta and Riccetto jumped in.

– See how much I know! – Riccetto said in a low voice, almost more with gestures than with words.

- I like this one, - Lenzetta said slowly too, turning his back on the old man, - you like that other one.

From the inn, to go where they had to go, they passed through Porta Furba, turned down towards the Quadraro, cut through some isolated houses like huts and arrived at the vegetable garden, which on one side was

limited by a dirt road , on the other it was lost across meadows with a villa and a pine forest at the end.

There was the smell of stabbio and decayed straw, and a great scent of fennel, which could be seen spreading like a green cloud, with the cappuccina in the middle, beyond the torn copper, between the gashes of the soggy cane hedge that covered it. coasted.

"Namo de here," said the old man with a werewolf's face, going hunched with silent steps further down, where the twisted auburn ended and a parade of soaked and uneven boards began, until they arrived in front of the stairway: between this and the parade, there was a kind of passage, a hole, covered with thorny wedges and some reeds. The old man began to scratch around it to widen it, kneeling on the dog's tongue, the pig, the mallow, and the chard from the ditch, all soaked in dew. Through that hole they slipped into the garden.

The moonlight hit it all, so big it was, that you couldn't see the fences on the other side. The moon was now high in the sky, it had shrunk and seemed to no longer want to have anything to do with the world, completely absorbed in contemplating what was beyond us. To the world, it seemed that he was now only showing his butt; and, from that silver bottom, a grandiose light rained down, which invaded everything. At the end of the garden it shone on the perches, the willows, the angel's breasts, the cherry trees, the elderberries, which sprouted here and there in tufts as hard as wrought iron, twisted and light in the white dust. Then he would come down to make the surface of the garden sparkle with light or patina it with shine: with the curved façades of chard or cappuccina half in light and half in shadow, and the yellow plots of lettuce and the golden-green ones of leeks and ricciatta. And here and there the piles of straw, the tools abandoned by the pranksters, in the most picturesque disorder, which the land created on its own, without having to bother so much to work it.

But the old man had lighted the flowering cabbages, and only those. Followed by his two partners, without wasting time, he crossed the furrow and went down the bar, which was like a path with a little water in the middle of the patch of cabbage flowers, and from where on the right and on the left the scrimoli, also marshy, dividing the plot into many squares. On these, the cabbage flowers were lined up, as big as peacocks, in rows of four or five meters - Come on, - said the old man, who already had the knife

open in his hand. And sneaking in for a scrap, he immersed himself among the rows of flowering cabbages that reached up to his waist, and began to cut them out with his knife. He cut them and stuffed them into the sack, tying them up with his hands and feet. The two accomplices, who remained further behind to observe, looked at each other and burst out laughing, louder and louder, until their laughter could be heard in the Quadraro. – Be quiet, aòh, – said the old man, looking out worriedly among the blue tops of the flowering cabbages. After a while, once the initial enthusiasm had passed, they fell silent: then little by little they decided to do something, and tore up a few cabbages each, without moving from the bar, and choosing the first ones that came to hand. They stuffed their loot, torn from the rich earth with top, torso and all, into the neno's sack, crushing and half-overturning the load and kicking it. “Take it easy,” the old man recommended. But those who didn't spin it enjoyed stuffing as many cabbages as they could into the sack, having a laugh. But finally the old man took the sack, glued it on and started zigzagging under the weight towards the hole. Lenzetta, however, remained calm: - Aòh, come on, wait a moment, I have something to do - and without waiting for an answer, he undid his belt, lowered his trousers and carefreely began to carry out the unhooking work. on the wet grass. Even Riccetto and Sor Antonio, this being the case, imitated him, and all three of them lined up on the furrow, with their bottoms in the moonlight, crouching under a large cherry tree.

Lenzetta, fulfilling the task, began to sing. The old man then looked at him sideways, crouching as he was next to his full sack, and very worried said: - What, you know that my grandson for a damn, but one of the number, he's done six months of prison? What are you doing, you're going to jail everyone?

Lenzetta fell silent at those sensible words. – Sorry, – Riccetto then said, taking advantage of that confidential moment, while Lenzetta was already pulling up his trousers, – who is your girlfriend engaged to?

Al Lenzetta burst out laughing and did his usual "Phhh, phh, phh", giving the excuse that he was laughing at the smell and holding his nose; the old man, swallowing the micky part that circumstances forced him to play, replied affably: – None, she's not engaged. – They pulled up their trousers, tightened their belts and went doggystyle after Lenzetta who had already slipped into the parade hole.

As soon as they were on the road, the two Fiji de na whores didn't want, you'll understand, to let the old man do the hard work, and they offered to glue the full sack on them at all costs. They each carried him a little on their shoulders, all appearing cheerful and indifferent, and making a great fuss, while they all walked helplessly and cursing within themselves for the effort they had to make, behind Mr. Antonio, who was forced to play the part of micco, now he had the micchi who carried his load. When they had left behind, step by step, Porta Furba and had settled in the middle of a Shanghai of small gardens, streets, wire fences, little villages of hovels, clearings, construction sites, groups of blocks of flats, marane, and had almost reached the Borgata degli Angeli, which is located between Torpignattara and Quadraro, the old man said with the demeanor of a polite and worldly person: - Why don't you come up to the house? – Thanks, of course, – replied the two henchmen, all sweaty, and thinking to themselves: «I just couldn't wait for him to invite us up, this fagot!»

The Borgata degli Angeli was completely deserted at that hour, and between the large boxes of the public housing built in many regular rows, you could see, down below, four dirt roads full of rubbish, and above, the sky without a cloud with a lunette that locca locca was setting.

The street door of the large building where Mr. Antonio lived was open. They entered and began to climb a flight, two, three, with a mess of landings, doors, windows overlooking the internal courtyards, all peeling off and with children's dirty charcoal drawings on the walls. The old man rang the bell inside seventy-four, with the two assistants waiting behind him, and after a while it was his eldest daughter who answered the door.

She was a beautiful little girl, not even twenty years old, with a dressing gown that fell down her shoulders, all disheveled and with swollen eyes and her flesh warm from sleep. Having awakened the two guests, she cut behind a torn screen that was there in the middle of the entrance.

Mr. Antonio entered, placed the sack near the screen, and called out in a loud voice: - To Nadia! – No one came out, but beyond the wall we could hear skiing, skiing, like women do when there are three or four of them together.

«Ammappete, – thought Riccetto, – what, is there a tribe in here?»

– To Nadia! – repeated Mr. Antonio.

She heard herself moaning louder, then the eldest daughter came out again, in a tight dressing gown, with shoes and with her hair done.

“I'd like to introduce these friends to you,” said Antonio. Nadia approached with a smile, completely ashamed, holding one hand against the neckline of her dressing gown and the other stretched out towards them, with certain narrow fingers, tender and white as butter, which immediately turned the two buddies on.

– Mastracca Claudio, – said Riccetto, shaking that beautiful little hand.

– De Marzi Alfredo, – said Lenzetta, doing the same, with the reddish and liquefied face he had in moments of emotion; she was so ashamed that you could see she was almost crying, especially since all four of them were standing there, without moving, looking at each other.

“Sit down,” said Mr. Antonio, and preceded them, through a door covered by a curtain, into the kitchen. There between the stove and the cupboard, among four or five chairs, there was also, against the wall, a camp bed where two little girls, red and sweaty, one at the head and one at the feet, were sleeping, with the sheets all twisted and grayer than white. On the table there were dirty pans and plates, and a cloud of flies, awakened by the light, wandered and buzzed as if at midday.

Nadia had entered last, and was standing aside, next to the door.

– Don't pay any attention, – said Mr. Antonio, – it's a workers' house!

– So, yes, you can see my house! – said Lenzetta, chuckling, to give him courage, but like a kid would do, used to talking with other naughty kids like him. Riccetto also chuckled at his companion's half-hearted outburst. Lenzetta, taken by enthusiasm, continued without any scruples as if he were reasoning at the Stab Bar, pissing irony from his eyes: - The kitchen of our house, it seems like a shitter to me, and in the bedroom there is the sorting of mice on holiday!

Meanwhile, Mr. Antonio had made a sudden decision: he jumped into the hall and dragged the sack of flowering cabbages into the kitchen, placing it happily under the bucket.

– These two good boys have helped me, – he told his daughter, – since when I had to bring them here so soon! at Christmas!

When her father left, Nadia, who was doing everything she could to appear smiling, trembled and looked as if she was about to burst into tears,

and turned her face away.

– Eeeh! – Lenzetta said cordially, putting his belly out and raising his arms – he won't cry for so little!

But she, as if she were waiting for nothing more than these words, actually burst into tears and ran away behind the screen.

– Crazy, crazy! – She heard herself shouting after a moment back there.

“Es mi moje,” said the old man.

In fact, not a minute had passed when Sister Adriana came out, also in her dressing gown, but all well combed with her bun full of pins, with two bumpers in front of her that had nothing to envy of the sack of flowering cabbages. «The mother is better than the girls», thought Riccetto. She stormed into the kitchen still vibrant with disdain, continuing the conversation she had started there: - She's an idiot, they can kill her! Why, one has to cry because he has to make do to live, but look at that stuff! Nowadays! But from whom he took this daughter of mine, I don't know...

She stopped, calmed down a little, and studied, with two quick glances, the guests who presented themselves to her gaze, all disorganized and stranded.

"I'd like to introduce these friends to you," the old man said again.

– Nice to meet you – she said, frowning a little and hastily carrying out that worldly duty. – Mastracca Claudio, – repeated Riccetto, – Di Marzi Alfredo, repeated Lenzetta. Having completed the necessary parenthesis of the presentation, she began again with the important discussions, albeit with a more confidential tone: - But look, you have to see a twenty-year-old girl who cries like a little girl, and what reason then! For four cabbages fracichi flowers! But what, is there anything to be ashamed of? – And she raised her head in defiance, her eyes blazing and her hands on her hips, against an invisible audience, probably gentlemen. – To Nadia! – She said then herself, sticking her head over the jamb of her door. – To Nadiaaaa!

In the meantime the two little girls who were sleeping, one on the head and one on the feet, had woken up, and lying there with their little eyes open, they were enjoying the news. Nadia returned after a while, still ashamed, wiping the tips of her eyes with one hand, and smiling at the foolishness of her behavior just before her, with the air of saying: – Don't pay any attention! – Crazy! – Her mother repeated, always in a tone of

defiance against those people she knew, – what, is there anything to be ashamed of?

– And maybe we're not into stealing? - He always did this to cheer her up, with her usual delicacy, Lenzetta, - we're unemployed, we're out of work!

"It's no wonder," Riccetto added with an almost salon-like air, "everyone steals, some more, some less."

At those beautiful consolations the girl was almost ready to be taken back by the big mother: luckily at that moment her sister, the eighteen year old one, came in all dressed up. It had taken her so long to show up because she had worn her beautiful black silk robe, and she had even put on a little lipstick. She counted on her surprise at his appearance, and she came forward very modestly. – I present to you these two good guys, my friends, – the old man said ceremoniously for the third time. – This is my other girlfriend.

- Lucianna, - she drawled, acting like a puppy like the girls in the magazines.

– Mastracca Claudio, – Di Marzi Alfredo, – repeated the two good boys.

– Nice to meet you – she said, pulling her hair back with one hand.

"I'm very happy to meet you," Riccetto and Lenzetta prattled, pleased and as red as two chanterelles. Shortly afterwards the third daughter also came, a little redhead, with a face full of lentils, and with a ribbon in her hair, who did not enter the kitchen, but remained half outside and half inside looking at the two good boys without saying a word. , like the two little girls in the bed.

And in fact she was little more than a little girl too, with the little flowered dress, smooth like the friars' one, which she had, and under her two dry and knotty little legs. In the meantime, her mother had started again with her off-stage coaxing, driven to speak by a deep and well-rooted conviction, and she knew why, and who should blame her.

– You're right, sir, – concluded Lenzetta, when she had finished, – it's legal! – But his heat came from another reason, namely from the fact that he was completely horny for all that milk factory around him.

– What can we offer you? – said Mr. Antonio. – What, will you accept a coffee?

– And forget it, Sor Antò! – said Riccetto, while Lenzetta had pricked up his ears at the offer. – What, do you want to disturb the two of us? – Added Riccetto, with an unexpected and cheerful air of contempt for those two starving people who were him and his companion. However, Mr. Antonio hadn't noticed that at the word "coffee" the four women, and also the two little girls in the bed, had looked at each other. So he insisted: - But what a nuisance, indeed, it pleases us, - he said, carried away by his courtesy. The looks around him became dismayed. Sister Adriana opened her mouth a little as if she wanted to say something, but then she closed it and remained silent, with her daughters looking at her with apprehension and with feigned indifference in her eyes.

“And make this cup of coffee,” said Mr. Antonio, completely absorbed in his duty as master of the house.

The wife didn't move, standing between her daughters who were now looking at her and now looking at each other, with Nadia who was almost about to start crying again and Luciana who was giving an embarrassed smile, tapping her head to make pull your hair back over your shoulders. Sora Adriana, shaking her head quickly, and placing a hand on her chest, said: - Do it, he would do it, except that... I've got you since today... we've forgotten about Anna buying it. sugar ... – Mr. Antonio felt the shock. – Ah, my Antonio, what are you doing, – said the wife, – with all these thoughts I can't keep my head in order anymore, you know...

- And what are you doing, - said Riccetto cheerfully, always maintaining the tone of the most complete underestimation of himself and his companion, - for us it's fine even without sugar!

Lenzetta approved, laughing, all stained red. The entire Bifoni family felt heartened at that exit. Sister Adriana said: - I'll do it for you... - took the caccavella and lit the stove, with the assistance of her daughters, and that activity spread so much enthusiasm around that while the two good boys and Sister Antonio chatted affably, the two girls also came out from under the sheets in their shirts and started making a fuss around the room.

In no time at all the coffee was ready, and was served in two unmatched cups to Lenzetta and Riccetto, while Mr. Antonio and his wife drank it in two latte cups that were all chipped. Blowing on it to cool it down, Riccetto said: - Let's drink, and then we'll stop bothering you! – But what a nuisance! – made Mr. Antonio look great. Sister Adriana, drinking her

coffee, did not hide her disgust, even to put her hands forward. «Baah, what a mess!» the two good guys thought to themselves, hiding the shiver of disgust under a cordial and worldly air, sipping their coffee happily, and, finally, putting the cups back on the table among the flies.

– Now it's time for us to go away! – Riccetto then repeated.

– What's up? – said Antonio, with a gesture of wonder, as if instead of two or three in the morning it was just after dinner.

– Kill, – said Lenzetta, – it will soon be midday!

– And stay a little longer, no – insisted the old man, spreading his arms.

“We greet you aaaa, Sor Antonio,” said Riccetto hastily, extending his hand to the old man manfully and with a slightly parochial air.

– Aòh, then I'll accompany you, – said the little boy. Long and white like a cod, he led the way to the door, and waited for them on the landing, while they said goodbye, meticulously shaking the hands of sister Adriana, Nadia, Luciana and the last one, one by one. she came forward for the operation, always silent as a fish, to participate in the social chatter of greetings. She gave her hand without batting an eyelid, without saying a word, while the other two were already going about their business, behind the screen, now with the faces they had when they were alone.

Mr. Antonio shuffled down the stairs, taking the steps sideways, without making any noise because of his rag shoes. Riccetto bumped Lenzetta's elbow, taking advantage of the fact that Antonio was moving forward. Lenzetta looked at him. "Give me the deaf ones," Riccetto said in a low and ferocious voice, for fear that he wouldn't listen to him. In fact, Lenzetta darkened his face and pretended not to have heard. - Don't act like an Indian, - Riccetto said in a very low voice, more with his looks than with his words, gritting his teeth and shooting Lenzetta a furious look, - give me the deaf ones, come on. – Lenzetta felt obliged to give them to him, and he blackly threw them out of his pocket. They had already reached the bottom of the stairs, the crumbling entrance hall, and the old man opened the door. It was already a little light outside: behind the forty boxes lined up in the Borgata degli Angeli, beyond the Quadraro, beyond the countryside, beyond the foggy shapes of the Alban hills, a reddish light was printed in the sky, as if behind a glass window, and it seemed that down there, on the other side of the sky, there was another Rome, silently burning.

– Well, I'll say hello to Moretti now – said Antonio, now I'm going to sleep.

– God forbid, – said Lenzetta, – I'd have to bother you again!

The old man smiled, his head down, stretching his jaw as if chewing a handful of dried chestnuts.

– Here, aaa sor maè! – said Riccetto hastily, handing him a pile and a half in a crumpled pile. Sor Antonio looked at the grain, observing it carefully. – No, no, of course... – he said.

“Let's go, let's get it,” Lenzetta encouraged him.

The old man continued to make a bit of a controversy, but in the meantime, however, in the end, he took half a penny.

– Damn, what a sun! – said Lenzetta when the old man had returned, and they were left alone in the middle of the village: in fact a little more than violet light had come to float clearly in the spaces of the streets, between building and building, reverberated down there by that sort of the distant and invisible fire, behind the hills, while between one ledge and another two or three owls fluttered and screamed a few times.

Lenzetta, listening to them with concern, and putting all the thoughts together in a heap of the role of good boys they had played, of the Bifoni family, and of death, and feeling the milk coming to his knees, stood still for a moment lost in thought, as if in contemplation. , then he raised one leg with his knee against his belly, and let out a fart. But he was forced, because he was not de core.

At the Stab Bar or the Green Carpet Bar, the wizened beardless men of Maranella, playing billiards, between one shot of the cue and another, or watching the game, huddled with a tired look along the walls of the small room where the two billiard players barely fit , and raising one arm a little they touched the ceiling, among the many topics on which to express their opinion, they also had that of Riccetto's engagement.

Depending on how it suited them, sometimes they discussed it fraternally, with a suggestive air, taking the matter very seriously; other times, however, without giving a damn. He, Riccetto, for his part, felt the most interesting among them: and as such, he had felt obliged to buy at least a pair of new

trousers. All affable and joking, but maintaining an air of mystery about his private affairs, he came with those new trousers pulled on his tight, bully hips as he walked. They were grey, tube-shaped, with pockets askew, and he came forward slightly bent over, with his thumbs in his belt, dragging his feet a bit, with the slightly tired and clumsy air of a prankster. They were like many tubes, around the slit, which moved as they walked, tube here, tube there, tube up tube down, and when he stopped, leaning with his legs crossed against the wall or the edge of the billiard table, they formed a single lump, tense, quiet and menacing. As for the rest, he still slept with Lenzetta in the bins on the meadows of Borgata Gordiani: but this way of life lasted for a short while, because it was no longer suited to Riccetto's new conditions.

Lenzetta knew of a place, in via Taranto, on the top floor of a seven or eight-storey building: it was a landing which on one side led through a door which was rickety and always open, a sort of barn where there were the water tanks, on the other in an uninhabited apartment, with the door that must have been closed for several months. They took a pack of newspapers up there, which they then hid between the water tanks during the day, and their stuff, and chose that landing as their bedroom.

The engagement entailed a serious life: and in fact Riccetto - very happy to play that part of a serious boy, which was the one about which the most solid comments that gave him the most pleasure were made at the Bar della Pugnalata - had started to work. He was the assistant of a fishmonger who had a stall there at the Maranella market. And on Sundays, always to be completely faithful to his role, he mystically gave up going for a walk with Lenzetta and the others, either in Centocelle or in Rome, and took his girlfriend to the cinema. His girlfriend, then, was not the one who was twenty years old, nor even the one who was eighteen: but the little, slow-witted and somewhat ugly redhead, the one who had not said a word and was there running against the dirty curtain of the door. When he was with her, and he didn't kiss her - and this was rare, because they were never really alone, but neither of them minded very much - Riccetto got so bored that sometimes he really got mad. Then he would give her any excuse to argue, and he always ended up giving her a few slaps. He couldn't wait for the moment to go away, to the Bar della Pugnalata, and find Lenzetta and the gang of paraguletti again; he presented himself to us with a satisfied air,

naturally, like someone who has now settled down, he has overcome all his anxieties and has nothing left to expect from life.

At the same time, however, he didn't give up, in order to be a serious boy, the other temptations and occupations of a straight boy of a whore, as the others continued to be. If there was a fuss to do, he did it, and he never failed to take part in the little thefts that every now and then they organized against the owner of the Stab Bar, who was a piece of bread, and the next morning, doing the cleaning, he he vented and complained right at them. Since Lenzetta and some of the others had already been at Porta Portese, they knew the "modern" education methods that were needed with rascals like them, they were proud and pleased to consider themselves: and then, since the master's sister treated them badly , to apologize and set their consciences at ease - not that they cared at all, but because they conveniently had the way to do it - they said that they organized those blows because she didn't know how to take them, to punish her... On the other hand, at Riccetto, the little money he earned as a fishmonger wasn't enough for him. So how can you behave like an honest boy! When there was something to steal, he stole, you'll understand, with that old hunger for money that he kept! Now he also had the ring to give to the girl... So, with Lenzetta, they decided to organize a major theft: to get a loot of axle shafts and other old scrap metal that would remain intact for at least a month.

Four of them left: Riccetto, Lenzetta, Alduccio and a certain Lello, a friend of Lenzetta, who was one of those who frequented the Bar della Pignalata. They were with the cart.

As they entered the Casilina, the wind began to blow and columns of white dust and rubbish began to move here and there on the open spaces, playing on the wires of the Naples railway like on a guitar. In a flash, behind all that white the sky turned black, and against that backdrop as black as hell, the pink and white facades of the Casilina shone like chocolate wrappers. Then even that light dimmed, and everything was dark, dull, now cold, under the rubbing of the winds that filled the eyes with grains of dust.

The four took shelter under a small door just in time to avoid being hit by the first downpour. It thundered with such rumbles that it seemed as if six or seven large domes of St. Peter's, placed inside a bin that could contain them all, were slammed against each other up there in the middle of the sky, and

their bangs then sounded a little false a few kilometers away. far away, behind the rows of houses and the expanses of the neighborhoods, towards the Quadraro or towards San Lorenzo, or who knows where, perhaps right there where there was still a bit of blue sky and the sparrows flew there.

After half an hour it rained and the four arrived cold and wet like chicks at Porta Metronia, in the area where they had been to steal the other time: it had rained, but the sky was still completely dark, as if a veil had been placed in front of us to cover us something scary, and this veil was even more scary: here and there it was broken by little red lights. Evening had come at least two hours earlier, and everything in Porta Metronia was deserted and dripping. The four did the counting: Riccetto had to stay outside with the cart. The others entered, and as soon as they were inside the warehouse, they counted once again who should enter first with the sack. It was Lello's turn. With a spagheggio that trembled like a leaf Lello entered and filled the sack with axle shafts, drills and other stuff, so much so that he could hardly move it anymore. Then he managed to call Lenzetta and Alduccio to help him carry the sack, since the worst was already done. He went out but could no longer find the other two. Then he ran out of the warehouse, to Riccetto who was waiting there with the cart, and asked him where they had gone. And Riccetto told him that he had seen them enter. Lello then went back in to try to take the bag out on the cart on his own. Riccetto saw him disappear into the warehouse but, as he reappeared after a while dragging the sack, the guardian came out and threw himself on him. Meanwhile, Lenzetta and Alduccio, who had entered a warehouse that was behind the scrap metal warehouse, which could not be seen from the street, were now coming back from there with the other sack full of stuff that Riccetto didn't understand, but which were of cheese wheels. As soon as they were in the courtyard of the warehouse, however, they saw Lello caught by the guard who was trying to free himself and cut him off, but he couldn't do it. So, to help him, they dropped the bag of cheese, and also threw themselves on the guard: however, the poor guy, began to call for help, and so they ran out of an oven there near the owner of the oven and his boys. Only Alduccio managed to escape: but before reaching the road, where Riccetto, pretending nothing had happened, was waiting for him, right at the gate some other people who had run there stood in front of him: he then ran down the street the wire fence towards another smaller gate which was further ahead: he was about to climb over it but in his haste he

slipped with one foot on the wet iron, and his thigh remained stuck on a pointed bar like a spear, which stuck all the way through inside. But he was still able to jump to the other side, and Riccetto ran towards him to help him: the other two or three who had run after him, seeing that he had hurt himself, left him alone, so as to have nothing to do . Riccetto took Alduccio by the arm, accompanied him a little further down, towards the Archaeological Walk, and when they reached a dark spot, he bandaged his wound tightly with a piece of his undershirt; then they went further forward, took the circular route, staying behind, on the platform, and went down to the Ponte Rotto. Riccetto left Alduccio at the entrance to the Fatebenefratelli hospital. Meanwhile, little by little, it had started to rain and thunder again, in those neighborhoods and those streets where Riccetto, thinking that either Alduccio in the hospital or the other two in the security room, slapped or bagged with sand, would talk, he prepared to wander all night.

It was starting to lighten. Above the roofs of the houses you could see banners of clouds, rubbed and crushed by the wind, which, up there, must have blown as freely as the beginning of the world had blown. Down below, however, he did nothing but crumple some piece of poster dangling from the walls, or lift some paper, causing it to rub against the peeling pavement or on the tram tracks. As the houses spread out, in some square, on some overpass, as silent as a cemetery, in some parceled-out land where there were nothing but construction sites with armor up to the fifth floor and lush little lawns, then the whole sky could be seen: covered with thousands of small clouds like pustules, like bubbles, which descended towards the faded and serrated tops of the skyscrapers at the end, in all shapes and all colours. Black shells, yellowish mussels, blue whiskers, egg-red spit; and at the end, after a strip of blue, clear and glassy like a river of the polar earth, a large white cloud, all curly, fresh and immense that looked like the Mount of Purgatory.

Riccetto went back, white-faced, down towards Via Taranto, slowly, waiting for the market stalls to be set up and for people to come and do their shopping. He was hungry, poor son, who was about to get upset, and he put one foot in front of the other without even knowing where he was going. Via Taranto was nearby: what did it take to get there? He took Via

Taranto, in fact, which was deserted like a minefield, with thousands of shutters closed on the facades that piled up, dark, on the slope, towards the sky full of those candied fireworks. And the cool breeze, which made your face turn white and blue like fennel, every now and then gave a jolt to the two rows of small trees with apennines and tuberculosis that rose, on both sides of the road, with their facades, towards the sky of San John. But where the market was, at the crossroads of via Monza or via Orvieto, I don't even remember any stalls. But not even a piece of paper was visible: a core, a piece of garlic, a bruised clove of garlic; nothing, it seemed that there had never been any markets there, or that there would ever be any. – Oh well, – said Riccetto, with his hands buried in his pockets, so far down that he had pushed the crotch of his trousers down to his knees, and huddling inside his blouse with his collar raised. And he turned down the first street that came to him, no matter what. – Damn the s..., – he said, suddenly getting angry, with clenched teeth and in an almost loud voice. – Who can hear me here anyway? – He said then throwing an exploratory look around, – and if they hear me too, who cares –. He was shaking like a leaf. The streetlights that were still lit suddenly dimmed: the light fell harsher and sadder from the sky and stuck to the walls. Everyone, from the doormen to the clerks, from the maids to the commanders, still slept behind the painted shutters in Via Pinerolo. But suddenly at the end of the road, brakes started screeching so loudly that they could have been heard all the way to San Giovanni; and then immediately afterwards some bangs, which reverberated throughout the neighborhood now covered in the whiteness of the day. Riccetto headed in that direction without forcing, and entered Piazza Re di Roma. That's where they made all that noise. Behind the small trees on the black, wet flowerbeds, with empty benches, the garbage truck was stopped; and lined up along the pavement, a dozen bins, with basket holders around them with their sleeves rolled up and swearing. The driver had gotten out, and with curls in his eyes, he was listening to them, leaning against a dirty fender of the truck, with his hands in his pockets. A little boy, with a little smile stretching his mouth, also enjoying himself because he didn't give a damn about that discussion, and, in fact, he was fine with it because he didn't work like that, he was silent a little away, with a board in front of him. hand. – But didn't you go to call me, that son of a slut? – said the driver, suddenly turning to the young man; he blushed a little, and then calmly said: - Of course. – Aòh, dear Fiji, what do I have to say to you! – said the

driver, turning to the two street cleaners. – Make do a little! – And he got back into the cabin, stretching out on the seat and sticking his feet out the window. But it wasn't so much of a misfortune for the street cleaners: they just had to unload the bins into the truck instead of one of the kids: the other, with a face like a slap, and dirty as a gypsy, was there. And then, after all, their bad soul, if in Borgata Gordiani or Quadraro there hadn't been some males who, in order to then have the right to go and scavenge among the rubbish, got up at three in the morning and toiled for four or five hours, shouldn't they always have done that job themselves? But by now they were badly used to it and it annoyed them, poor things, to find themselves in such trouble. Riccetto stood there, with his hands already half out of his pockets, and his eyes speaking.

A toothless man, with a beard as black as coal on his jaws white for the giannetta, and two poor Christ's eyes, which shone like a dog's, drunkenly despite the fact that it was four in the morning, said to him: - Come on. – Riccetto didn't have to be told twice, and while the basket makers giggled, saying, bent over the frozen bins: – Come on, there's a lot of fat here now. – Take advantage, man, it's a lot here – without worrying about it at all, he took the other plank that was protruding from the truck and with his other colleague began to roll the rubbish bins into the truck with great energy. and download them.

A stain of grey, dirty vapour, like watered-down ink, was meanwhile spreading across the strips of sky that could be glimpsed at the top of the buildings, in the voids of the square: and the disaster of little clouds first faded, then was absorbed by that dirt. The beautiful white cloud, with its steely reflections, had dispersed and shimmered, and now it too was disappearing like snow in the mud. Summer was coming to an end. For three hours Riccetto with the paraguiletto from Borgata Gordiani unloaded bins of rubbish onto the truck, onto the pile that became higher and higher and that increasingly scraped the lungs with a smell that seemed like being in a burnt orange grove. We could already see the first servants walking around with empty bags, and we could hear more and more frequently the gniiiu, gnieceeu of the trams at the turns: and the truck cut through the neighborhood of respectable and grainy people, took the Casilina, passed by with its fresh stench the buildings of the poor were cool, he danced the samba through streets full of potholes, with sidewalks that looked like sewers, between large peeling overpasses, fences, scaffolding, construction

sites, neighborhoods of shacks, villages of hovels, crossing with the Centocelle tramways with groups of workers to the steps, and arrived, along the Strada Bianca, right under the first houses of the Borgata Gordiani, alone as a concentration camp, in the middle of a small plateau between the Casilina and the Prenestina, beaten by the sun and the wind.

Where the truck had stopped, just before entering the village, there were expanses of fields on both sides of the road that must have been wheat, but which were all full of thickets, holes and reeds; and further on a vegetable garden, with trees even older than the crumbling farmhouse, and not pruned for at least twenty years. The ditch was full of black water, and they walked up and down the grass and earth even blacker than the straying old ducks. Just beyond the farmhouse the wheat fields ended, disappearing as they went into abandoned quarries which also became fields again, all mangy, good for passing Sabine or Abruzzo flocks, and interrupted here and there by ravines and overhangs. The path became sandy there, and there the truck stopped. – Come on, hurry up, – said the driver, as he had maneuvered by turning the nose of the truck towards the Strada Bianca and the rear part towards the edge of an almost sheer escarpment. The two workers opened the back sides, and the pile of rubbish fell down the slope. As the landslide stopped rolling down by natural force, the two made her keep behind the remains, Prussian blue and tomato red, which had remained stinking in the box, sweeping all tied up. Then the driver started the truck and left.

Ricchetto and the other man were left alone in the stench, with the quarry floor underneath and the small fields torn apart around them. They sat down, one on top and one on the bottom, and began searching through the rubbish.

The other was practical, and stood all bent over and attentive, with a serious face as if he were doing precise work: and Ricchetto did as he did, but since he disliked scratching with his hands, he went to tear a branch from a fig tree beyond a fence that seemed to have been there since Crispi's time and with it, crouching down, he began to move the dirty papers, the shards, the boxes of medicines, the leftovers from the soups and all the other stuff that smelled around him. The hours slowly passed, and before becoming definitively gray and siroccoous, the sky had just enough time to clear, there above the Borgata Gordiani, for the burning sun of nine in the morning to beat down on the curved backs of the two workers. Ricchetto was bathed in sweat, and his eyes darkened every now and then: he saw green

and red stripes around him in the darkness: he was on the verge of becoming distraught from hunger. – Fuck you..., damn you...! – He said it all at once, drooling with anger. He stood up, and without even saying goodbye to the other man, who didn't even make the effort to turn around, he pretended to be nice and left. He walked along the Strada Bianca, reeling from tiredness, which in fact was all white with dust and sun, under the sky that was darkening again, and arrived dazed on Casilina. There he waited for a tram, clung to the buffers, and after a journey of more than half an hour he was back in via Taranto: wandering like a stray dog around the market, among the stalls, smelling the smells that wafted in the sultry sirocco. thousands, and all appetizing, in that small clearing nestled between the buildings.

He searched the fruit stalls and managed to steal a few perches and two or three apples: he went to eat them in an alleyway. Then he came back even hungrier with that little bit of sweetness in his stomach attracted by the smell of cheese that came from the row of white stalls right there in front of the alley, behind the fontanella, on the soaked pavement. There were lined up mozzarella, caciotta, and provolone hanging high, and on the counter there were already cut pieces of Emmenthal and Parmesan, or pecorino; there were also pieces reduced to three or four ounces, or even less, isolated and scattered among the whole wheels. Riccetto, troubled, put his eyes on a slice of Gruyere, with a slightly yellowed texture, and so fragrant that it took your breath away. He approached it, coaxing and waiting for the owner to be absorbed in the discussion with a customer, as fat as a bishop, who had been standing there for a long time examining the cheese with a venomous expression, and with a lightning move Zac got the piece of Gruyere and slapped it in his pocket. The master caught him. He planted the knife in a sheath, said: "One minute, sir," he came out of the desk, grabbed Riccetto by the collar of his shirt as he was making off by acting stupid, and with a paragon air, feeling fully entitled to do so, gave him the soaked two sganassoni and turned it the other way. The furious Riccetto, as soon as he recovered from his daze, threw himself under him without much thought, throwing desperate hooks at his sides: the other toppled for a moment, but then, since Riccetto was twice as big as the other, he began to lead him in such a way that if other stallholders hadn't run there to separate them, he would have sent him straight to the Polyclinic. But however, being as strong and upright as he felt, he was able to allow himself to calm down

immediately. He said to those who were holding him: – Leave me, leave me, to Moretti, I don't do anything. What do I do with kids, me? – Riccetto on the other hand, all battered and with a little blood showing between his teeth, continued to kick for a while longer in the arms of those who were holding him. “Give me my cheese, and it's worth it,” said the cheesemaker, almost conciliatory. – Come on, this cheese, – said a fishmonger nearby. Riccetto slowly took the piece of Gruyere out of his pocket and handed it to him, with a pale face, chewing on vague thoughts of revenge and swallowing the resentment with the blood from his gums. Then, while the crowd around him was melting, since the fact was truly negligible, he went down into the middle of the crowd, among the red, green, yellow stalls, among mountains of tomatoes and aubergines, with the fruit sellers shouting around like this. so much so that they had to bend over on their stomachs, all happy and happy. He headed down to Via Taranto, and slowly climbed the four hundred steps that led to the landing where he slept. He could no longer stand up due to his weakness; he saw, yes, that the door of the empty apartment, usually closed, was open and slammed every now and then with a few gusts of air: but he didn't pay any attention to it. Staggering and with slow gestures like someone swimming underwater, he took a piece of string from his pocket, passed it through two eyelets and tied it, thus keeping the doors closed. Then he stretched out on the floor, already asleep. Not even half an hour must have passed - just enough time for the concierge to make a phone call and they arrived - when Riccetto felt himself being kicked awake and saw two policemen on top of him. Long story short, the apartment next door had been burgled during the night – that's why the door was banging. Riccetto, poor guy, woken up from who knows what dreams - perhaps of eating in a restaurant or sleeping on a bed - got up, rubbing his eyes, and without understanding anything, followed the policemen, lolling down the stairs. – Why did they catch me – he wondered, still not fully awake. - I don't know. . .! – They took him to Porta Portese, and sentenced him to almost three years – he had to stay there until the spring of '50! – to teach him morals.

VI THE BATH ON THE ANIENE

Traiti ahead, Alichino, and Calcabrina
– he began to say – and you, Cagnazzo;
And Barbariccia leads the tenth.

Libicocco comes beyond, and Draghinazzo,
Ciriatto sannuto, and Graffiacane.
And Farfarello, and crazy Rubicante.
DANTE, *Inferno*

"I'm so hungry that I'm shitting myself," shouted the Begalone. He took off his undershirt, standing on the turf trampled against the slope of the Aniene, among the charred bushes, unbuttoned his trousers and began to piss as he stood. – Are you pissing here? – Caciotta shouted to him as he was taking off his pedals a little further down. – Now I'm going to take a piss in Via Arenula, – said Begalone, – at the sound of music.

"Now let's take a bath," said Caciotta, who had gained weight in those three years, with a satisfied face, "and then we'll go to the cinema." – And where do you keep deaf people? – Alduccio said ironically. "I'm sorry," replied Caciotta. "He went away for that last night," Alduccio shouted with his feet in the water, Alduccio already naked. – Fuck you..., go on, – Caciotta simply replied, tightening his clothes with the belt.

He placed them with the others against a dusty bush, and went to the embankment, on the field where the wheat had recently been cut, and two or three horses were grazing there; Up there the little ones, who had come before noon, had started playing games. "You are naked, dirty," shouted Caciotta. – Do your business, – shouted Sgarone. – I'm the son of a slut! – Caciotta shouted to the boy, trying to catch him. But the other ran away, down the sheer cliff behind the ski jump. Moreover, Begalone, Tirillo and the other young men were also naked. Caciotta had spoken like this because, in the morning, he had stolen his nephew's panties and had sewn a pair of slippi himself. – See how much you catch! – Begalone said laughing. He heard himself shouting at the top of his lungs in the middle of the river, which flowed narrow and dark, under the sun, between banks full of reeds and thickets. The boys who had gone to throw themselves at the

dredge arrived screaming, clinging to reed rafts. “We're crossing the river,” Alduccio shouted from below, and threw himself into the water. Almost everyone followed him, the kids stopped playing and came to the edge of the bank. – Aren't you going to throw yourself in? – they asked Caciotta. 'I don't lack courage,' he said, 'but it's fear that matters to me!

The others crossed in large strokes, crossing paths with those who arrived with canes, and reached the other bank, which came down straight and filthy. A trickle as white as lime cut it in half, between the hardened mud and the old bushes, under the wall of the bleach factory, with its green tanks and tobacco-colored walls, without windows. The Begalone went under the white drainage of the bleach to bathe.

– You need that! – He shouted, Caciotta. The Begalone with his funnel-shaped hands, barely turning his head, answered him by shouting from the other bank:

- Old to wash your sister!
- Caccoloso! – said Caciotta.
- Sgarato 'n c...! – Begalone replied.

Those who had come from the dredger on the reeds had stopped under the diving board to roll on the black mud, under the plumb bank, and the kids came down with them.

Only three children remained on the bank, who had descended from Ponte Mammolo, and after stopping for a while on the bridge to watch, they had come to hide among the others on the edge of the escarpment, at the bend of the river, without that they decided to undress. They were careful to watch those who were joking about the shallow water and the mud, those who were splashing on the stream of bleach on the other bank. The two smaller ones were laughing and having fun even like this, the older one was laughing in silence; then he slowly began to undress. The other two did as he did, and all piled up the clothes together: the smallest held them under his arm, while the others went down. But he remained speechless. – To Genè, – he shouted, – and I don't take a bath? “Later,” Genesio replied in a low voice. Cliques of kids still came from the bottom of the curve, among the stubble that here and there burned slowly on the slopes of the Tiburtina, on the river bank, crackling under the small tongues of fire. They came two or three at a time, baccajando and prancing against the empty countryside

with the white walls of the Silver Cine and the hump of Monte del Pecoraro in the background.

They were almost naked, with their shorts held up by a string, their undershirt or t-shirt all torn with the tails hanging out. They took off their trousers as they walked, and arrived at the end of the field already with their clothes in their hands. – Note mejo de tte, I'm waiting for you! – Armandino shouted angrily, spitting, holding his wolf dog by the collar, at a little male who was trotting behind him. - This f..., - said the little boy who was taking care to hastily tear off Zella's gray undershirt, when they were at the bathroom, on the diving board of reeds and swamp, Armandino threw a branch into the water, and the dog fell over through the dust on the slope he smelled the water and swam off. All the kids gathered to watch him. He grabbed the branch and, holding it between his bare teeth up to his gums, happily climbed back up the slope, splashing mud. Armandino smoothed it out satisfied and threw the branch back into the water, further away, making the dog do all that nagging again. He came up again gloating, dropped the branch and started jumping on the kids. He attacked them, placing his front paws on their chests and with his tail glued between the back ones, all soaked and moaning with satisfaction. They moved away laughing – A fijo de na slut! – they shouted at him with sympathy. The dog went to grab Sgarone head-on: he almost threw him to the ground, holding him between his front paws as if he wanted to hug him, with his mouth open.

“You can be embarrassed,” said Tirillo.

– This f..., – replied Sgarone, pushing the dog away, not so sure of his intentions.

“Let's be rude about giving Piattoletta a dog,” Roschetto shouted, laughing.

- Gives, gives, - gridarono gli altri.

– To Piattolè, – they shouted down towards the embankment, where Piattoletta was just having fun with the mud and rubbish of the river. – Come here, put the culambrina on – the kids shouted from above him. He didn't respond, bent over on the ground, with his shoulder blades protruding, his little arms with bones and his face like a mouse with the spoon pointed at his ribs. He had a dangling cap on his head to cover the scabs, and his bald nape looked even smaller and more bumpy. He had a yellow face, with two big dark circles under his eyes and lips protruding

like a monkey's. Sgarone and Roscetto went down and started pulling him by the arms. He started to cry, slowly, and the tears immediately ran down his face and down to his neck. – Come on, scratch the dog, and come on, – they shouted at him, – see what an article it is! – He clung to the brush, to the mud, always crying without saying anything. But in the meantime the dog, who continued to jump, moaning with contentment, from one to the other, from the stripped edge of the stubble, suddenly began to take the clothes piled up here and there between his teeth and carry them around. – A son of a slut! – They screamed at him, chasing him, laughing, for fear that he would throw them into the water. Laughing, Sgarone and Roscetto let go of Piattoletta, who immediately cut down among the thickets, and went up to save their tight clothes together with the string.

Mariuccio held his and his brothers' dogs against his chest, drawing back worried if the dog approached him; but the dog didn't listen to him, even though he bumped into his sides, almost making him fall and crushing him with his wet fur. Then she noticed him and jumped on him happily to snatch the clothes from his hands. – To Genè, to Genè, – Mariuccio called out in fear. The dog had taken his brother's shorts between his teeth and was throwing them at him. The other males laughed. “I'm a scoundrel,” they shouted at the dog. Genesio and his other brother came up the slope dripping wet and, shaking a branch, made the dog run away. He took the clothes from Mariuccio's arms and, still in silence, rolled them up again.

It was a moment of calm, and all that could be heard was the voice of an old drunk who had come to riot in the dirt, and was singing under the vaults of the bridge. But those who had gone to the other bank now returned and, plowing the current together, shouted and sang. Caciotta, who had not yet entered the water, shouted: - A Bègalo, is it calla? in Bègalo!

– It's calla lily, it's calla lily, – Begalone replied, splashing his arms and feet in the oil-stained water, – like piss!

– And throw it away! – Sgarone shouted ironically to Caciotta.

“He's not even good enough,” shouted another little guy.

– Asshole, you learn from me, you learn from me, – said Caciotta, his face dark.

- And cross the river, - said Armandino, who in the meantime had undressed, but like Caciotta was wearing a pair of panties which he had remedied who knows how.

Lasseme only points the tip...

sang the old drunk from under the bridge.

– Come on Cacio, come on, – Alduccio and Begalone shouted from under the escarpment.

– Yes, now let's throw it away! – Armandino said sneering.

From under the slope Roscetto threw a piece of mud at Caciotta. Caciotta got pissed off. - Who did it? – He shouted, stepping to the edge of the clearing and looking down. The boys laughed.

– If I find out who did it, – warned Caciotta, – I'll make my face like a balloon!

– You know, – said Armandino, – but you don't cross the river.

– He would cross or he would cross, – admitted Caciotta, – but I'm impressed by his damn things!

Genesio had taken half a cigarette out of the pocket of his shorts and was smoking it while looking at the caciara; he and his two brothers were the only ones in Ponte Mammolo, and they kept to themselves. Immediately about ten males gathered around him. – Are you going to give me a tirade? – they said, – And faces smoke!, – Are you smoking all alone? – They had crouched around Genesio like beggars waiting for a tirade, pushing each other and pushing each other away. – So get dressed, Sgarone asked him, to make him a friend. – At Ponte Mammolo, – said Genesio. “We're ready to go to the house,” announced Mariuccio. After a few puffs Genesio silently passed the cigarette to Sgarone, and the others stood around Sgarone waiting for his puff.

"Now let's take a bath," Caciotta repeated happily, "and then we'll go to the cinema."

– What are they doing in Tibburtino? – asked Armandino.

– Er leone de Amarfi, – said Caciotta, satisfied with his work on the dirty sticks and the dust.

He was in good spirits with the penny and a half he had in his pocket. The buses from Casale di San Basilio and Settecamini passed through the Tiburtina from time to time, under the silent sun that clouded the mountains of Tivoli at the bottom of the boiling countryside. The smell of rotten apples

from the bleach weighed on everything, sticky like an oil stain spreading from the structures of the factory - which looked like a spider with its walls and its tanks - down the slopes of the Aniene, the asphalt of the road and the stubble burned by a fire that could not be distinguished, so strong was the sunlight.

– In Borgo Antico! – he shouted with a protective air to Genesio's middle brother, Riccetto, who was coming down from the bridge at the end of the path, erect, with his chest puffed out inside his white undershirt, walking; so much so that, looking at him, a boy from Tiburtino shouted: - He's coming! – In Borgo Anti! – Riccetto repeated in a cheerful and mocking voice, from the edge of the embankment, since Borgo Antico hadn't missed him at all, and as if he hadn't heard it, he had huddled up against the dirty earth of the bank, with his face frowning turned down towards the water. Riccetto ironically began to undress. He piled the clothes under his feet, without haste; then he put on a flashy pair of briefs and finally took a national team out of his pocket and lit it. He crouched down on the burning dust, and looked once again under the embankment, among the chaos of the kids. Mariuccio stood next to him, with his brothers' clothes pressed against his ribs. – In Borgo Anti! – Riccetto began again. - Ariocace, - he said, grinning between his teeth at the little guy who had already grabbed him head-on. But the other one didn't work at all. – And let's have a cantata, Borgo Anti, – he shouted. Borgo Antico, however, didn't even turn around, standing still in his position, with his chocolate face, shiny and black. – Which, he sings too – said Sgarone ironically. – Why, no – Riccetto also replied ironically. Borgo Antico was always silent, and Genesio was silent too, as if he didn't notice anything. Mariuccio, the youngest of the three brothers, said: – I'm not going to sing. – Asshole, – said Riccetto to Borgo Antico, – you have a dry throat, what? – What are you giving? – Genesio asked suddenly. – I'm a national, go, – said Riccetto. – Sing, – Genesio ordered his brother. – Mo sings, – announced Mariuccio. Borgo Antico raised his thin, black shoulders and pressed his birdlike face further into his chest. – And sing, – Genesio repeated already angrily. – And what do I have to sing? – Borgo Antico said in a broken voice. – Sing Luna Rossa, come on, – said Riccetto. Borgo Antico sat down, squeezing his knees against his chest, and began to sing in Neapolitan, bringing out a voice ten times bigger than him, so full of passion that he seemed like a man of thirty. The other males who hadn't been heard for a while, behind the humps of the slope, in the mud, came up

around him to listen. “Kill him when he sings,” said Roscetto, while in the whole river nothing but that voice could be heard. Just as everyone was still, a new piece of mud hit Caciotta on the head, who still hadn't decided to take a bath. - Who did it? – he said again, getting angry. “Let's see what you're holding in that hand,” he said, seeing Armandino who, with his dog in tow, was hiding one hand behind his back. Armandino looked him in the eyes, with his eyes becoming ironic and a little scared, defiantly, acting indifferent. He hesitated a little before showing his hand: then he suddenly took it away from behind his back and showed it to Caciotta with his palm open, but Caciotta leaped behind him and, taking him under his arms, forced him to get up.

Armandino, who hadn't expected it, nervously pushed the forelock out of his eyes, still looking at Caciotta with insolence and a bit of fear: - What the hell, you wretch, - he told him. – What were you keeping down there? – Caciotta asked him, increasingly angry, taking a handful of crushed and rolled mud from the ground. “But he's not going to break my balls, he's not going to bother me,” Armandino slurred. – You were there, right? – said Caciotta. Armandino snapped, pointing his open hand at him, with fingers outstretched: - You see this, but who's in your head... never, to do it! – He said, taking, in any case, about ten steps further. Caciotta looked at him without saying anything, choked with anger and moved threateningly towards him, who had behind him, to cut across, the whole field and the banks of the Aniene up to the dredge, to the Pescatore tavern, in Tiburtino: but instead he remained there as he was, a little hunchbacked, red in the face and ready to do anything for satisfaction, even perhaps to get it. As Caciotta approached him, he suddenly bent over, almost crying, grabbed a piece of dried meat that was in front of him and threw it in his face. But he wasn't able to escape immediately because, enraged, Caciotta was on top of him with two zompi and grabbed him, as he turned around, by the bottom of his panties. Armandino ran away with his panties hanging loosely over his bare bottom. He went away, amidst a riot of laughter, to the bottom of the bend in the river, and sitting there, while Caciotta returned with ill-concealed satisfaction towards the others, he turned his panties inside out: he didn't give a damn if they saw him in front anyway, the it was important that the backside was covered. Meanwhile everyone continued to laugh gathered at the top of the escarpment. – You see, Piattoletta is laughing too! – said Bègalo, who in the meantime had come across the river with the

others, seeing Piattoletta with his mouth open. As soon as he heard these words, Piattoletta suddenly stopped laughing and started to go back down to the embankment. But the Begalone's hand stopped him. It was impossible to give an idea of the difference between the Piattoletta and the Begalone. With those crooked eyes that he had, slow and red, the Begalone could certainly be considered the straightest of the whole clique: and in fact he considered himself, not at all, while without even looking at him, with a patient air, he grabbed with the hand by the neck of the Piattoletta. You'll understand, he had stayed up all night, half hanging out at the Salario and half at Villa Borghese, among paragules and fagots, or on the trams picking pockets. That other one, however, had come to the river after spending the morning with his grandmother sorting out the rubbish in the midst of the smelly meadows and hovels where the sewer of the Polyclinic flows into the Aniene. So now, pushed to sit on the ground by the Bègalo's hand, he crouched there in silence, like those beasts that pretend to be dead, ready to complain under his dirty white cap, which fell down to his back. Only the two protruding ears prevented it from falling over the crease of his nose.

– He laughs too, this scoundrel, – repeated the Begalone, feigning a cheerful air of protection, and forcefully slapping his hand on the small bones in his back. Piattoletta, shaken by those blows, looked at him. – 'Oh, break it,' said Riccetto. – What, do you want to joke? – replied the Begalone, raising his voice, – and when do you break this trunk? – And he gave him another slap on the shoulder blades. Piattoletta laughed a little, twisting his mouth.

– Do you know why he was laughing? – said Sgarone, – do you know? Because he looked right at Armandino.

– Oh yes-i? – said Begalone. – I'm the son of a slut! I didn't imagine it, you know, you had to put on the bandone when you were next to me! You like it, eh? they can kill you, you and that Arab of your father!

Piattoletta pressed his head against his chest, looking around out of the corner of his eye, while everyone laughed.

“But what a little knuckle, what a little knuckle,” said Tirillo, moving with his legs apart with his belly against Piattoletta's nose, “this fagot likes this.

“Give it to your sister,” whispered Piattoletta, who was already crying. But Tirillo slammed his bare lower belly into his face two or three times,

then rolled in the dust. – And forget it, – said Begalone, – why are we having a chat in German, see Piattolè?

– What, is he German? – asked Riccetto.

– But damn him, – said Begalone, – he's German and Moroccan, go and ask your mother!

Piattoletta was all wet from crying, and he let it slide down his face and neck without drying himself.

– You have to see how much German he speaks, – said Sgarone, – tell Piattolè a little.

“Come on, talk,” shouted the Begalone, “the hell with your grandmother and yours.

- If you don't talk, - said Tirillo, jumping up, - we'll make a hole for you... like a hut.

– Yes, because he's small now – said Roscetto.

– And you want to stop, broccoli, – said Begalone, hugging Piattoletta, – because now we can't have this chat in German, we'll throw our clothes in the river and we'll stay in Pietralata naked.

Piattoletta continued to cry. – Addò threw away his clothes, I'm a bugger, – asked the Begalone. – Over there, get up to the mud, – shouted Sgarone, and ran to get them. - This cap is pure, here, - said Begalone, tearing it from Piattoletta's head, which remained naked, shaved, and marked by white scars.

He made a whole pile of clothes, and holding them high with one hand, he threw himself into the river and crossed it. When he reached the other bank under the drainage ditch, he shouted to Piattoletta:

- Mo, if you don't speak German, I'll come to you tomorrow morning, these dirty clothes!

“And he talks, and what's the matter,” Riccetto told him cheerfully.

“But the damn thing is yours,” Sgarone shouted, kicking him on the back. Piattoletta began to cry louder, with his monkey face, increasingly disfigured and disgusting: but at the same time he decided to speak. “Ach rich grau riche fram ghelenen fil ach ach,” he said, as softly as he cried.

– I can't hear you! speak louder! – Begalone shouted from the other bank – “Ir zum ach gramen bur ach minen fil ach zum cramen firen,” Piattoletta repeated a little louder, immediately starting to cry again. "Now do like the

Indians," shouted the Begalone. Piattoletta obeyed immediately, and wet with the tears that continued to bleed from his narrow eyes, he started jumping around, waving his arms and shouting: - Ihiu, ihuuuu, ihu. – The Begalone put the clothes down on a tuft and threw himself into the water shouting: – Mo cor c... I'll bring them back to you.

The sun had set a little, down towards Rome, and there was like coal dust in the air. – Let's go, – Genesio said to his little brothers. He asked Mariuccio to give him his clothes and put on his trousers, slightly torn at the hem by the dog's bite. "But he died there," he said between his teeth, looking. – What does mother say to you? – said Mariuccio. Genesio didn't answer anything, he took another half cigarette from the bottom of his pocket, and when they were a little further along the path that went up the Tiburtina escarpment, he lit it. "Wait for me," Riccetto shouted at that moment, seeing them go away. The three little boys turned sideways and stood still for a bit: they were unsure whether to wait for him or not. – Let's wait for him, – Genesio said softly, still with a dark face, and without even looking at what his brothers were doing he sat cross-legged on the dust, smoking with his eyes lowered.

Riccetto got dressed calmly, one pedal at a time singing and raising moina with those who were doing some brush or underpainting; then finally, after having put his clothes on backwards two or three times, he was ready, he stood up and one step after another, moving lazily on his shoulders, he passed in front of the three boys from Ponte Mammolo who were waiting for him, and with a mocking nod of his head he said: – Let's go. – They went in line along the path along the Aniene, climbed up the escarpment almost overlooking the Tiburtina and took the bridge.

Riccetto walked ahead, in his undershirt, plump, and all shiny from the bath, still taking the mischievous walk. He was cheerful, and he sang with his eyes full of irony and his wet panties dangling in his hand. The three boys followed him, Genesio, with licorice skin and coal eyes, standing aside, sly, and the other two trotting like little puppies, as if they were going to a procession with Riccetto in the lead. They turned out of the Tiburtina and onto Via Casal dei Pazzi which led between the large clearings of cultivated fields, with zigzag furrows, and the small whitewashed buildings, the construction sites, the stumps of houses. There wasn't a soul, and under the sun that baked the asphalt of the road and the countryside you could only hear Riccetto's voice singing.

The workers who were making holes for the sewers along Via Casal dei Pazzi, because it was election time, were sleeping on their backs, lying under the shade of a low wall. – See! – Mariuccio shouted in his little bird voice, leaning over to look into one of the holes in which the winch rope was dangling still. Borgo Antico ran to look down, also marveling at the depth; Genesio gave us a contemptuous look. - Come on, - said Riccetto, seeing that the three were left behind, busy observing one by one the potholes that lined up along their trestles for the length of the road.

– Now I'm... yours with your father, – Riccetto shouted cheerfully, moving one hand up and down energetically.

– And who's going for nothing, – said Genesio hoarsely.

– If, if, it's just a little chat, – Riccetto said mockingly, continuing to wave his arm. He was referring to the beatings that the three little brothers received every day from their father, who was an evil, drunkard. Riccetto, who had been a laborer with him since the spring, in Ponte Mammolo, knew him well. They entered via Selmi, leaving the row of fenced holes that disappeared under the sun.

– Your eyes will swell, now! – She continued to say, amusing Riccetto.

- If it's! – It was Genesio, stung to the point and not willing to accept Riccetto's predictions: but he had no arguments to defend himself and Riccetto took the opportunity to have fun.

'Especially if you've been drinking,' he said in a pathetic voice, 'grab a stick with a stick and he'll show you!'

- And get up, - said Mariuccio, who was still too small to say "fuck you...", looking at him uncertainly from below. – If, if, you're joking, – said Riccetto, – but now you have to cry!

"And get up," Mariuccio repeated, unsure whether to joke too or take it badly. Riccetto sang a little song, as if he had forgotten about the three brothers, and then: - He wouldn't want to find me in your shoes! – He said jokingly, stretching his mouth and hunching his head between his shoulders as if to dodge a volley of blows.

“And get up,” Mariuccio said again resentfully. Genesio remained silent, giving the last puffs to his butt which was reduced to just the embers, and kicking the cobblestones of via Selmi, sunk between skimpy vegetable gardens, little houses left half-finished and armies of laundry.

"Now we're here," Riccetto said ironically as they reached the end of the street, near Pugliese's house, which also had a single floor and no plaster: but now they were raising it again, and there were scaffolding around it, and in the beaten earth of the small garden, the puddle of quicklime and the piles of plum-coloured sand. None of the two or three laborers were still at work. Riccetto was the first and approached very calmly. The Pugliese had just beaten his wife, and he was sitting on the step of the house with his face stained with blood and his eyes as dark and shiny as those of a dog. The three boys who had eyed their father from afar had kept their distance, among the bumps in the road and the gutted walls, waiting for the tragedy. Riccetto, on the other hand, entered the garden, all calm and well-disposed, took the comb out of the back pocket of his trousers, wet it under the fountain and began to comb his hair, as beautiful as Cleopatra.

– The dogs, the dogs! – shouted Roscetto, emerging from under the Aniene escarpment, with all the pipinara of his companions. Zinzello, the carter with the Rudi-style hairdo, and Miccia with two adult wolfhounds, a male and a female, were in fact coming along the Tiburtino path. Arriving at the bend in the river, while the dogs were playing among the cut stalks of wheat, they undressed, took soap from their pockets, and chatting among themselves they went with their feet into the shallow water to wash.

Neither the children nor the youngsters did anything at all. Zinzello with his face as hard as dirt, and Miccia, an already large guy, with a beard that blackened his well-nourished cheeks, in the cold of the water that ran down his back, they had both started to singing, and they paid no attention to the males playing with their dogs.

Armandino's dog, in fact, had started to growl, but standing at a distance, with his tail held tightly between his thighs, turning around so as to never present his completely soaked side to the other two colleagues, curling up and stretching out.

All the kids, including Piattoletta, had gathered around.

– Je trema er c..., – Roscetto said mockingly.

“He's a puppy,” said Sgarone, taking his side.

– But what a puppy, what a stupid puppy, – said the Roscetto in a vibrant voice, – but he was born before me!

Armandino said "pzt" with his tongue, raising his eyebrows with an air of compassion: - 'He hasn't even had a year,' he said.

– Well? – said Roschetto. – Why should he be afraid of another dog?

– But what fear, yes fear! You make me angry,” Armandino blurted out.

He approached his dog, grabbed him violently by the collar and dragged him towards the other two dogs, who, growling, had already begun to patrol the stubble.

He lowered himself on him, and slowly, almost inaudible, he began to incite him, angrily, dripping saliva:

- Give, Lupo, give, Lupo, give, give!

Wolf trembled at the incitements of that very low voice which barely reached his erect ears. With the sternum forward, it was all vibration, like a running engine. Suddenly Armandino let him go.

All the kids watched, almost in silence. Of Zinzello's two dogs, the male was smaller and thinner, and seeing Wolf incited against him by his master and in high spirits, he lazily retreated towards the center of the field, returning every now and then to barking and growling.

But the bitch was a beast. Thin, black, with a sharp muzzle, a mangy tail and slanting eyes, she waited as still as a statue for the Wolf, who, having arrived near Callara, stopped suddenly, barking like a villain at her.

She stood still for a while listening to him, mournfully, amidst the cries of the children: then she turned her back on him and took two steps to walk away and go about her business, as if she were thinking to herself: "Give it to me, go, until this happens." a tragedy!»

But as he left he turned every now and then, with his face pointed against his thin shoulder, and his dull, dark eyes stained with red.

– Come on, Lupo, come on, come on, – whispered Armandino, still leaning over his dog's ear, while the kids also cheered him on, shouting like monkeys, making a racket that could be heard as far away as Tiburtino. The Wolf, naive, threw himself after the bitch, who was still silent, barking at the top of his lungs, making a bit of coaxing.

«But it seems to me that you swell a little too much, – the bitch seemed to think, pausing, – due to my character!», and after an instant: «But damn you» she burst out shouting, suddenly losing her temper. patience. It was such a ferocious growl that Wolf stopped, and it even made a bit of an

impression on the kids. In the meantime she had turned around, pivoting on her back and glaring grimly at the idiot Wolf who was starting to cut.

– What did I tell you, in Sgarò? – said Roscetto.

Armandino bent over even more: - Come on, come on, Lupo, come on, - he said, almost trembling too. Wolf regained some courage, immediately forgetting the panic he had felt, and began barking again, even more threatening and wild than before. "And ariòcace," the dog seemed to think. «You slut, you bastard, it's useless for you to look at me so much, you know! – shouted the furious Wolf, – you don't impress me anyway! » And the other was silent. «Now if you don't say anything, – threatened Lupo, – I'll soak you in a piñata and I'll cut your head off!»

"Aaaah, you're cute!" said the other dog, intervening in the conversation.

«Well? – said Wolf with a dash towards him, who ran away, – but what are these wretches looking for?» The bitch let out a growl. «Make a growl about this c. ...» shouted Wolf.

"Enough," the bitch snapped, "I'm already bored, you know that?" She turned completely to face. «If only I could do it, – she said, then shouting completely enraged, – but for satisfaction I'll even do thirty years of Reggina Celi!»

"Now they'll kill themselves," said Sgarone, but he hadn't even finished saying these words before the two wolves were already on top of each other, with their back paws pointed at the ground and their front ones intertwined on their chests, with their mouths wide open and their teeth exposed up to their gums. Gasping, they tried to bite behind the ears, and, between one bite and another, they growled so loudly that they drowned out the kids' screams. Wolf rolled in the stubble, kicking up dust, and the bitch was on top of him, biting him in the throat. But Wolf got up again and after doing a few leaps backwards, he jumped on her again, standing almost perpendicular and waving his paws in front of him like someone who is drowning. They roared, wriggled, choked with rage. But Zinzello at the most beautiful moment came up from the embankment and gave a whistle. Immediately the bitch, as if her anger had magically melted away, followed by the male, ran towards him, lightly, leaping, moving her tail, submissive and almost cheerful. Zinzello shouted the dead to the kids, and when he had let off steam properly, he went back down to get the soap, taking his dogs with him. Wolf was hurt. – Guà you cut them off! – said Tirillo in a loud

voice of wonder, – you cut them off! – Everyone bent over Lupo, who had a completely mangy neck, and here and there among the stuck-on black hair, reddish, swollen sores with black crusts. – Kill him! – he said with the same voice full of amazement as Tirillo the Sgarone. “Let's throw him into the water,” said Roschetto, and they all got out, dragging the dog down the slope.

Meanwhile Caciotta came up from the bank where the big men had started playing cards, taking a look every now and then to see if the caretaker's daughter was appearing at the little window lost between the walls of the factory, so as to be able to act a little wretched with her, naked as they were. She looked around and said: - Now they'll be in my shoes.

– Panni, where are you? – She then shouted with her usual good humor.

– Are you already leaving? – Alduccio asked him.

– And what am I doing here? – said Caciotta, looking for clothes among the brush and reeds.

– Famous in the bathroom, come on, – shouted Alduccio.

– None – shouted Caciotta.

“And let him lose,” Begalone said to Alduccio, bumping his elbow. Caciotta had found his clothes, and was turning them over in his hands looking at them.

– Who touched them, – he said to himself, – well, I don't know.

– What, is there anyone out there looking for money? – She asked out loud.

– No, – Sgarone shouted ironically.

- I'll catch someone who's going after my pocket, I'm blind, I'm blind, - Caciotta said cheerfully.

– If you're strong, go – the Begalone shouted from below, hearing him. Caciotta began by putting on his pedals and shoes, and meanwhile sang:

Clogs, clogs...

- Claudio Villa, - said the Begalone, - no one likes you, Caciò.

– I know, – said Caciotta, interrupting the song and immediately starting it again.

- Get ready to sing, - said Alduccio.
- Yes, I'm arriving... – said Caciotta.

Clogs, clogs...

What, shouldn't I be comforted? What, do I have to ask anyone for permission to sing a song?...

Clogs, clogs...

– Now if we get dressed, we'll go for a walk, and then we'll go out to the cinema... – While he was singing and chatting, he had put on his socks and shoes, and now he was undoing the belt that tied his clothes.

- You're going to the cinema, but you don't want to bring your friends, do you? – said the Begalone.

– I'm stupid, – replied Caciotta, – I have a total of about a penny and a half...

– All right, all right, do as you like, – said Begalone.

Caciotta started singing again: – Zoccoletti, zoc..., – he suddenly fell silent. He remained silent for a while, then came forward with the clothes in his hands, his face as white as a dead man.

– Who stole the deaf ones I had in my pocket? she said.

- What, - said the Begalone, - me, are you coming to look after me?

- Who did it? – Caciotta repeated palely.

"Now whoever did it will tell you today," said Zinzello, leaving with his dogs and shaking his head.

– Now let me see your pockets! – said Caciotta. The Begalone jumped up with a burst of nerves. 'What an idiot,' he told him, 'look at us. – He took the clothes and threw them in Caciotta's face; He took these and looked carefully in all the pockets, in silence. Then he also looked inside the Begalone's pedals and shoes.

– You found something, what? – shouted the Bègalo. “I found your shit there,” said Caciotta.

“I'll give you an artichoke now,” said Begalone. Caciotta went to look in Alduccio's shoes, and then one by one at all the kids, but found nothing. He

put them back in the dust, without looking anyone in the face: who knows how many weeks it had been since he had seen a hundred lire and that he hadn't felt as satisfied as that after lunch. He dressed in silence, thinking deeply, and left. Already along the Tiburtina there was more passage of cars, although the low sun was still burning above the black vapors accumulated over Rome; the shutters of the Silver Cine went up, and here and there, throughout the lots of the village, distant voices and noises could be heard more frequently. Alduccio and Begalone took another bath and then left too. The last to leave the river were the children.

Some went straight home along Via Boccaleone, while others still hung around: they slowly made their way from the river to the first lots in Tiburtino, and stopped for half an hour in front of the Silver Cine to look at the posters and tease each other. Then they went down, again, among the oleander bushes of the Tiburtina, until they arrived at the bus stop, which was the center of the kids' pissing and the youngsters' cliques, in the square in front of Monte del Pecoraro.

Below there were some little girls, in the middle of the yellow esplanade that flattened out between the four or five indentations of the mountain and the Tiburtina, full of workers returning home on bicycles, some continuing towards Ponte Mammolo or Settecamini, some turning right in front of the esplanade, towards the lots of Tiburtino III and the Madonna del Soccorso. There was already someone who, having returned home, and then succeeded, went for a walk with his companions, towards Pietralata, or one of the two cinemas nearby, with his undershirt or shirt untucked.

The children, coming from the Aniene still half naked, went up the dark brown path that split the slope of the serrated hump in half, at first on the edge of a tuff quarry, and then penetrating among the brambles, inside the Monte of Pecoraro.

The girls went after him, and together they arrived in the middle of the mountain, from where the road could no longer be seen, on a clearing full of abandoned quarries, which sank in the middle like small ravines. Since a storm was coming up on the side of San Pietro, it seemed that it was already almost evening; the sun, as it set, had been covered by clouds, which were already flashing here and there even though the sky above was shiny, almost red from the glare and the heat. And instead of the sun, the surfaces of Monte del Pecoraro were now rubbed by a kind of African wind, full of

the noises of the entire suburbs. Piattoletta also followed the gang of men, laughing under his cap, keeping well apart, so that we could stay together without them noticing. The others, however, had calmed down a bit, because the girls were there. They went to stand under the electricity pylon, and Sgarone and Tirillo began to play morra; as a joke, at first, then they warmed up and started screaming, one on his knees, the other crouched on the little bit of grass that was left under the pylon.

Armandino, on the other hand, had gone to work on the thread of shadow which could barely be distinguished because the sun had disappeared behind the flashes, but the light remained, while the others, mangy like a pack of monkeys, had begun to attack the little girls. Staying away, however, because despite all the mischief they did, they were a little shy, and they kept grouped together and hugging each other, raising mockery all ironic and dislodged. But they always had an answer ready to shut his mouth.

“Those,” said Armandino in a thick voice, “make you happy, they talk to themselves,” and he started singing. But the others acted like Indians, and continued to stand there joking with the females. Roschetto, seeing that he had no other arguments, took and gave one of him a blow on the head, which almost bent it. Then the girls, all offended and speechless, went away to the other side of the pylon, from where you could see Pietralata, and the boys behind, as mad as the girls were. Below, on the other side of Monte del Pecoraro, still among the old tuff quarries, was the Fiorentini factory, which made the air vibrate with its engines. And from time to time the white flashes of autogenous welding flashed from the windows, from the patched-up windows; Pietralata was further away, with the rows of pink houses of the evicted, under the hardened and infected crust of the dust, and further away the big yellow buildings, tall and narrow in rows, in the countryside as bare as in winter, so much sun it had burned.

But the girls retreated on their own to the bottom of a small clearing between the lips of two large holes, and no longer replied anything to the boys, barely exchanging a few words between themselves while waiting for them to leave. They had gathered to play rogues a little further up the ridge; but the behavior of the girls made them angry, even if they didn't want to show it: for this reason they began to be even more mischievous and material: since they couldn't seem more upright than the girls in words, they

began to throw wedges and strings on their tattered sweaters, on hair that is dusty but already combed like that of young ladies.

The girls did nothing but move further down, after having shouted in the boys' faces what they deserved. – Damn, – they said, – why don't you go and break your sister's balls, stupid people! – Their voices were all vibrating with anger, and had become more strident and at the same time more drawled. The boys, hearing them, started grinning and mocking him, in the way they heard older brothers do about certain guys in Via Veneto: and the youngest one shouted: - Frosce! – And, walking towards her on the slope, they began to walk with her left hand on her hip and her right hand now stretching forward and now stroking the hair on the back of their neck, with long, slow steps.

Armandino under the pylon continued to sing at the top of his lungs, passionately, and the other two continued to play morra, standing, with the fingers of the left-hander straight to count the points. – Damn you! - shouted those who came up, - and what are we doing? – They threw themselves on the three under the pylon, all excited, and rolled around fighting, some, others lit a cigarette butt, and the match, thrown to the ground, burned a little grass which crumpled black and angry according to the whim of the threads of wind that flowed over the humps of the hill.

The clouds had thickened and their flashes, at intervals, stained them red, and more rapid and frequent, also because in the already dark air they could be seen better, were the flashes of the welding, below, from the factory, which was covered with hum of its engines the voices of the poor life of Pietralata and Tiburtino.

Piattoletta was sitting on the ground, with his legs crossed, and his cap pulled as low as he could over his ears, laughing with his long, hanging lips.

– At Piattolè, – the others shouted, rolling on the cracked mud, – catch this one, – but they continued to fight among themselves without paying any attention to him. Sgarone was lying on the ground with his stomach up, and Roschetto was on top of him, belly to belly, to keep him still, and with his hands he was squeezing his wrists, keeping them hunched on the ground.

Sgarone was trying to free himself. – Don't move! – shouted Roschetto, blushing from the effort. But Sgarone, who was starting to get annoyed, fidgeted like a ciriola. “What the hell is yours,” he shouted. – Stacce, in

Sgarò, – said Roschetto. – And get the f... – the other replied, starting to get really angry, his voice already a little broken. The Roschetto began to jump on him, as if there was a San Giusto ball. – Be careful, there's Bastiano standing guard here in Roscè! – said Sgarone, laughing. Leaving him all excited, Roschetto leapt backwards. – Let's play Indians! – He shouted. “And go away,” said the others contemptuously. – Come on, let's have fun – Roschetto insisted. – Uh, it's some stuff, – Armandino said, grinning. – Hee, hee, hee, – shouted the Roschetto, jumping. – Come on, Piattolè!

Piattoletta stood up and began to shout too, jumping now on one foot, now on the other: - Ihu, ihihu -. The Roschetto stood beside him, to jump together: - Hee, hee, hee, - they shouted, laughing.

The others also started jumping, bending their bodies back and forth, and shouting: - Ihu, hey -. The girls came up to see what was happening and, finding all that chaos, they stopped in a circle around them and said: - How fanatical they are! – But the kids in front of them started jumping and shouting even more to make them angry.

– Let's do the dance of death, the dance of death! - shouted Roschetto: the others started screaming even louder: - Heehee, heehee, - and as soon as they jumped and passed near the girls they gave him a kick or a broom on the head. But they, who were expecting it, were quick to get away – “Hey, what a nuisance you are,” they said. – You want it to be quiet, ignorant people – but they didn't go away and just watched their dances; and the kids, although they could no longer jump and scream, continued louder and louder to make themselves seen.

“The torture stake,” shouted Roschetto.

– Yes, I'm just at the stake of torture, – the girls said grimacingly, – he fade laughs, he fade, – and they looked with an air of compassion, bored.

Roschetto threw himself on Piattoletta, who was lying down among the others, barely moving his feet because he was dead tired, shouting "hee, hee". – Ar stake de 'to death, shouted Roschetto, as soon as he had caught him.

The others helped him shouting and dragged Piattoletta near the electricity pylon.

“Let's tie him up,” shouted Sgarone. Piattoletta struggled, letting himself fall to the ground body-first. 'But the damn thing is yours,' shouted

Roscetto, who was holding him under his arms, 'and he's standing there like a fool.

But Piattoletta didn't want to hear of it, and threw himself on the ground kicking: the others around him continued to scream. – I'm already fed up, – said Roscetta, kicking him in the stomach.

Piattoletta began to cry so loudly that it surpassed the screams of the kids. – I'm crying, this asshole, – said Armandino. – Now don't you dare... – Roscetto shouted. But Piattoletta really didn't want to know and continued to free himself in the dust, crying at full force.

“Ten of them can't handle that crooked guy, there,” said the girls. But Roscetto had lifted him by pulling him up by the collar, and as Piattoletta was shouting: - Lasseme, a fijo de na slut, - Tiè, - he told him and spat in his eye; then he squeezed him badly, and helped by Sgarone and Tirillo, he pushed him against the pylon, and they tied his wrists with string to an iron hook that was protruding from the concrete.

But even though he was hanging like this, Piattoletta continued to kick and shake, shouting. The others resumed dancing around him and shouted louder: - Ihu, hee, ihuuuu, - but staying at a certain distance so as not to be hit by the kicks that Piattoletta loosened in the air. 'Wow,' cried Roscetto, 'why, doesn't anyone have another piece of string?'

– And who has any, – said Tirillo.

“Er Piattoletta, er Piattoletta,” shouted Sgarone. – What if you have these songs!

They threw themselves on Piattoletta, who was moaning and praying, and while the girls laughed and shouted: - Look at those! - they removed the string that held up his trousers and tied his ankles.

“Now let's give fire to the stake of death,” shouted Armandino, lighting a match.

But the wind blew it out. – Hee, hee, hee, – everyone else shouted around at the top of their lungs.

– 'Your car! – shouted Sgarone to Tirillo.

– Here it is, – said Tirillo, putting it out of the bottom of his pocket; she lit it, and while the others, kicking, piled up the brushwood under the pillar, still shouting and dancing, she lit the dry grass here and there around.

The wind was blowing strongly from all sides on the now almost dark Monte del Pecoraro, while between the flashes of light from the factory and the flashes of the storm, some thunder could already be heard and the smell of wetness could be heard.

The dry grass immediately lit up, the blood-colored flames passed to the brushwood, and a little smoke rose around the screaming Piattoletta.

Meanwhile, his trousers, no longer held up by the string, had slipped, leaving his stomach exposed and bunching up at his tied feet. So the fire, from the blades of grass and the twigs that the kids kept kicking while shouting, stuck to the dry cloth, crackling happily.

VII IN ROME

In front of Monte del Pecoraro there was a large square and near the sign with the writing "End of area - Beginning of area", just before where the large expanse of fields began up to the Aniene, there was the old shelter of 309 which at that point it turned, leaving Via Tiburtina, and heading between the lots of the Borgata towards the Madonna del Soccorso. Alduccio lived, like Begalone, in Lotto IV, at the end of the central street of the village, shortly after the market clearing, with the row of street lamps which, turning on at dusk, along the lots no higher than two floors, gave the impression of being in the poor neighborhood of some seaside resort, with the road that behind the short slope seemed to disappear against the blurry sky, with the noises of the people who were having dinner or preparing for the hours of the night between the sonorous walls, in the courtyards. At that hour there was a great passage of boys and youngsters; but the real men of life still stayed apart, inside the cafés or on the crossroads, waiting for night to come, not to go to the cinema or to Villa Borghese, but to gather in some gambling den to play zecchinette until morning. And while a few young men here and there, in the courtyards, were plucking a guitar, there were still women washing dishes or sweeping, with kids complaining, and the buses still arrived full of people returning from work. – I greet you, in Bègalo, – said Alduccio when they were outside the house. – I greet you, – said Begalone, – if we see. – I'll wait for you at nine, – said Alduccio, – give me a shout, eh! “Okay, but you're ready,” said Begalone, going up the crumbling staircase, all full of kids. Alduccio lived three or four doors down, on the ground floor. In front of the door there was a kind of loggia, as in all lots, with small columns and battered and crumbling walls. Sitting on the step was his sister. “Well, what are you doing,” said Alduccio. She didn't answer him anything, looking out into the street. “She's going to be killed,” he said, and went into the kitchen, where her mother was cooking at the stove. – What do you want? – She said without turning. “Whatever I want,” said Alduccio. She turned abruptly, all disheveled: - Whoever doesn't work doesn't earn money, you know, - she said. She was a tall, stout woman, almost naked under her dirty linen dressing gown, with her hair

plastered with sweat to her forehead, and her bun all in disarray, frayed over her neck and the hem of her neck. her dressing gown. – Oh well! said Alduccio, acting calmly, - don't you feed me? and who cares!

He went from there, into the only room where his entire family slept, while Riccetto's family slept in the other, and began to undress, whistling to show his mother that he didn't give a damn. 'Just give another whistle,' she shouted from the kitchen, 'to the wretch, who might kill you and that dirty drunkard of your father!' – Yes, and that wrench of my mother, – Alduccio muttered between his teeth, while naked on the bed he was putting on his moccasins. – If you have the nerves for the body of that wretched daughter of yours, put it in your pocket, so that you can come and vent with me? Don't you want to give me dinner? And he doesn't give me dinner! What do I care! Just keep quiet! 'But how quiet, how quiet,' shouted the mother, 'you have to see a boy who is almost twenty years old and now goes deaf, who doesn't even bring home a lira, he doesn't bring home, that infamous person. – Ugh, what a pussy you are! – Alduccio shouted as he sat down. But from outside in the street you could hear screams, women's voices chatting. Alduccio's mother remained silent for a while, with her ears pricked, to listen, while in the room where Alduccio was staying her words came out confused. – You stupid bastard! – She shouted, speaking to herself, her mother in front of the stove. She dropped something in the rush to leave, and she went to the door. There she remained silent a little longer and listened and then she went out completely and her voice was also heard screaming along with the others. – Listen! but why don't they go and scratch the bear! – Alduccio said to himself. After almost ten minutes of bickering and banter, on the street or perhaps on the stair landings, the door was heard slamming again, but not closing again, because Alduccio's mother had stopped, perhaps because she still had something. to say. In fact she went back a little, onto the landing: 'You slut,' she started shouting outwards, 'you've been a whore up until now, and now you're coming to my girlfriend today, a slut!' – A voice was heard answering her from above, which was not well understood. – They really smell like murdered people to me! – Alduccio said bitterly. – Less pain! – Her mother shouted, putting a hand on her hip, responding to that mess of words that hadn't been heard. - Look Who's Talking! And what were you doing with deaf people at your friend's house to go to the cinema in Fiji and she's alone with him! – The voice from the courtyard or from the landing rose furiously by two or three

tones, and began to vomit out a collection of insults of all sorts in that very high tone: when it had finished, it addressed Alduccio's mother once again: – You don't remember her, – she shouted in a very high-pitched voice, which not even Jesus Christ would have kept her quiet, – dirty, when your husband came home and found you with your friend, in the front bed. a li du fiji small? - She slammed the door and went back into the kitchen, and there she continued alone, with her voice vibrating in her throat, sharp as a knife: - And then get it over with, unfortunate girl, because tomorrow when I meet you in the square I'll tear out all your hair. It's in your head that they might kill you! – After a while the door opened again and Alduccio's father entered. Like every night he was drunk. He approached his wife and made a move to beat her. But she put her hand on his chest and pushed him back: he made a complete turn, and fell sitting on a chair. But he immediately got up and stubbornly tried to beat her again. From the room over there, where Riccetto's family lived, Riccetto's sister came out to see if something worrying was happening: she arrived just to see her uncle fall back into his chair a second time. – What are you up here, – she said to her, her mother turning furiously, – what are you doing! – The little girl, with another little Riccetto in her arms, turned on her heel and went straight back to her room. “You and your entire family are unfortunate, suffering from UFOs and deaths from hunger,” the mother shouted after her, “I've been here for four years and they've never said anything to you before, more like these thousand lire, pay the electricity bill! – The father, after a few minutes of contemplation, managed to articulate his voice a little and, following two or three attempts, managed to say something like: – She's always playing baccajā, she's unfortunate! – He stood up, and swaying back and forth, made a sort of reasoning entirely with gestures, brought his hand two or three times from the height of his chest to the height of his nose, then made a pirouette with his fingers as if to indicate a It was an idea of his own that was running through his head: finally, running to avoid falling, he went into the room where Alduccio was dressing, and threw himself on his back on the bed, dressed. The wine he had drunk for the entire post-lunch period had turned him white as a sheet and had plastered the three fingers of skin stubbled with beard around the corners of his nose and the corners of his mouth, dark, moist and wrinkled like that of dogs. It was all sloping; the arms stretched out on the bedspread, the half-open mouth sloping, the jaws and the slits of the eyes sloping, the hair, still black and shiny with sweat

that looked like brilliantine, sloping. The lit lamp that hung above the bed illuminated one by one on his face the cocoa-colored spots of the old lady mixed with the recent crusts of dust and sweat under his forehead; while the web of wrinkles moved up and down on his behalf over his skin, stretched and softened by wine, yellow from who knows what old diseases of that bad liver stuffed inside his four bones covered in old clothes. And here and there you could see the shadows of the dents, brown in the center and with a crown of lentils around them, which were blows received perhaps when he was a boy, or in his youth, when he was a soldier or a laborer, a hundred years before. . And everything as if melted by the grayness of fasting and wine, plus that of the tufts of his four-day beard.

Alduccio was now ready, with his tube trousers and his striped shirt with an open neck and the tails outside the trousers. He still had to comb his hair. He went to the mirror in the kitchen, and, with a wet comb at the tap, began to fix his hair, standing with his legs wide apart, because the mirror was too low for him. "This good-for-nothing pimp," he began again, finding his mother at his feet, gray with anger. – Enough, ma, – Alduccio snapped, – you've already bored me, you know it! – You've bored me, – the mother retorted, louder than her. Alduccio began to sing, bent over the mirror. - He doesn't work, he doesn't work, he helps around the house, he doesn't help... - To Ma, - Alduccio interrupted her, - you've already bored me, I'm waiting for you, but will you stop? – I'm not going to cry about it at all, – she shouted, – she's going to baccajā as baccajo as I want, she's got it, yes, I'm sorry for my assholes! "Let me have it, go," said Alduccio angrily, and left, all well combed, slamming the broken door. He didn't even look at her sister, who was crouched on the step with her skirts pulled down to her heels. She was green, she was so pale and her painted lips looked like a cut. Her hair fell on her neck straight and dry, with a few spikes in front of her eyes. «She is shameless!» Alduccio just thought as he left. Ever since she had gotten into trouble with the son of Sister Anita, the fruit seller who lived on the corner, there had not been a moment of peace in Alduccio's house. Now she had to get married, but the fruit seller's son could no longer see her. The night she was kicked out of the house, he had kept her company, sleeping with her in the house, on the steps in front of her house on the third lot: but only to be seen by people. After she realized that she was pregnant with her, they got engaged, despite the fact that, before her, both his and her parents hadn't wanted it. She, for her humiliation, had cut

her wrists with a piece of glass, and she was about to die; and in fact she still had two beautiful fresh scars on her wrists.

While waiting for Begalone, Alduccio went for a walk around the village. The storm had cleared, and the air was warm, almost spring-like. Even Begalone had changed; he had put a handkerchief knotted in a naughty way around his neck, and had combed his tow-colored hair straight, straight like a scab, parted on one side and long on his neck. – In Bègalo! – called Alduccio. – How much do you care? – Begalone asked him immediately. “Thirty lire,” said Alduccio. – Just for the bus, – said the Begalone, – me too! – What, and that artri? – Alduccio asked suspiciously. – They're here, they're here! – said Begalone, tapping his hand on the back pocket where he kept Caciotta's half-and-a-half frigate folded. “There's even two nationals running away,” said Alduccio, passing in front of the coffin. – Tiette, to Ardù! – replied the Begalone. – Goodbye! he then asked the passing bus. “Now we're in the cave,” said Alduccio, stretching cheerfully.

Begalone was also fasting. And under his yellow hair his face was yellow with a beautiful yellow that turned green on which the reddish creases stood out well. He was so weak that not even the fever could give him a little color: and so he had at least six seven lines, like every evening, since he had been released from Forlanini; he had been tubercular for two or three years, and now there was nothing left to do, he only had about a year left to live...

Walking with Aldo he passed the palms of his hands over his empty stomach, bending forward and telling the dead to his brothers, to his father and most of all to his poor mother, who one night - which had been the first of a row of wretched nights – she had thrown herself out of bed screaming like an idiot who had seen the devil. She said that a snake had come inside her in her room and had curled up at the foot of the bed and was staring at her, forcing her to strip naked; and then she began to scream. Then for the whole day, all of a sudden, she would start screaming again, and whining like a bitch with a headache who was getting upset, she would attack her daughters or anyone around her so that they could protect her against that thing that she only understood. she. The next night she woke up again screaming: but this time it was no longer the devil. In fact, she had moved further away on the unmade bed, to leave a little space for someone, even though her body, as dry as an alice, didn't take up much of it. Sitting next to her on the gray sheets - as she later said - was a dead girl: dead at least considering how she was dressed, with the good dress, the white woolen

stockings and the crown of orange flowers, because a few days later he was supposed to get married. She had begun to complain to Begalone's mother, saying that they had put a slip on her that was too short, that the crown of flowers they had placed on her head was too tight and hurt her temples, and then to complain that few masses were said for her. , that Pisciasotto, a little cousin of hers, never came to visit her in the cemetery, and so on. Begalone's mother had never met this girl, but the next day, the neighborhood, commenting on those screams that came out in the middle of the night from the broken windows of Begalone's apartment and echoed through the courtyards of the lots, ascertained that the dead girl was a relative of certain people who lived a few doors away in the same lot: all the features corresponded perfectly, including his little cousin Pisciasotto, who in fact existed alive and happy in Borghetto Prenestino. Then the devil began to appear again, in various forms: once a snake, once a bear, once again a neighbor whose teeth had grown like fangs, and who entered and exited the Bègalo's house like it was their home to torment their mother. Then the family decided to do something, and had an old relative come from Naples who was familiar with those matters. First, this relative boiled all the objects that belonged to Begalone's mother: 20 kilowatts of gas went away in a few days due to those boilings, and no one thought about dinner. The three brothers, the four sisters and all the neighbors were busy sending the invoice away. They had found some feathers twisted in the shape of doves, crosses, crowns on the pillow of Bègalo's mother, and they had immediately boiled them: at the same time they had put pieces of iron in the boiling oil and then thrown them into the cold water, to see what figures came out, and for two or three days nothing had been heard in the house except the tapping on the floor to form circles around the turnover which did nothing but recommend itself and make complaints.

"If only they had given me a piece of bread, not even that, these wretches," said Begalone, clutching the pit of his stomach. "Here we are one more starved than the other," said Alduccio, laughing, his handsome face distorted by a grin of resigned irony. They put their hands in their pockets and walked the distance to Monte del Pecoraro.

It was so hot that it wasn't sirocco and it wasn't scorching, but it was just hot. It was like a coat of color given on the breeze, on the yellow walls of

the village, on the meadows, on the carts, on the buses with grapes at the doors. A coat of color that was all the joy and misery of the summer nights of the present and the past. The air was tight and buzzing like the skin of a drum; the piss, even freshly taken, which streaked the pavement, was dry; the piles of rubbish were scorched and no longer smelled. The only ones making the smell were the stones and the bands still warm from the sun: perhaps surrounded by expanses of wet rags that were then dried up by the heat. In the gardens that still remained here and there, full of legumes that grew beautifully fat as if in the earthly paradise, there was not a drop of dew. And in the centers of the suburbs, in the crossroads, like there at Tiburtino, people crowded together, ran, shouted, it seemed like they were in the slums of Shanghai: even in the loneliest places there was confusion, with rows of males they went in search of some slut, stopping to have a chat at the mechanics' shops that were still open, with Rumi outside. And past Tiburtino, here is Tor dei Schiavi, Borghetto Prenestino, Acqua Bulicante, Maranella, Mandrione, Porta Furba, Quarticciolo, Quadraro... Hundreds more centers like the one there in Tiburtino: with a sea of people under the traffic lights, which gradually spread out in the surrounding streets, noisy like entrance halls, with sidewalks all broken, and along colossal ruins of walls with rows of hovels underneath. And gangs of young men making off with their engines, Lambrettas, Ducatis or Mondials, half drunk, with greasy overalls open on their black chests, or dressed up as if they had come out of a shop window in Piazza Vittorio. All a great encirclement around Rome, between Rome and the surrounding countryside, with hundreds of thousands of human lives swarming among their lots, their houses of evicted people or their skyscrapers. And all that life was there not only in the suburbs of the outskirts, but also inside Rome, in the center of the city, perhaps under the Dome: yes, right under the Dome, that all you had to do was stick your nose out of the colonnade of St. Peter's Square, towards Porta Cavalleggeri, and there they were, shouting, taking vinegar, teasing, in gangs and gangs around the cinemas, the pizzerias, scattered a little further on, in via del Gelsomino, in via della Cava, on the open spaces of beaten earth bordered by piles of waste where children play ball during the day, in pairs among the thickets covered with pieces of abandoned newspaper between Via delle Fornaci and the Gianicolo... And below, past the dripping tunnel, everything is the same, in Piazza della Rovere, where rows of tourists pass with their heads held high, arm in arm, with

knickerbockers and heavy shoes, singing Alpine songs in chorus, while the youngsters leaning against the side of the Tiber, near a clogged latrine, with their trousers tube and pointy shoes, they look at them, saying behind them with a bored and sarcastic expression words that if they understood them would make them die of a stroke. And down along the Lungoteveri where the rare trams pass under the tunnels of the plane trees, along bumpy pavements, and the Lambrettas that screw around on curves with a young man or two on them looking for trouble; towards Castel Sant'Angelo with the Ciriola all lit up at the foot, on the river surface; towards Piazza del Popolo as elegant as a great theatre, the Pincio, and Villa Borghese, with the hum of the violins and the mutes of the whores, or the fagots who pass by in droves singing with their eyelids lowered and their mouths sagging "Sentimental", and peering with the corner of his eye to see if by chance the cart was coming. Or, on the opposite side, towards Ponte Sisto, where, under the dirty and shiny Funtanone, two teams of Trastevere youngsters are playing a game of football, screaming loudly, and running like a flock of sheep between the wheels of the ganzis millenove who go with the Cinecittà slut to dine at the Antica Pesa: while from all the alleys of Trastevere, behind there, comes the buzz of male and female jaws chewing the pizza or the crouton, outdoors, in Piazza Sant'Egidio or at the Mattatoto, with the kids complaining or around the kids arguing while running on the pavements, as light as the dirty papers that the breeze carries here and there.

– Let's choose here, in Ardù! – Begalone said, leaping, wild and agile and looking like a sorceress, off the buffer.

Alduccio stood up on the step, so that the delivery boy could get a better look at him, and banging on the glass he shouted: - I salute you, that ugly thing!

He jumped off the tram onto the pavement, while the deliveryman took the satisfaction of sticking his head out and shouting, with the pad clutched in his fist and the people waiting to buy their tickets: - Parrots!

– Tiè, – shouted the Bègalo, bending on his knees with his stomach forward and with his fingers making the image of two beautiful swollen eyes, which he held, all splashing with energy and lineage, at chest height.

On the starboard side there was the Colosseum which was burning like a furnace, and out of the holes in the arches blew in puffs and columns a bloody smoke, the color of grenadine and candy paper, which rose up and

up, all around towards the sky, against the Celian and the Oppio, above Via Labicana glittering with cars, above Via dell'Impero, amidst the flashes of spotlights.

– And what are we doing here? – said Alduccio.

- Let's go for a walk! – said the Begalone.

- A famous walk on foot, - said Alduccio: they went down under the Colosseum, went around it, cut under the Arch of Constantine along the Viale dei Trionfi, dark, hot, nestled between the ruins and the pines of the greenish hump of the Palatine, which flowed smoothly, making a great curve towards the Circles.

They walked around, with their hands in their pockets, all sprawled and sprawled, standing far away from each other and singing a song to each other as usual, each on their own.

Clogs, clogs...

Begalone sang. – Did you see, – he said, interrupting himself – the face Caciotta made?

Clogs, clogs...

he continued, in a louder voice, making an entire stretch of deserted avenue resonate under the umbrellas of the green pine trees like billiards, among the broken stones of the ruins. But Alduccio didn't think so at all, he was too busy singing, with his hands stuffed in his pockets, bent forward and with his head held high and moving here and there, his eyes half closed and the back of his head pulled back between his shoulders.

A small, dusty moon was beating over the Cerchi, but it shed a light that never ended on the whole meadow, the black bushes, the fields, the piles of straw and rubbish. Everyone who was there looked at her askance, intrigued, because the only places in the shade were those under the walls around the immense oval of the Circus Maximus. On the little wall, immediately where Alduccio and Bègalo had arrived, and behind which the Circus stretched out in the dust of the moon, with here and there some broken towers, some men were already sitting, some young men and even

some kids, and further down, at the circular train stop, but inside the meadow, shadows could be seen moving, gathering and dispersing.

– 'Moving squad! – the Bègalo shouted ironically with a fanned hand against his mouth, starting to snort.

They continued to snog for a while even when the whores could no longer hear them, bending on their knees, leaning against the wall or hitting each other: rather than laughing, they made loud noises with their mouths and spat. But he soon got over it, because maybe those sluts with all their bellies had given it to him, or at least they had given him one in a shameful way. They were both horny, as they would have done with an old woman of seventy. This is why the fantasy of laughing immediately passed away from them, and indeed they walked very seriously, almost intrigued, exploring with certain pandering glances down beyond the wall, into the great oval expanse with the ruins and thickets that were blackened in the white dust of the moon. There were rows of soldiers, some stray youths, and the usual scave who screamed at each other like bitches and made the gesture of punching each other.

– If we lost all the roads! – Begalone said dejectedly, walking. – Here we need to go back to Santa Calla, you pig of...! As much as I would have liked to give me a pat this evening, but instead it's moldy... Damn, damn the misery! – Well, look at that guy, – he added, pointing to someone passing by in a non-series car, – how he's enjoying it! Do you think it's nice that he was with that beautiful s... all dressed up, full of guineas, and we had nothing? These forks! But let's get to the end of this bonanza! This flag will change! – And he walked for a while in silence, with his mouth drawn up in a grimace of disgust.

But as they turned onto Via del Mare, on the little gardens uphill in front of the temple of Vesta, the Begalone said: - You see -, and stared dazedly into the little gardens.

– What did you do? – asked Alduccio, unsure whether to send him to the gang or to listen to him.

The Begalone began to whistle, bent over.

– What, you call 'and sheep?' – said Alduccio.

– How delicious! – shouted the Bègalo. Well, they were two girls sitting on the steps of the little temple: two sexy blondes on all sides, with revealing skirts, and with half their breasts visible on their necklines.

They remained huddled in silence, one turned towards the other, but as if they couldn't even see each other, fixed on the gardens, with the flowerbeds that descended from the Tiber, up, down, to Piazza di Bocca della Verità, to the Arco di Janus, at the old church, with the moonlight shining on it; we could see each other as if during the day.

Bègalo and Alduccio, coming down from the Cerchi, towards Ponte Rotto, passed the malandrina, singing below them. But when they were a little further up, they thought better of it and slowly went back.

The two beauties hadn't moved, as if they hadn't even taken a breath: walking narrowly, like two dogs who slow down after being chased away with a stick, along some dirty sidewalk, with their tails glued to their backsides, they went back up the street for a little while. Sea, and then they swerved again. They came to stand in the middle of the gardens, always looking at each other, the two roses de fuego. But it seemed that they hadn't even noticed them. They went back down towards the small temple, but on the opposite side, which overlooked the slope, they entered under the small colonnade in the shade, and slowly moved from the flaming side to the moon towards Bocca della Verità.

The two joyful girls had not gotten away with it this time either, and were just standing there as before. All the dogs ungrouped, half in the shade and half in the light, they sat down with their backs against the yellow and peeling wall of the temple.

– Which one would you like for the bones, – asked the Begalone, 'a blonde or a redhead?'

“Both,” said the other.

– Eh, how many of you then! – said Begalone.

“Either both or neither,” Alduccio explained jokingly, “because not the other pija of vinegar.

– Yes, these will be waiting for the payboy! – muttered the Bègalo.

– Well, what are you doing? that we too are not good de castrallo? – said Alduccio an optimist.

– If we want to throw it away? – Bègalo said after a while.

– And buttàmise! – said Alduccio. Instead they just stood there; speaking not so loudly, giggling with his knees tight against his chest, his bottom in the dust, his hair and the tips of his shoes touched by the light; However,

when the two women finally exchanged a few words between themselves, they took courage and began to raise dust in a louder voice.

- And let's smoke, - shouted the Bègalo.

"If we take this one, we're done," said Alduccio, lighting his cigarette.

- Then we can't make up for it?

- See, but yes, we don't even pay the blind!

- Feel the heat, - shouted the Bègalo, blowing, - smash the turtles' behinds!

- Aòh, - he said after a while, - but I'm dying of callus, you know...

- Well? - said Alduccio.

- Take a bath in the funtana, - proposed Begalone.

- Are you crazy? - Alduccio said amusedly.

- I'm not joking, you know! - Begalone said disgustedly.

- Fuck you..., go! - Alduccio said laughing.

The two girls giggled between themselves.

- Come on, Ardù! - shouted the Begalone.

They stood up in the dim light, and jokingly began to hastily unbutton the buttons on their blouse; they took it off and threw it on the ground, a little further into the deepest shadow. Remaining in their undershirts with their ghigo hair that looked like Samson and Absalom, so as not to lose their balance when taking off their tube trousers, they sat down again.

"Let me take off my shoes first," said Alduccio, softly, touched by his new shoes, with the air of someone who feels like making fun of himself a bit. He took them off and threw them away. Lastly they took off their tank tops from their dark, sweaty chests and remained in their panties.

"Look at what a guy I am," said Begalone, puffing out his chest.

- Hu, you're the idiot of a car, - said the other.

"Clogs, clogs," Bègalo then sang, gathering up the clothes they had scattered here and there to make the malandri: they tied them in a pile with belts and put them under their arms. They emerged like that from the shadows, stopped for a while on the steps in the glow of the moon, and then started running shouting through the flowerbeds. They threw the clothes on the grass, under the chains that dangled around the fountain, they climbed

in because the shell was more than a meter high from the ground, and they stood on the edge.

"I'm already trembling, damn you," said Bègalo, stretching his mouth and crouching down.

- Come on, Bègalo, shut up, - said Alduccio.

- Yes, like a broth, - said Bègalo, keeping himself balanced with his toes twisted like an ape. Alduccio gave him a blow and the other fell like a sack of potatoes into the water.

- Damn that nonsense, - said Bègalo, succeeding with his head dripping.

- I'll see for you now - Alduccio shouted, he dove in and the water splashed out of the tub, splashing on the marble base under the fountain. Bègalo sang at the top of his lungs, with his head and shoulders hanging out.

'Shut up, so loudly,' said Alduccio, 'you'll feel like a chalk when... we know!'

- Look, he's dead afloat, eh! - said Begalone; he played dead, went under with his nose and came out half drowned, wiping her face like a desperate man, with the hair that covered it as hard as spinach and longer than Maddalena's. - You're going to be great and you don't have the chance! - said Alduccio, laughing. In the three minutes they were in there they had washed the pavement around for ten meters in diameter, with all the taproots and flowerbeds.

- I was born, - said Bègalo.

'Me too,' shouted Alduccio, 'I'm not going to wear pijamme or pormonite, you know.'

They climbed back up to the edge, their panties clinging and transparent, did another flip, then zoomed out of the fountain.

"He's dead," Bègalo said, his teeth chattering.

They all picked up their dripping clothes and with them under their arms they started running across the mowed lawn, jumping between the small hedges. They ran away laughing to keep warm. Then with two leaps they climbed up the steps of the temple, entered under the colonnade and, passing behind the two girls, went to sneak into the shadow. There they started slapping each other: the girls just looked at them, indifferent or with a slightly simpering smile.

– There is here, – said the Begalone, – where we squeeze our panties. – Laughing and playing the comparcita they pulled back a little further, beyond the curve of the little temple they took off their panties and twisted them one on one side and one on the other. Like every time he was getting dressed after his bath, Bègalo was overcome by a wave of sentimentality: – Never, ever – have I loved you so much in my life.. – he sang, with his soaked panties around his neck, putting on the pedals. But while they were slowly getting dressed in a hurry, the two doves cut. They went up towards the Tiber, with a book in their hands and their large pleated skirts swaying in the scorching light. The Begalone came and stood on the steps where they had been sitting, still half naked and holding up his trousers with one hand.

– How good of you! - he shouted.

Even Alduccio, undressed as he was, approached with his hands like a funnel around his mouth and said his piece: - See what a beautiful pair you are!

– Come on, – he added, – let's get dressed and we'll take it from the chest!

They were already in Monte Savello when Alduccio and Begalone, with their clothes on their still wet skin, took them back.

- Let me see how you stop a woman, - said the Begalone, as they walked hastily towards the two meccas who were leaving with a calm and fast pace.

“Kill them, how much do they cost,” said Alduccio, who still walked as if his slices hurt. – Why don't you approach her? – He then blew.

- See, that's a weakness, - said Bègalo even more anxiously.

– You're such a pick-me-up, fuck you..., and say something, no.

“Li me cojoni,” Begalone said with disgust.

In the meantime, however, those two, as they took the other Tiber embankment, arrived in front of a car ten meters long, they got in, started one of them and I say hello to you, Gesucrì.

The robbers remained leaning against the shoulder, limp, like two plucked turkeys. "I'm just like a beggar," said Alduccio after a while, looking at Bègalo and bursting out laughing. – And you have a security camera, – said Begalone. – Damn the grieving m ..., – he added, – but we're not going to end like this, yes, tonight. – See, with a penny and a half in

your pocket, what are you doing? – He sadly put the pitta and a half stolen from Caciotta in his pocket. – Let's get started on the Cerchi, – said Begalone, – let's draw lots. 'He's crazy,' said Alduccio, tapping his forehead with two fingers, 'and then he'll eat his way to Tibburtino. – But what, – Begalone snapped, – won't a half-baked cave make up for it? What, a little guy who soaks up a little bit of dough and finds something somewhere around here? – And when do you find it? at Christmas! – said Alduccio. – Kill, – said the Bègalo, – how much do you charge that we find? – They went down towards Ponte Garibaldi like two hungry wolves. Next to the pisser in lace on the bridge, on the Via Arenula side, there was an old man huddled against the wall. Begalone went inside to get a drink of water, then he too went to lean on the railing, where Alduccio had already placed himself. They remained in silence for a while. Then Bègalo put a cigarette butt out of his pocket, and, bending courteously over the old man, asked him: – What, do you have a match, please? – After five minutes they had unstitched half his leg.

They got another one in Ponte Sisto, from an old man with a bag under his arm, who started with them an offstage charm that made the old women give milk. It was Begalone who cut him short: he said: - Let's keep ourselves hungry, we're starving, we haven't eaten the damn thing about him since this morning! – The gentleman soaked them a hundred lire to buy four bombs, and they immediately headed up Via dei Giubbonari. They made off quickly, towards the Campo dei Fiori block. They argued seriously. – What, are you a man too? – Alduccio said blackly. – See this! – Begalone shouted, stopping in the middle of the street and pointing his outstretched hand towards him, – what, 'did you make up for the money?' “Well,” said Alduccio, what do you want? – Ah, nothing, – replied Begalone, – I fix the problem, and he ends up in trouble. – Fool! – he shouted then tapping his nose with two fingers. But at that moment they passed in front of a delicatessen, Begalone said - vaffan..., - and went in; they ate three cakes for one, and when they rose again they were in the same condition as before. But while they were at it, they continued, straggling, down Via dei Giubbonari, and behold, as they reached the end of the road and were entering Campo dei Fiori, Alduccio gave Begalone an elbow, and with a nod of his head and his eyes congealed with a sleepy and astute look, he pointed out a guy who, walking in front of them, occasionally gave him long glances. – We're done, – said Begalone. Now

slowing down, now accelerating, he took Campo dei Fiori, then turned left, amidst the peeping of kids playing with a rag ball in the wet square; and he stopped for a moment near a pisser's lace shed, looking back. Begalone and Alduccio enlightened him very well. He looked pretty with a nice blouse and a nice pair of sandals. Uncertainly the basset continued towards Piazza Farnese, and then up again to Campo dei Fiori along a dark alley; and so two or three times he wandered around those streets around and around like a mouse drowning in a basin.

– Well, – said Begalone as he advanced, – what are you doing here, I say.

– You, what are you doing, – said Riccetto, lowering his gaze on Begalone himself, on Alduccio and on the subject they were towing.

– Give me a hint, and tone it down, – said Begalone, approaching Riccetto with a cigarette between his lips. Riccetto extended his light to him, without moving an inch, and only lowering his eyelids a little, since, compared to Begalone and the other two, he was a little higher up: sitting on the shoulder of the Tiber with a leg dangling and the other folded and pressed against his chest.

– What, are you having an episode with someone? – Bègalo reminded us.

– But what an episode! – said Riccetto.

– A filone, – said Bègalo.

Alduccio and the other were a bit stunned.

- Arduccio is bleeding, - said Bègalo, grinning, with a bit of envy. But the other also fascinated Riccetto, who had purposely placed himself in that naughty position, with his legs open.

– What are you looking at me? – Riccetto asked him.

He smiled: - Zi, - he said, a little shy and a little cocky.

– Aaaaa, – Bègalo said as if he was thinking back to something that had escaped him, all affable and easy-going, – I present to you my friend.

Riccetto let his cramped leg slide down against his chest, and extended his right hand, with which he held it tightly, towards his new acquaintance. The latter shook his hand, with a schoolgirl's smile: "Nice to meet you," he said, alluding to the pleasure he expected to derive from that knowledge, if everything went well, and his gaze touching everything on the dispenser of

that same pleasure, who took care of it. he stood, calm and blissful, on the wall in front, as if he were ready to sing a little song.

– Look at me – said Riccetto, following the evolution of that look.

The fagot pretended to feel caught out, he pretended to smile embarrassed, with a hint of provocation in his livid mouth with his tongue inside that moved like that of a snake; and he put a hand on his chest, nervously clutching the open collar of his shirt to his throat, partly as if he wanted to defend himself from the humidity of the night, partly to modestly protect himself from who knows what from the sight of males.

– You'd like it, eh, – said Begalone.

– Nnnnnh, I'd like that! – She said, raising one shoulder and pretending to be a bored little boy.

Alduccio was starting to lose patience, even feeling a little neglected. – Well, what if we want to move? – He said.

- Where are you going? - he whispered, straining his voice.

– Let's go here under the river, come on, – said Alduccio. They stood on the shoulder of the Tiber between Ponte Sisto and Ponte Garibaldi.

– You're crazy, handsome boy, – said the sad fagot.

– Come on, – insisted Alduccio, – let's go down the ladder, let's go under the bridge and do a general little thing.

'No no no no no,' said the faggot, waving his hand and shaking his head, with an absolutely negative face.

– But why? – continued Alduccio, warming up, – come on, can you find a better place than this? What, have we had this half hour? Two minutes and I say goodbye! Let's pretend that we have a need right now, and who's there to break our balls down there! – While he was talking the fagot forgot about him, and, all smiling with his teeth bared, continued to look partly in his eyes and partly in that place at Riccetto; as Alduccio fell silent, the faggot regained awareness of him, and concluded dryly and staccato, as if the matter were now out of the question:

– No, I'm not going down there.

And he started smiling again, making big languid eyes, towards Riccetto.

“Damn, you're so ugly,” Riccetto said to him.

Alduccio returned to the attack: - So what do we want to do? – The Begalone supported him: – Aòh, we can't waste so much time, you know, dear boy! – The faggot was already almost fifty, but he wanted to look at least twenty younger: he continued to clutch his shirt collar against his chicken breast with the air of a person in poor health. “Let's go now,” he said condescendingly to the two males.

- Self! you always say let's go, let's go, and then you won't move from here! – said Alduccio.

Between Ponte Sisto and Ponte Garibaldi, almost no one passed anymore, and Riccetto instead remembered when he was a boy, immediately after the war ended, what happened there: along the parapet, sitting like him now, there were at least twenty, of youngsters, ready to sell themselves to the first comer; and the fagots passed by in droves, singing and dancing, bald and bleached, still young, young or old, but all acting crazy, not thinking at all about the people who passed by on foot or in the circulars, calling each other by name loudly: – Wanda, Bolero! Railway! Mistinguette! –, as they saw each other from afar, running towards each other and kissing each other delicately on the cheeks, as women do to avoid ruining their make-up: and when they all gathered together, in front of the males who were leaning against the shoulder and watching with heavy faces, they started dancing , some mentioning a piece of classical dance, some doing the cancan, and frolicking like that, they occasionally shouted: - We are free! We are free!

That time you could go down the ladder, and among the puncicarelli full of mud and dirty papers, under Ponte Sisto or Ponte Garibaldi, do whatever you wanted without fear. Sometimes the caravan passed, there was a bit of a stampede, but then everything went back to how it was before. Riccetto was there that evening not to do anything, but to pass the time, in the mood for re-enactments.

– Come on, I'll bring you a nice place – he said, driven by a magnanimous impulse of generosity.

The fagot accentuated the fixed mask of his smile, making lots of creases on all sides, but feeling all dazzling, slanted, like a showgirl photographed with bare shoulders in an Altieri poster. In fact he made the gesture that women make to throw their hair behind their neck, and leaned forward, a little crooked, ready to follow Riccetto.

Ricchetto made him take the 44 and took them up to where he had lived as a boy. They got off at Piazza Ottavilla, which when Ricchetto lived in those parts was still almost in the countryside, they turned down to the left along a road that hadn't been there before, or was just a path in the middle of large meadows with a downhill slope here and there. , as on the slopes of a small valley, tufts of reeds three meters high and willows: but now there were buildings already built and inhabited and construction sites. “Let's go further down,” said Ricchetto. They went further down, and arrived, behind the last construction sites, in a lane, which led to Donna Olimpia, but first passing through the courtyard of an old tavern with a pergola, full of drunks. They went further, but the path was still short because right at the end of those meadows which were now full of houses, there was a new road, with here and there just as many buildings built or under construction. Immediately behind it began the descent of Monte di Casadio, where Ricchetto had spent the whole day as a child. They went in that direction, and, as soon as they reached the slope, which was almost sheer below them, they found themselves in front of the Ferrobédò. It was embedded at their feet, at the bottom of the valley, all whitened by the moon. Behind, against the whitish clouds, we could distinguish the black tangle of Monteverde Nuovo indented in a large semicircle and to the right, behind Monte di Casadio, the tops of the skyscrapers of Donna Olimpia.

– Aaaaa like that, – said Ricchetto, – now you choose here on the right, – and he showed a kind of path between the brushwood that went down the hill, and which seemed to be suitable for goats. – And you find yourself right in front of a cave. You see it right away. Whoever comes there to break your balls... I greet you, take care.

– But go now, what are you leaving us with now? – said the faggot, dumbfounded, shrugging his shoulders.

“Go your way, so that you can get in the way, Moor,” Alduccio told him, who didn't mind at all that Ricchetto was leaving.

– But gome, – said the fagot, – if it's funny if it's?

– Come on, – said Ricchetto magnanimously, – I'll take you up to the cave. They went down the path, holding tight to the brush, and found themselves in a small green and muddy clearing, because a trickle of black drainage was coming out of the cave nearby. – Here, in there, – said Ricchetto. The faggot was not resigned to him not staying there, and took him by the arm,

smiling at him invitingly, and hiding his face graciously behind his shoulder, so as to give him a little smile from below.

Ricchetto patiently laughed too. Since he had been at Porta Portese he had put on weight and no longer had the desire to always go straight. He was now a man expert in life. – Kill, – he said almost as an ally, – two aren't enough for you, what?

– N-no, – said the little froccio, bending a little on one knee like a little girl making a fuss for having won.

– Kill it, – Ricchetto repeated, – you like having fun, eh? – And full of understanding and a sense of his own superiority, he went down the path, waving to Paragulo and never looking back.

The path descended halfway down the hill for about twenty metres, and led right into the center of Donna Olimpia. All you had to do was take a leap at the end, over a ruined wall, cross a stretch of road, and you were immediately in front of the Franceschi schools. It was still all a pile of rubble, as if the collapse had occurred two days earlier, except that a bit of rubbish had settled on the gravel washed by the rain and burned by the sun. Ricchetto stopped in front of us, with his hands in his pockets, to take a look. Yes, it's true, the boulders that had rolled into the middle of the road and the gravel landslides had been piled up somewhat in order: only a few blocks, here and there, had remained on the road: it can be seen that when, during the period of the elections, they had pretended to begin work to rebuild the building, those two or three blocks had remained aside, and, once the elections had taken place, no one had bothered to come and remove them from there.

Ricchetto looked all around with great interest: he went to the back to observe the courtyards with the wash basins and the toilets, then returned to the front, under the mountain of brecole and the buildings at the corners still standing, uninhabited, with wooden planks soaked nailed to the windows. He stayed there for a while, because he had come to Donna Olimpia so much precisely for this reason; then he pulled up the collar of his shirt, narrowing it a little on his shoulders, because it was starting to get a little cool, and slowly went for a walk around Donna Olimpia, in the centre, with the peeling pavements and the closed newsagent, with only a few people returning home in silence, all sleepy, and, in front of the entrance to the Case Nòve, something new: two policemen, green with boredom and cold,

who were standing guard, now standing still, now walking up and down a little, as if two shadows in the shadows of the blocks of flats, with pistol holsters on their belts.

Ricchetto had nothing on his conscience, and he was in those parts for simple sentimental reasons: he passed the two guards slowly and almost a bit like I don't care, and went to the Skyscrapers, which were four large buildings all connected to each other, so that the rows and diagonals of windows had no interruptions and lined up all around for hundreds and hundreds of meters far and wide, and so the stairwells, which could be recognized from the outside by the enormous vertical rows of rectangular windows: while, below, between arches, underpasses, porticoes, in twentieth-century fascist style, there were six or seven internal courtyards, of old beaten earth, with the remains of what once should have been the flowerbeds, all strewn with rags and papers, at the bottom of the funnel of walls that rose up to the moon. At that time, at that time, from the gate that opened onto Via di Donna Olimpia, almost no one entered into those internal courtyards, through the semi-dark corridors: or if, still, someone passed, they walked quickly along the bars of the cellars, if he slipped into some portico and began to climb towards his interior up the long flights of smelly stairs. of dust.

Ricchetto wandered around those courtyards hoping to meet someone to have a chat with. After a while, in fact, he saw the silhouette of a young man coming down the iron steps of Ozanam Street. «Perhaps I know this», thought Ricchetto, and went towards him. He was a little redhead, all freckled, with two little red bushes for eyes, and with neatly combed hair parted on one side. Ricchetto observed him as he came forward, and the other, feeling observed, watched carefully, ready for any eventuality. – Aòh, but we know each other – said Ricchetto, going towards him with his hand outstretched.

"Yes, you say so," said the other, looking at him more closely.

- What, your name isn't Agnolo, so they can catch you? – said Ricchetto.

– Yes, – said the other.

– I know Ricchetto, – exclaimed Ricchetto with the air of making a revelation.

– Ah, – said Agnolo.

– Well, how do you walk? – Ricchetto asked politely.

"I'm going to get away with it," said Agnolo, who could see that he was full of sleep.

– Can you tell me again? – Riccetto, on the other hand, said very cheerfully.

– What I have to tell you. Er zòlito. I'm off work now, and I've got a mess that I'm falling for.

– What are you doing as a bartender?

- Yes. – And the joints? Obberdan, Zambuia, Bruno, Lupetto?

– Aòh, more or less they all work, and there they are.

– Rocco, Arvaro?

– Chi Arvaro?

– Arvaro Furciniti, er Capoccione, there.

– Aaaah, – said Agnolo. Rocco had gone to live in Risano, and we've seen each other. Alvaro's affair, on the other hand, was a big deal, and it had ended just a few weeks earlier. It was the first days of March. It was raining. Alvaro was down in Testaccio in a bar, where some young men, with a tired look, were playing billiards; he played too, just to pass the time. Inside that bar they were all from the underworld, including the owner, a bald-bellied man with curls on his neck who looked like Nero, who was a fence: one of those who played billiards, all dressed up with everything that it was a working day, or rather a Monday, no one had made less than two or three big taps, and now they were living on an income, for that day at least. But they had been playing all after lunch in that damp room behind the bar, and they were bored, so they thought of going for a little stroll around Rome. As they were near Piazza del Popolo, the opportunity arose to steal an old Aprilia, which it would have been foolish not to take advantage of: there was nothing inside, not even a pair of gloves, but they thought of taking it to have some fun. a little that evening, and then leave it abandoned somewhere. They had drunk a little at the bar in Testaccio, they had drank a little while walking through Piazza di Spagna and Via del Babuino, they drank a little now, going up and down Rome in the Aprilia they had just picked up. They got completely drunk and started running around like villains. They went for a few carousels in Piazza Navona, then since the Piazza Navona ring was too narrow, they headed towards the Cerchi, to the Archaeological walk, and, taking turns taking the car, they went at one hundred and twenty, one hundred and thirty along the wet

avenues. Two policemen on motorbikes ran after him, but they, slipping down the Registry Office and through the alleys of Piazza Giudia, lost them on the street: they returned to Piazza Navona, and going around it they collided with it, knocking it to the ground five or six meters away. , a wheelchair fortunately empty, because the creature was walking by the mother's hand; a man shouted something after him, they stopped abruptly, got out, grabbed him head-on, beat him up, leaving him with a bleeding mouth, got back into the car, and took off at full speed through the governo Vecchio and Borgo Panigo. They took the Tiber riverfront and rushed up towards the Milvian Bridge; near the Ministry of the Navy, one saw a beautiful lady walking alone, all spick and span, along the parapet: they slowed down, one got out, approached the lady, snatched her purse, and away, backtracking, they crossed the bridge, and they went back down towards Borgo Pio; they wandered around St. Peter's Square for a bit, and ended up once again in Tetaccio drinking three or four more glasses of cognac. It was already evening, and they decided to go for a run to Anzio, Ardea or Latina, through the countryside. They got back into the Aprilia, set off at full speed towards San Giovanni, took the Appia: after half an hour they were in a village whose name they hadn't even seen, and they went to get half a liter in a tavern, then ran up and down always at more than a hundred miles per hour along those country roads, until, almost by chance, they found themselves in a place near Latina that one of them already knew. It was late at night. They left the car on the side of the road, and entered the courtyards of a country house, where they stole about twenty chickens, shooting the dog to death. They loaded the chickens into the car, and set off at a speed of one hundred and thirty, they took the Appia once again, and, at the thirtieth kilometer from Rome, just before Marino, who knows how, they crashed into the back of a lorry. . The Aprilia was reduced to a pile of twisted iron, with the bloody bodies and feathers of chickens mixed together inside. The only one who had survived was Alvaro: but he had lost an arm and was left blind.

While telling this story, the little frog had begun to feel a little cool, perhaps due to the sleepiness he had, and, his face turning a little pale, he looked impatiently out of the corner of his eye at those who came home at intervals, crossing the door silent and hunched.

- Let me go to sleep, go, otherwise my father will be angry, - he said, at the end, stretching himself.

“Then let's see,” said Riccetto, who was sorry that he was leaving like that, but didn't want to show it.

- I greet you, aaa thing, in Riccè, - said Agnolo, shook his hand, and disappeared up the wide and black passage of the M or N staircase, with its dusty ramps, occasionally spotted by the light of a remote electric bulb .

Riccetto went away thoughtfully and calmly, through the courtyards, in Via di Donna Olimpia, passed the policemen again, and, with his hands in his pockets, whistling, under Monte di Casadio, took the road that led down to the Ponte Bianco, beyond Ferrobedò. There was nothing left to do there now, and he quickened his pace a little, still whistling. He couldn't wait to get down to the White Bridge and take the tram to go home and sleep.

The Ferrobedò, or to put it better, the Ferro-Beton, lay on his right in the cotton candy of the moon, a white and fragrant dust, all well ordered and so silent that one could hear a guardian, inside some warehouse, singing halfway through. voice. And behind, on a sort of plateau, against the light, on top of large black humps, the semicircle of Monteverde Nuovo loomed immensely, speckled with lights, under banners of clouds that looked like porcelain, all grainy, in the smooth sky smooth. Since the schools collapsed, Riccetto hadn't been seen in those areas again: and he almost had difficulty recognizing them. There was too much cleanliness, too much order, Riccetto couldn't understand it anymore. The Ferrobedò, down there, was a mirror: with the high chimneys, which almost reached the road from the bottom of its little valley, with the clearings full of orderly rows of sleepers stacked to perfection, with the bundles of tracks that glittered around some carriages motionless and black, with the rows of warehouses that, at least from above, looked like ballrooms, they were so clean, with their reddish roofs all the same in rows.

Even the wire fence, which followed the road along the bushy slope above the factory, was new, without a hole. Only the old sentry box, there, near the wire fence, was always completely fetid and filthy: those who passed by continued to relieve themselves as they once did: there was some inside, and outside too, all around, at least a palm. That was the only point that Riccetto found familiar, just like when he was a boy who had just finished the war.

Begalone and Alduccio were fighting quickly again towards Campo dei Fiori, with their hands in their pockets, and their open shirts flapping over their trousers, but without joking or singing.

– What, are you a man too? – Alduccio repeated as he walked hunched over.

– See this! – shouted the Begalone, stopping in the middle of the street and pointing his open hand at him with his fingers clenched, – what, are you the only one?

– Well, what does it have to do with it, he only said it to me, out of kindness! – said Alduccio, covering his mouth with his hand.

– Ah, you're cute! – said Bègalo as he resumed his march. "A 'ncephalitic," he added, tapping his fingers on his forehead.

– And then I didn't tell you just like that, – said Alduccio, – you're stupid, I told you all right!

In the meantime, arguing, they had arrived at Campo dei Fiori, with the pavement all watered but with still a few cabbage stems and a few pieces of shards here and there, and some kids who were still playing a game of football with the rag ball. At the end of the square, in the darkest shadow, a small alley began - which was Via de li Cappellari - with many rotten doors, large vaults and small crooked windows, and the cobblestones littered with old urinals. The two companions placed themselves on the last piece of light before the mouth of the alley, next to some old women sitting at the door of the house, under a rickety street lamp, and the Begalone took out a metal shield, turned it between his fingers and threw it in the air.

- Head! – shouted Alduccio.

The coin hit the fish-stinking cobblestones, rolling near a manhole cover: Bègalo and Alduccio, shouldering each other and pulling themselves back by their blouses which were almost coming off, threw themselves over the culambrina to look at it.

"It's up to me," Alduccio shouted calmly, and, all puffed up, he took the alleyway first. Bègalo followed him. The only light on the pavement that looked like that of a stable was the light that came from some small window stuck between the livid walls, and it was a word to recognize the door of the cupboard. But luckily it was tinged with a beautiful pea green, which one would have recognized it among a thousand and then it was half open and faced a corridor of white tiles like those in daytime hotels.

They climbed up the ladder, and arrived on the mezzanine landing; there on one side, the staircase continued, with a frayed carpet, under a white vault, while on the other the door of the room opened: in the middle there was the mistress's desk.

The two companions, since there was no one in the hall at that moment and the door to the room was closed, all calmly continued to climb the second flight of the stairs. But a roar stopped them. – Aòh, you wretched bastards! – It was the mistress who was screaming, and so loudly that her urine vein broke. – Do you see these people – she continued – what do you think of them in your house?

Laughter and ironic voices followed those words from the smoke-filled room. And in fact two or three of the customers who were already inside had gotten up and had come to lean on the door jamb, grinning.

Begalone and Alduccio ran back down the four steps they had taken, and, laughing too, appeared in front of the lady, who in the meantime had gone to stand, dragging her loose junk, behind her pulpit. But she wasn't joking at all, and neither was her servant, who was following her like a big plate, all in shock.

“These idiots,” said the lady, who every now and then spoke in Italian, because, since she was a landowner, she considered herself in the rank of high people. – What, did you want to be a hustler without hunting for money? Crazy stuff!

- Signed, - said the Begalone conciliatory, - if we are mistaken.

- You're wrong... - she said, who when they touched her interests, spoke in the Trastevere style, even if she was from Frosinone: and she stretched out her hand towards them. They took out their identity cards and showed them to him; then, with two cheerful faces despite the fool's impression they had made, they entered the room full of customers, who were smoking and sitting on the sofas along the walls, red as shrimp, mostly with the faces of victims, silent and ingrieved.

And there she was, on a padded stool, in the center of the room, with two or three mint-colored mosquito nets around her belly, the old Sicilian who was sitting, smoking a cigarette all smeared with lipstick.

Those present looked at her in silence, and she looked at them with indignation, in the face, throwing puffs of smoke around with her tits that reached her bellicose.

As she entered, Alduccio immediately stood in front of her, turning his back on the entire clientele, and making a sign with his head, he said between his teeth: - Let's go.

«This bastard, – thought Begalone, going to sit down on a small piece of sofa, – all of these are now here, and no one wanted to, he comes in and he doesn't even come in if he takes the door to the room! » Alduccio and the whore had meanwhile left and gone up the stairs with the frayed carpet. The Begalone started smoking, with one butt on top and one butt outside the sofa, next to two half-red Cispadani soldiers who hadn't said a word, respectful as if instead of being at the cupboard they were in church. «Now that's when it comes back down, the year of the c... – Bègalo thought blackly. – Now, once again, I don't hunt for money, I'll make him a small bunch!» He took the last puffs from the butt that was burning between his fingers, and threw it under the sofa, crushing it with his heel.

Everything was regular: the mistress was making out with the servant in the corridor; she screamed as if they were going to disembowel her, and you couldn't really make out the words she said.

– Tiette, good luck! - as was normal, after a bit of that brawl - two or three young men in a corner of the room said to her: and they made a voice so low and strained that it seemed as if it was coming out of his guts, breaking the strings of his neck and causing blood to splash from his eyes: then they would immediately resume their normal expression, and no one would be able to tell who had done it. The landlady didn't think anything of them and continued to shout with the pinzòchera Everything was in order, in short: after a while two more of the girls came down; one sat down on the empty stool, the other on the lap of one of the young men who had shouted and then immediately fallen silent, making faces like victims who seemed to have just swallowed the holy host. The two soldiers took it and left, chased by the insults of the two women; the younger ones laughed among themselves as red as chili peppers, the stench of smoke, sweaty clothes and rag shoes increased more and more, but this too was regular. When all of a bang...

In the midst of the chaos in the room, above the voice of the landlady throwing out the last bits of her speech, and of the girls complaining, all of a sudden laughter could be heard coming from above that never ended. At first no one paid any attention. Neither the owner, nor the girls, nor those

four clients, nor the Begalone. But then as the laughter continued, everyone began to prick up their ears a little. The mistress began to cast a few suspicious glances upwards from behind her desk, then put the money, which she hadn't stopped counting while she was shouting at the servant, into the drawer and went to the bottom of the flight of stairs, looking up. Even the girls fell silent and went around her, trailing their veils behind them, with their fat jumping under their skin smelling of powder and fried food. The young men from Panigo also got up and crowded in front of the door, leaning on the jambs or one on top of the other. The other customers crowded behind them, and lastly the Begalone, to crane their necks to see what was happening.

The one who laughed was still on the third flight of stairs, which disappeared under its small lime vault, beyond the landing where the frayed carpet ended. But little by little he went down the steps. She had to stop every now and then, to throw her head back, or to bend over on her stomach, to laugh better. He laughed so loudly that they could hear it all the way down the street, but not so heartily: he went a-a-a-a-ah, for a long while, then stopped, and started the a-a-a-a-ah again at a higher pitch, which seemed to clog his gargarozzo, to that nonsense. She finally arrived on the landing, and there she stopped laughing, in front of the audience who were watching her from the lower landing. For a while they watched her with their mouths open, as she writhed up there, now almost without desire anymore, but, in spite of her, increasingly stronger and more ramshackle.

– But if you know, you have a lot to laugh at, mouthful! a young man shouted. She looked down at him and the others, and laughed at them too.

– Have a laugh at this n...! – shouted another.

She turned towards the ramp that couldn't be seen, and without stopping laughing, she screamed: - Come on, hurry up, I want you to nurse, I want you? – Alduccio then also appeared, next to the Sicilian, on the landing, looking with his head down for a hole further down the waistband of his trousers to tighten it.

“Go and drink some zabbajone,” she continued between bursts of laughter.

– Fuck you..., – Alduccio said to himself, in a low voice, finally finding the right hole in the belt. The Sicilian went slowly down the carpeted steps, leaning with one hand against the wall to laugh better at her, and he came

behind her, as if hiding behind her. The others below, who had now caught sight of it, were laughing too, but not so loudly, with a bit of discretion, and muttering between their laughter: - Oh, what's the point of all this nastiness? - But she did it again, without imagination and to make everyone angry, by breaking down. "All this rush," she kept telling him, "and then I was left blank. A-a-a-a-ah! - Such weakness! - Alduccio zagged, to give a justification, but so softly that only he could hear. They had already reached the lowest landing, where the others were; the Sicilian with her hysterical laughter behind her entered the room, making her way through those who had gathered at the door, while Alduccio, without having the courage to look anyone in the face, pissed off, immediately ran down the last flight of the stairs, towards the exit, and Begalone, having quickly paid the landlady who was already starting to scream, ran after him.

- Now if we have to walk down the street to Termini station, you know, yes! - he said worriedly to Alduccio, as soon as he had caught him again and the door of the cupboard had closed behind them.

- What do I care, - said Alduccio. He walked forward without turning around like a mangy wolf with his tail glued between his thighs. On Via dei Cappellari there were only the two of them, one in front, one behind, close to the façade of the houses with two benches on them made of crust of dirt soaked in humidity, black, and pierced by the little windows with rags hanging: so narrow that you could touch one hand from two small windows in front. There was a darkness that one had to walk like the blind. - Let's get together here, - said Bègalo, - let's crash face first into some piss. Walking almost gropingly, and being very careful where he put his feet, all of a sudden he burst out laughing. - What are you laughing at? - said Alduccio, turning sharply. The other, proceeding on the pavement which seemed to be smeared with grease, continued to rattle. - Have another laugh! - said Alduccio weakly.

Thus they crossed the now silent Campo dei Fiori one in front and one behind, and along Largo Argentina and via Nazionale they went up towards Termini station and after half an hour of forced march they arrived there. - Shall we hang out here? - Alduccio said dully. - Further down, mejo, - said the Begalone, his face long and yellow with tiredness. They set up further down at number 9 in front of the Macao barracks. Begalone was cheerful. Clinging to the bumper, he started singing in a ragged way: - Zocoletti, clogs! - If by chance some passer-by turned their eyes on him, he would

immediately tackle him head-on. – What are you looking at? – He would do it, or, depending on the type or the speed of the tram: – Come on, I'm close to the tram, okay? – And he showed him his hand questioningly with clasped fingers; or if it was a young man: – What, can I lend you, two scudi, to death? –, And then if it was a fardona: – How good you are –, and taken by enthusiasm he started singing louder again. – And get it over with, – Alduccio told him seriously during a stop, while they walked around the car, pretending nothing had happened, – now why don't you make a phone call to the mobile squad and they'll come and get you: there's a kid in there slut attached to the tranve, number nine! – What do I care if they take me to the shop, is my house better? – said Begalone, reattaching himself with a jump to the buffer.

The little lights of Verano were there, shining, flickering, calmly, thickly, in hundreds, among the cypresses, in the niches that protruded above the wall. And even the Portonaccio at the terminus, just beyond the flyover of the Tiburtina station, was silent with only a few trams and a few empty and stopped buses, like a dark spot in the faded and more saddened air than illuminated by a few headlights and a clear sky . A 309 was stopped in front of the closed newspaper kiosk, and, further away, the soulless shelter.

“Let's see how much I have in my bag,” said Begalone, turning the lining of his pocket inside out and taking out the money. – Fifty-five lire, – he said, – forty for the car, and with two scudi if we do a bbomba, if we do, eh Ardù? "And this bomb is famous," Aluccio said in a hoarse voice. He was dying of hunger, but he didn't think about the bomb at all, and he remained there hunched behind the Bègalo. Bègalo bought a bomb at the now almost empty stall. – Tiè, magna, – he said, placing the cold bomb near Alduccio's mouth. Alduccio took a bite with his mouth crooked. “N'antro,” said Begalone. – None, stop, – said Alduccio, turning his head away. – Aòh, – shouted the Begalo, – mejo, so I can do all my best. – And he started eating it, laughing with his mouth full. – Laugh, laugh, fuck..., – Alduccio rambled more and more blackly. – Let's mount what? – After a while he made the Begalone, as soon as he had finished chewing it; and happily jumped onto the running board. Without saying anything, Alduccio got on the half-empty bus after him, dragging his feet, without taking his hands out of his pockets. Begalone, on the other hand, had gone up whistling the Charleston. “Du bijetti a farmer,” he shouted. - I hear you, I hear you, - said the delivery boy, slowly tearing two tickets off the pad, - without you screaming too much.

On the bus there were a dozen half-asleep people: a blind woman who had been begging accompanied by a man who looked like Cavour, two musicians with their instruments stuffed in black canvas covers, with their heads he was shouting, a police sergeant, two or three workers, and a few young men returning from the cinema. Bègalo and Alduccio went to scurry about with long legs on the first seats, and Bègalo, since Alduccio was silent, began to hum in a low voice. Down there, standing, the driver chatted with his head, and, further back, beyond the walls, the little lights of the Verano shone, flickering. In that silence and in that melancholy stench of poor people's clothes, all of a sudden, a boy in an English jacket entered, a blond man with a face like someone dead from hunger for seven generations, and stood in the middle of the corridor, turning towards the people. While no one was bothering him at all, he dutifully cleared his throat two or three times, then suddenly started singing. Everyone then turned to look at him, and he, unpunished, continued to sing loudly, in a nasal voice, accurately pronouncing all the words of the song.

Money! Money! Money!,

he sang: Bègalo and Alduccio glanced at their colleague at work out of the corner of their eyes. Here and there someone burst into laughter, and he stood there with his mouth open watching, while someone else, a little embarrassed, kept his face turned towards the window.

– Now if you don't hurry up, the car leaves, and I'll say goodbye to Gesucrì, – said Begalone, just to break the ice; while Alduccio took advantage of that broccoli who had come there to sing to think better about his affairs. But the boy sang his song from top to bottom, in the complete silence of the bus and the entire square, and then went around among the passengers to get something from them. The Begalone shook his graveyard monk's head, puffing out his neck like a turkey, and took out the last five lire he had left. Having done his duty, the blond boy, as silent as he had come, jumped down from the step. – Now that made up for the money, taja, – said Bègalo, his heart pierced by the thought of the five lire. "Fly, fly," he said after him even though he couldn't hear him now, "fly your damn thing." Then he bent over with his yellow face under Alduccio's nose: "Fly, fly," he repeated. Alduccio elbowed him under the chin which made him hit his head against the back of the seat, and looked furiously into his eyes, ready

to fight if he said another word. But Bègalo let it go. At that moment the driver slowly got on the bus, but instead of getting behind the wheel he stretched out on the seat with an expression of starvation in that black Judas face: he put his hands between his legs, and there it seemed fall asleep. A gloomy voice rose from the back of the bus: - Damn, what are we doing in the hole here? – But that's nothing. – And fly, fly, fly, – Bègalo commented loudly. At those two exits, the inside of the bus came alive, and everyone more or less had their say; when they had joked a bit, one after the other with a few shots, about the war in Korea and about Rebecchini, the driver began to show signs of life: he straightened up, lazily grabbed the brake lever, the cart began to shake and to expecorate, and wobbling on the pavement he left for the empty and dark Tiburina.

“Hail to you, Ardù,” Begalone said to Alduccio as they reached the end of Tiburtino, near their lots, and went up the crumbling staircase. - I greet you, - Alduccio slurred, continuing to walk towards his house, a little further up, along the deserted road. But even if it had been full of people, he wouldn't have seen anyone. The street lamps each shed their own patch of light on the asphalt and on the yellowish walls of the lots, which stretched out in rows of dozens, all the same, between small dirt courtyards, all the same. Five or six children passed by playing instruments, one a harmonica, one a drum, one the castanets, and disappeared down among those lots, until their samba became a tu-tùn, tu-tùn that seemed to wander in a dead city. A drunk, his face a blaze of fire under his dirty cap, would whistle every now and then for his lover to come and open the door for him while her husband slept. Two young men were chatting quietly about some of their business but with their voices still ringing clearly, in the middle of one of the courtyards, with the rows of stone supports for drying clothes, which looked like so many gallows lined up in the dim light.

The door of Alduccio's house was half open, and the light was on. Her sister was sitting on a chair; standing at the back of the messy kitchen, her mother was still screaming. The dishes on the bucket needed to be washed, on the floor everything was full of rubbish, and on the table, under the light of the bulb that made the wetness glisten, there were still two or three pieces of bread, a dirty bowl and a knife. Even the door of one of the two rooms was half open, and in the darkness Alduccio's father could be seen dressed, with his legs spread, on the double bed, where his youngest daughter was also sleeping; the other little ones slept on the floor on

mattresses. The other room, however, where Riccetto's entire family slept, was closed, and it seemed that there was no one in there.

"I'll kill myself, I'll kill myself," the sister was shouting, clutching her head between her thin, naked arms, as if she had cramps. - Magara, - Alduccio said between his teeth, without looking anyone in the face, and going towards his cot, against the wall of the room where his father was lying. Suddenly the sister jumped up from her chair and rushed towards the door. - Stop, - said Alduccio, taking her by the waist and throwing her back into the middle of her kitchen, with a push from her that made her fall to the floor.

She remained there as she was, between the overturned chair and the table, continuing to cry tearlessly, in anger, writhing on the wet floor.

"Shut the door," the mother said to Alduccio.

- And close it! - he said, taking a piece of bread from the table and putting it in his mouth.

- Wretch! - Her mother shouted at him, not too loudly so as not to be heard by her neighbors and therefore even more enraged: she was disheveled and half naked as she had left her, with her tits all sweaty and almost coming out of her open dress. . She went to close the door, dragging her bare feet on the tiles.

- This infamous pimp! - She continued, while, lying on the ground, her sister made a noise as if she were gasping, saying every now and then in a low voice: - God, God. - Alduccio swallowed a mouthful of bread, and went to the tap to drink a sip of waterfall. Staggering, in his underwear and still wearing his black work jacket, the father crossed the kitchen, blind from the wine he had drunk, with his hair disheveled and sweaty on his forehead. He stood there for a while, perhaps because he had forgotten what he intended to do: then he raised his hand, brought it in front of his mouth, and moved it up and down in the air, from the height of his heart to a point indeterminate at the height of the nose: as if he were underlining a long and complicated speech that did not come out of his mouth. Finally, when he realized that he couldn't express himself, he started running back towards the bed. Alduccio went out for a moment to do something, because there were no toilets in the apartments on the lots, and as he returned, his mother came back to pick him up head-on: "All day outside the house," he said. - He drinks, magna, and never wants to bring home a lira, never.

Alduccio turned suddenly: - You've already bored me, ma, stop it, - he shouted.

– And when you cry, – she said, throwing her hair back from her eyes and removing what was stuck to her sweaty and naked throat almost up to her nipples, – you want to hear me baccajā, again, you ugly criminal!

Alduccio, blind with rage, spat the morsel of the loaf of bread he had started eating in front of her feet: 'Here,' he said, 'that's it, I'll spit!' – He hit the table, turning to go into the bedroom, and knocked over the bowl and knife that were on top of her. – Will you give this back to me? – said her mother, walking after him, – what do you think you're going to make up for with this? – Fuck you.. ., – Alduccio told her. "Go away, you dirty bastard, like you've been up to now," shouted the mother. Alduccio no longer saw us and bent down to grab the knife that had fallen in front of his feet on the dirty floor.

VIII THE COMARE SECCA

... the Commaraccia

Secca de Strada-Giulia raises the grappling hook.

G. G. BELLI

It was Sunday morning. All the beautiful landscape that could be enjoyed from the San Basilio bus, on the long stretch of road without stops from Tiburtino to Ponte Mammolo, seemed to be made up of many wonderful pieces immersed in the blue of the sky, from there, under the embankment, up to to the mountains of Tivoli, which, vanished against a little steam, surrounded the countryside all dotted with trees, little bridges, vegetable gardens, factories and houses.

Along the Tiburtina, close to the bus which at that point was speeding at sixty with a great crash of glass and iron, one could only occasionally see lazy and noisy young men pass by, dressed to the nines, on foot or on bicycles, or groups of girls. Everything seemed to have been freshly painted, after the rain of the evening before, even the Aniene which, with its curve between the fields, the expanses of reeds, the hovels, wound through the Prati Fiscali down towards Monte Sacro.

Enjoying that beautiful view, in the empty and red-hot bus, were two carabinieri. Two dark-haired men from Ciociaria or Salerno, wet with sweat like fountains, with their summer uniforms unbuttoned in every place where they could be unbuttoned, their caps in their hands, and the faces of converted peasants locked in an annoyed expression, swallowed bitterly to think about all that pain in the ass due to the four burns of a little boy. As the bus quickly passed the bridge over the Aniene, skirting the bleach factory, and went to stop in front of an old tavern, they got off, without haste, and without haste, wiping their sweat with handkerchiefs, they got ready to do it. slices all over Via Casal dei Pazzi, which, from under the tavern, pointed, very long, towards the horizon teeming with hot air: there at the end Ponte Mammolo, like an Arab town, spread its rows of white houses along the wavy field curves.

Step by step, on the asphalt softened by the heat, the two carabinieri walked, arrived at the crossroads, took Via Selmi and entered the village. However, the ones they were looking for were not there. They weren't in

one of the last little houses on Via Selmi, half built and half not, with curtains instead of window frames and women arguing around the bathtub tap. And they weren't playing with the other kids in the middle of the street or on the lawns. If by any chance they had been able to imagine it, the two dark-haired men would have walked that entire stretch of road on foot. But let's find out! And to think that, inevitably, when the bus was about to take the bridge over the Aniene, if by chance taking a look at the landscape, they had observed the vegetable gardens just beyond the curve of the river where the boys' pipes went to have their tea bathroom, they might even have been able to see them...

The wanted men, in fact, were there in the middle of those vegetable gardens, or to put it better, in the middle of a sort of jungle of grazes and willows, of reeds and weevils, between the vegetable gardens and the escarpment that sloped down to the Aniene. Mariuccio, who was still so small that he hadn't even started going to school, was playing, calmly, crouched with his bottom on his heels, with two or three ants, which he teased with a wedge. Borgo Antico was watching him, and Genesio was smoking, serious, on the sidelines, also crouched on the ground. Sitting nearby was their little dog, named Fido, who was also resting. He sat on his hind legs, with the two front legs pointing straight at the ground: and every now and then, with one of his two hind legs, he scratched himself under his armpits. Thus seated, almost politely, he looked around, now to the left and now to the right, far away, observing the whole of things, from the lots of Tiburtino to the curves of the river, and every now and then grazing with a placid glance his three young owners who Compared to him, they were really little kids, and you had to let them do it even when they were a little dull.

All of a sudden, in the most beautiful of his contemplation, he got up and went to smell Mariuccio's heels. – Here. Fido,” said Genesio, but without a hint of a smile: he took the dog that had immediately run and put it between his knees and smoothed it. The beast blissfully let it go, half closed his eyes, and seemed to immerse himself in a sort of half-sleep in which to better enjoy the satisfaction of that moment of favor that his favorite master granted him. And it was rare, because Genesio, who was good at heart and always conflicted, a poor boy, with his emotions and affections, hid everything inside himself, and spoke as little as he could so as not to reveal himself. His little brothers had amused him, and always obeyed him, but

they were not afraid of him, and sometimes, obeying him with all respect, they even allowed themselves to tease him just a little. The little dog on his lap was almost dozing off: but all four, that morning, were dying of sleep: it was their first morning of freedom; and nearby, among the dry grass and bundles of crushed reeds, you could still see the holes where they had slept, like sparrows in their nests, or little rabbits. They didn't regret leaving home: on the contrary, the two youngest were all happy; Genesio thought about it so much. And Genesio sat frowning, precisely, thinking about it, while they played with the ants.

– Let's go, – Genesio said suddenly, getting up. Without asking him where and why, as always, Borgo Antico and Mariuccio, all intrigued, stood up too, awaiting the events. The puppy wagged his tail around, very satisfied with the resumption of activities. He ran back and forth with a constant bark coming out of his open mouth with his tongue hanging out. But the goal that Genesio had in mind was not really that far away. They first followed the sinuous and wild bank of the Aniene, jumping from one hump to another, among the thick reeds, up to the Fisherman's inn and the dredge, then, having crossed the river on the old brick bridge, they returned down, along the other bank, much freer, and with a little path that ran along the bushes without a single leaf left, until they found themselves opposite the place where they were before, there on the curve of the springboard. Like the day before the old drunkard, all alone, sang:

Lasseme only points the tip,

from under the vault of the bridge, which was a place he must have grown fond of. On the great clearing blackened by the fire, with the stumps of the wheat stalks, not a soul could be seen, not even the four black horses. But then some voices were heard, and in fact under the slope, on the surface of the water, on the loose and dirty earth from the day before, there were three or four bathers, who must have arrived while the three little brothers and Fido were going around the dredge. They chatted and moved calmly, in the still pure light, where the smelly heat was already spreading; they stood tall in the dust, with their legs spread apart, turning lazily every now and then, and their voices rang loudly in the silent air, because there was little passage of cars on the Tiburtina, and the factory opposite was at a standstill.

One of those four fives was Caciotta. – I wish, – she was saying nostalgically, when Genesio and the other kids approached, – I wish this song had come out of fashion last year!

The one singing that song was Zinzello, who, perhaps dissatisfied with his Saturday bath, had returned to soap himself up, this time without his two dogs. He shouted in desperation, at the top of his lungs, naked and dry as a hazelnut, behind a bush:

I'm a prisoner and my mother dies...

– Why do I wish this song had been in fashion last year? – asked Alduccio, who was there, his eyes red with sleep like two scars.

– Why? – said Caciotta, – but because when I was at Porta Portese last year, I could have sung it!

– You'll understand, – Alduccio grinned.

– You know how much I would have loved to sing this song! Caciotta continued enthusiastically and pathetically, – when I was in prison too! Kill! It would have been sung to me in the evening, before I went to sleep. – And, with all the passion, he too began to sing behind Zinzello, but everyone sang on his behalf, one more passionate than the other, Zinzello on the other side and Caciotta on this side of a gutted bush full of rubbish .

– They made a fool of you, eh! – said Begalone, – when you were in prison!

– What are you doing! – said Caciotta fatally, stopping to sing for a moment.

"But damn him," muttered Genesio, frowning in a low voice, as if to himself, as he crouched a little further up on the cracked edge of the slope. Mariuccio and Borgo Antico stared at him. It was the first time he had ever said that dirty word in its entirety. – If you felt like mother, – Mariuccio said slowly, as if with a sigh, looking worriedly at his brother, – what did she do to you? – Genesio gave him one of his expressionless looks, and went back to immersing himself in the contemplation of Tiburtino's malandri. Genesio's mother, from Borgo Antico and Mariuccio, was a Marche woman who, who knows how, during the war, had married a bricklayer from Andria. She got caught every day, poor woman, and she was reduced to living worse than the beasts. Yet, as she said in moments of respite to her

neighbors, she still cared about the good education of her children. Now she was there crying, first because she had realized that her children with their little dog were no longer in the house, then because she had seen the carabinieri arrive at the house looking for them: but the three of them, who were her spitting portrait, outside and inside too, they were too distracted at that moment to think about her. – In Borgo Anti, – Begalone said from below, looking at him, – you sing this song!

– 'Such a joke,' – Borgo Antico replied promptly, hardening his little brown face.

– It's true, – said Mariuccio, – you know!

Begalone had an outburst of anger, he approached, and poked his finger under Borgo Antico's cap: - You make me angry, you make me angry, - he said. Then with a menacing light in his Mohammedan face: – Sing, yes no less, he added. Borgo Antico pouting, with his head pulled between his knees, began to sing Carcerato at the top of his lungs.

Aldo took advantage of the moment that no one was paying attention to him, and went to lie down, as if he wanted to take a nap: he lay down on the grass washed by the rain of the previous evening and burnt by the sun, with his stomach down and his face against crossed arms.

While Borgo Antico was singing, Genesio without saying a word went down the slope, and Mariuccio and Fido followed him rolling down the dirt on all fours. Having reached the surface of the water, Genesio stopped for a moment to look thoughtfully at the river that ran in front of him, under the walls of the bleach factory, with the white furrow of the drain on the other slope. Then, without haste, in front of Mariuccio and Fido who were watching him with due respect, crouching on the floor, he began to undress. Carefully he took off his shorts hardened by sweat and dust, his t-shirt, his pink undershirt, his shoes and his pedals: he remained, slim and a little thin, with his shoulder blades protruding a little, almost completely naked: he didn't completely, because he wasn't shameless like those of Tiburtino of his age. He had kept his baggy panties on, which covered him completely, front and back. – Tiè, – he said to Mariuccio, handing him the package of clothes, which he had meticulously wrapped and tightened with the belt. – No, wait, – he added dryly. He untied the belt, unrolled the pack of clothes, and from the pocket of his shorts took a cigarette butt, which lit up, and a comb. While smoking, he combed his hair very carefully, asking Mariuccio if his

parting was straight or crooked, and then making a sort of wave on his forehead, black, shiny, and without a hair out of place. In the end, having returned the clothes tied to his brother, he announced dryly, as if what happened to him was not his: - Today I'm crossing the river. – Mariuccio looked at him for a moment, understanding that the moment was exciting, then he started screaming in his puppy voice: – To Borgo Anti, to Borgo Anti! – Borgo Antico sang in a hurry, with the accelerator, the last remaining words of the song, and he leaned over the edge without saying anything.

– In Borgo Antì, – said Mariuccio hastily and cheerfully, today Genesio says it crosses the river.

Borgo Antico remained silent for a little longer and then he too began to slide down the bank with his ass, right under the hardened quagmire stepping stone.

– What, crossing the river, in Genè? – he asked seriously.

– Yes, – said Genesio, letting out a half smile, with a bit of emotion.

– Immediately?

– Not right away, later, I want to rest now.

The three of them sat down on the black sand, with the little dog, who, seeing himself neglected for more important things that he couldn't understand, didn't sit still for a moment and jumped from one to the other, rubbing his nose in them. Genesio, smoking seriously, remained silent for a while, then said to his brothers: - Now when we grow up we kill our father.

“Me too,” Mariuccio said promptly.

- All three together, - confirmed Genesio, - we are going to kill him! And then if we go to live somewhere else with my mother.

He spat the butt into the water, his straight, serious gaze glistening a little wetly.

"He must have brought her this morning too," he said. He remained silent for a while to be able to overcome himself, and then repeated in his usual dull and inexpressive voice: - Now when we're grown up, you see, we do it, you see.

“I'll try,” he said then, without changing his tone.

– 'Or traverses? – asked the smallest one trembling.

– But what a crossroads – said Genesio. – Give it a try.

- What are you doing in the middle? – Mariuccio asked again.
- Yes, – said Genesius. He got up and climbed the slope.
- Where are you going? – said Mariuccio in amazement.
- “De lane,” Genesio said without turning.

The brothers followed him up the slope and then went back down to the other side of the diving board, where Zinzello was finishing soaping himself, while, as if to take his place, another big man had arrived, a little mangy and with the long beard on his face that seemed burned by fever, who was Alfio Lucchetti, the uncle of that Amerigo di Pietralata who had killed himself.

– Where do these come from? – Zinzello said good-naturedly and mockingly. Alfio, who was still dressed in his black striped trousers, looked at them, shaking his head ironically and holding the hand holding the roll of towel and soap against his side, with a smile that swelled his jaw dotted with beard. hard, and a piece of sideburn that hung below his protruding ear, his hair combed like a youngster's, even if there were a few white threads here and there. Genesio, just as if no one were talking about him, without looking at anyone, had gone to put his feet in the water. Before him he stayed a little longer to light the river, then he pushed himself into it until the water reached his waist, keeping his arms raised, and there he immersed himself, swimming quickly like the dog.

"If he's in training to cross the river," Mariuccio communicated, full of naive enthusiasm, to the men, looking at them as if he were looking at the top of a mountain. But they were now talking about the c... them, and they didn't even hear him. Genesius reached the halfway point where the current made many small waves, flowing faster and gathering at that point all the dirt from the river, many black streaks of oil and a sort of yellow foam that seemed to be formed by thousands of spit; then he turned, let himself be carried down a little, staying still, until he reached below the diving board, then he started swimming again towards the shore on this side. He clung a little further down, towards the bridge, to some stingers that hung from the almost sheer slope onto the surface of the river.

Borgo Antico and Mariuccio ran after him without even paying attention to where they put their feet, slipping, falling, getting up in the mud, up and down the slippery hump of the trampoline, followed by the dog who started barking without really knowing if he should be alarmed or happy.

“To Genesio, to Genesio,” the two little brothers shouted, as if it were ten kilometers away.

– You didn't make it, what? – Mariuccio asked anxiously.

– You've already bored me, – Genesio said in response. He looked around him resentfully, with a quick and surly glance; then he added, without looking them in the face: - I did a test, I'll see you tomorrow!

Now that he had tasted it, he re-observed the river, calculating the distances in silence. Behind the current there were still about ten meters before reaching the other bank, where the white stripe that the discharge of the bleach had cut as it flowed into the river plummeted down. Fido began to observe him too, sitting down: he was panting with his mouth open, and closing it every now and then to swallow or to lick himself. He respected the silence of his masters, with a slightly dejected expression: it seemed that some boy of a whore had punched him in the eye and had swollen it, because everything was as white as it was, only around the left eye there was 'he had an almost blue spot: and on that side his ear also hung limply, while the other stood straight, tense, so as not to miss even the smallest noise.

In the meantime, those wild people like pigs in the swamp showed signs of awakening. Tirillo went to sit like a lace statue on the trampoline, limply, stretching himself, and stood there for a while, his head down, clicking his thick tongue against the roof of his mouth with a grimace of disgust. – And when you throw that away, – said Caciotta, looking at him out of the corner of his eye so as not to make the effort to turn around. – Don't you know that I was born tired? – Tirillo said resignedly, his eyes clotted with sleep. The Begalone had started coughing and it looked like he was about to spit out some piece of lung at any moment. – You've arrived, go! – said Tirillo, then, seized by a sudden energy, he shouted: – Who's going to throw themselves with me? - And fuck it, fuck you..., - the disgusted Begalone told him between the coughs that skimmed his lungs. Tirillo raised his arms with a great coaxing and bowed his head to the angel, spreading his legs like a Scrooge. – You suck ass, – said Caciotta, while the other was still under water.

But at that moment there was a great roar and a great uproar, which cut off any comment. It seemed that the earthquake was coming. It spread on the Tiburtino side, and proceeded in parallel along the Tiburtina and the

banks of the Aniene. From the Tiburtina side you could hear a noise that seemed to be crushing the roots of the earth, a regular and always the same noise, where every now and then you could make out scrapes and tears, which sounded like anger and which suddenly disappeared. It proceeded like an immense compressor, grinding up the entire stretch of horizon between the Tiburtino lots and Monte del Pecoraro, crunching up and crumbling everything it encountered, like a carpet bombing. On the other side, however, on the bank of the Aniene, it was as if a flock of monkeys and parrots had been unleashed, driven out of the forest by some fire, and they were screaming at breakneck speed. It was not clear whether it was because they were afraid or so that they would be carried away by enthusiasm. It was an army of kids, produced by half Tiburtino, who ran like scoundrels, wearing good shorts, and waving the t-shirts or vests that they had taken off while running. It was not possible to hear what they were shouting, all together, from one group to another, because in the race they had spread out and spread out along the entire shore: but they came forward together with the roar, and as it became clearer it became clearer. they also heard their screams clearer. – The bersajeri, the bersajeri! – they shouted, while the first ones were already collapsing at the bend of the ski jump, and it was clear that they didn't give a damn about the Bersaglieri, but that this was a good opportunity to have a bit of a row. Running like little horses with their hair blowing in the wind, Sgarone, Roschetto and Armandino were in the lead, with a cheerful and mocking face in contradiction to the ardor of the race and the wild shouts they let out. It was a fantasy improvised by the kids who, since there were so many of them, felt strong in front of the big guys and acted like paragulets. The avalanche passed at full speed, raising heavy red dust along the mangy bank, and following the curve of the river and shouting, always with the utmost disinterest but as loudly as they could, - li bersajeriii -, they turned up towards the Tiburtina. The armored column was already arriving there, with the relays of Bersaglieri on motorcycles, the armored cars, alternating with the trucks full of rows of Bersaglieri with camouflaged uniforms and machine guns between their knees, and the tanks with their tracks poking holes in the asphalt as if was made of butter. The first kids were already starting to climb up the embankment of the road, near the bridge, while the last ones, a small group of Fiji de sluts with all that were still five or six year old babies, had lined up, and ironically singing the march of the Bersaglieri, – papparappa pappa para, papparappa

pappa paara –, they came forward at a walk. Caciotta, overcome by enthusiasm, also started running after them, as did Tirillo who had resurrected amidst the streaks of oil and the spit. Borgo Antico and Mariuccio shouted with their necks pulled at Genesis: – Are you coming to Genè? there are tanks there! – But Genesis shrugged and as if he hadn't heard them either, he sat thoughtfully there in the bushes where he was. – Are you coming to Gene? – the other two continued to shout, all anxious. Then, seeing that Genesis himself had no intention of coming, they took the road alone for once, trotting behind the two big ones, towards the Tiburtina escarpment, followed by poor Fido who no longer understood anything.

Only Alfio Lucchetti remained at the trampoline, secluded and threatening, because the other, Zinzello, had left, Alduccio, with his face still hidden in his arms against the dust that was beginning to burn, Genesis, all alone like a hermit on the other side of the diving board and the Begalone. The Begalone didn't stop coughing with rasps and expectorations that sounded like blows given with a ladle into an empty bin; his yellow skin was covered in a layer of blush that hid the creaks; it seemed that on his crucifix side, instead of normal skin, there was boiled meat attached. He went to extract a handkerchief from his trousers pocket, already splattered with red specks, and, coughing, compressed his mouth with it. Nobody listened to him. And he coughed, on his behalf, swearing and calling the dead. Finally he passed him, and little by little, he went to put the handkerchief back in his pocket, throwing the clothes back as if they were rags under the bush. Since the cough had left him feeling dizzy and also feeling nauseous, certainly also due to his weakness, because he had hardly slept at all the night before, he thought that perhaps a bath would do him some good. He picked up his carcass from the ground, tied the piece of string tightly which, going around his head like a sort of frayed ribbon, held in place the layer of yellow and faded hair that fell down like a madman down to the first little bones of his vertebrae, and he took his locco locco, because there was no one watching him, at the spitting edge of the river, taking a simple bath like any other, like old people when they go to wash their feet, or Alfio, nearby, who had now put aside the ambitions of youth, and used the river as a bathtub. He immersed his slices in the water, pulled them up one at a time with a jerk like hens do, due to the sudden cold he felt, grinding between his teeth: - Damn you... -, then he got used to it a little, and in his frenzy he went down towards the center of the river, slowly

until the water reached his little heads which were sticking out red like two pieces of sealing wax on the ribs. Finally he threw himself into swimming, and sailed for a while arm in arm in the middle of the river: but he felt even worse: his head was spinning like a woodpecker with an orange zag, and he seemed to feel inside his stomach like a dead cat. He was almost shocked. He got scared and began to swim frantically towards the shore; As soon as he set foot on the ground, all dripping, he couldn't stand up straight, he knelt on the mud and vomited them up. In the morning, since he had fasted the previous day, he had eaten, poor guy, half a basket of bread and pork rinds: he must have had indigestion, and now he was throwing out his soul too.

Thus those who had run onto the road to watch the tanks pass by found him until the last one turned up towards Ponte Mammolo. – Er Begalone feels bad! – Caciotta announced shouting, seeing him first lying on the ground with his mouth in the mud. Everyone ran around him, but he didn't even seem to notice, with his half-open eye staring into space. Caciotta and Tirillo started shaking him by the shoulders: - In Bègalo, in Bègalo, what do you feel? – they asked him, and he said nothing, silent, with a dirty face that made one's stomach turn. He had around him, all disheveled and sweaty, at least thirty kids, who pushed each other and fought to see him. Even Alduccio went down, his face congested from the ceccagna, and began to shout: - Make way, get away, you idiots, can't you see that you're taking away the air? – He also shook Bègalo by the shoulders, in the middle of the circle that had closed around him. Bègalo said something to himself, with a grimace of nausea. – What's up today? – asked Caciotta. – Well, – said Tirillo with a certain impression. – Let's wash it, – Alduccio decided instead, getting busy. Cupping his hands she took some water from the river and threw it against the face of the Begalone, who shook for a moment like drunkards, immediately falling back into his torpor. – Come on, – said Alduccio. The other two helped him, and with three or four good sprays they made all the filth slide off the Bègalo's face and pectorals. "Now that's our business," Caciotta slurred, "that we had to stick it all the way home." Tirillo approved with the gesture of someone who receives a blow on the head, and making a face that meant: – Kill, Cacio –. In any case they had to resign themselves. They pulled the Begalone ashore a little further up the shore, and left him lying there while they dressed. Then, in the midst of the audience of kids who were excitedly watching, they also covered the Begalone, which he let do, with every now and then some new effort to

vomit. To take him away, Caciotta took him under the armpits and Tirillo by the feet, and so they began the march towards Tiburtino, stopping every five or six meters to rest, followed by the crowd of kids who overlapped and fought to stay closer to him. Alduccio accompanied them only for a while along the path, relieving them every now and then. Then when he was about to turn back, he saw Riccetto coming forward from afar, evidently in good spirits, all dressed up and walking carefully so as not to get dust on his white shoes with holes: in his hand he held his new slippi neatly folded, and the blue blouse fluttering above his butt.

Alduccio then ran a little further ahead, regaining the piece he had lost compared to the procession of kids, just in time to hear the first information that Riccetto was giving him with a stern face. Begalone, who had been knocked to the ground by Caciotta and Tirillo who were resting, like a Christ taken down from the cross, began to move at that very moment, and little by little, immediately taken under the armpits by his companions, he got back up on his feet. Riccetto looked at him with a pessimistic grimace: but as soon as he saw Alduccio, he worried Bègalo, and turned to him with a grin: - A cuggi, - he said, - well? You made a big deal out of it tonight! - Alduccio got angry, seized by a fit of nerves: - What an idiot, - he said to Riccetto, - do you think I want to joke? But go somewhere else, go! - With a face disfigured by anger, but it was clear that he had a lump in his throat and that he was almost about to burst into tears, he turned and started to walk back towards the trampoline. - Are you stinky in cuggi? said Riccetto, following him with a soft step, all joking and ironic. Alduccio turned like a snake: - Vaffan.... - he shouted. - Yes, yes, - Riccetto said, shaking his head, - but you know what you're doing after Lenzetta! - Right at the end of Lenzetta! - He repeated. With Lenzetta, in fact, whoever had seen himself had seen himself: now he was undergoing a year of cellular segregation, in some prison outside Rome, in Volterra or Ischia, because he had been sentenced to no less than thirty years... A day, obviously he was drunk or who knows what had crossed his mind, he had rented a taxi, had himself taken to a deserted place near the Grotta Rossa, and there with the revolver stolen from the Cappellone, he had killed the taxi driver to take away those five or six thousand lire he had in his pocket...

Riccetto was silent for a while, looking at his cousin who was walking in front of him with his head down, then he decided he had had enough fun and said: - Let's go, come on, it's nothing! Ariconsul, come on, and go

home, it's time I think... - Alduccio looked at him, suspicious, but also with a poorly concealed thread of hope in his gaze: - What would it be like today, it's nothing, - he asked. - It's nothing, it's nothing, come on, - said Riccetto, - I'm joking on purpose. Your mother didn't tell you! She made an excuse, that she hurt herself, what do I know! - Alduccio remained silent for a while, still walking towards the bathroom, all thoughtful. But then he turned around, and without saying anything to Riccetto, he took the road back to Tiburtino, almost running to reach Bègalo's company, who was now walking alone, clinging to Caciotta and Tirillo with his arms.

- I salute you a cuggi, - said Riccetto wisely, waving a hand and he too without turning.

He continued alone, without haste, towards the curve under the bleach factory. He began a song and when he finished it, he was there on the slope of the ski jump, where, on one side there were the three kids from Ponte Mammolo, who couldn't be seen, and on the other Alfio Lucchetti, who, as if nothing had happened, he had finished soaping himself up, and was now putting on his old striped trousers.

- But who is that? - Riccetto wondered, standing on the edge of the slope. - I don't know! - He looked at him a little longer, while he, impenetrable, with his shoulder blades sticking out and his chest all frizzy with hair, was getting dressed. - Aaaaaah! - Riccetto then said to himself, remembering when he had seen him at Amerigo's funeral, and it had worried him so much. - If, if, I remember now! - And calmly he began to undress, without paying any more attention to it, only giving him one last look when he left, thinking: «He's a victim».

While he was taking off his trousers with his legs high so as not to make them drag on the dust, he whistled with satisfaction, and chattered to himself, banging in a low voice against the holes in the pedals, or congratulating himself on the nice shirt he had on. Done. - It's strong, - he said with conviction, looking at it while he folded it.

- Now I'm going away from that bastard of the boss, - he said to himself then as he was in his panties, - I'll give myself money, magno, and after lunch my whole life! Cut to Riccè!

Doing this cheerful program he brought himself with his hands to his hips in lace to the trampoline, and from there he finally glimpsed the boss's three fijets down to the left among the bushes. Fido ran up to celebrate with him,

all eager, almost jumping on his chest and prancing with his little front paws. But Riccetto just casually stretched out a hand towards him: he was too happy to have seen the three down there. His good mood had increased: he already didn't feel like taking a bath all alone, in that silence and solitude that grew as midday approached. But the reason for the joy that had brightened his already cheerful face under his shorn curls was another. He looked at them. They too had noticed him, but they remained silent. Riccetto continued to look at them. And those nothing. He looked at them fixedly, and they, turning their backs on him, occasionally glanced at him sideways. Then at a moment when all three were turned towards him to look at him, Riccetto broke the silence by raising one hand and moving it up and down, with closed fingers, as one does to threaten a blow. The three little ones looked at him angrily, shaking their shoulders.

– Yes, yes, – said Riccetto, – do it like that!

– What do you want? - said Genesio let slip, then immediately retreating into silence like a hedgehog.

Riccetto was having a blast, and instead of answering immediately, he started looking at them again, continuing to nod his head and stretch his mouth.

“You've done beautiful things,” he exclaimed after a while at the top of his lungs.

– What have we done? – said Mariuccio for everyone, who, being the smallest, felt less responsible.

- What have you done? - Riccetto shouted, his eyes widening, - kill what courage you have, oh!

– Yes, we did, – repeated the little one candidly.

– Damn you! - Riccetto exclaimed sternly, attacking them with his loud voice as if to lecture them, - do you even have the courage to deny it?

Genesio also began to get curious: and, scratching his foot with a wedge, curled up on himself, he asked: - What do you deny?

- Which is? – Riccetto said: and despite the almost tragic thing he was thinking, a wave of laughter came over him, which made him bubble like a pot.

– Roast the lice, do it, – he shouted, bursting into laughter at the expression he had invented on the spot, – and then say that we did it! – He

continued to laugh on his behalf, even rolling on the ground, at the idea of the roasted prawns: even if the prawn had not actually been roasted but only browned. The three brothers didn't understand a thing...

– But what are you doing today? – Genesio said in a hoarse voice.

"You know it, little paraguletto," Riccetto said, getting up and calming down a little from his laughter.

– We left home, okay? – Genesio admitted without batting an eyelid. Riccetto looked at him: he didn't know this.

– Ah, – he said, – you've left the house too! 'Oh, you know, you knew, yes, that the bastards were looking for you!

Genesio was in turn impressed by that matter, but huddled with his chest against his knees, he kept his astonishment to himself, quickly starting to think about it. However, this is not the case in Borgo Antico and Mariuccio; and Mariuccio chirped: - It's not true, the carabinieri aren't looking for us!

"Say no, you," said Riccetto, jokingly, "but you'll see when I catch you, if it's not true!

"And get up," Mariuccio said again.

– And why, are the carabinieri looking for us? – Genesio inquired, pretending nothing happened.

- Because it's? – Riccetto said sternly, – and do you have the courage to ask me? What did you do yesterday evening on Monte der Pecoraro? huh? tell me a little!

– What did we do, – said Genesio, this time, looking at his face almost with a challenging air.

Riccetto frowned as if he felt offended by that obstinacy. – Who was he, – he said, – who burned the Piattoletta on the pillar of Monte der Pecoraro?

Genesio was stunned for a moment at that exit; but then he shrugged, as if dropping the argument, and said softly: - And what do I know.

– You did it – exclaimed Riccetto treacherously and triumphantly.

– Pct, – said Genesio, raising his shoulders and looking away with his eyes burning under his black tuft.

"None, it wasn't us," said Mariuccio.

– There's no point in denying it, you know, – said Riccetto, increasingly amused, – there are witnesses, please!

– But what witnesses! – said Genesio.

– But how, – Riccetto retorted, – sixty people saw you yesterday evening! er Roscetto, Sgarone, Armandino, all the kids from lot two, what are you waiting for today!

"It wasn't us," Mariuccio said again, already almost desperate.

"You'll see when they put you in prison, if you still have the courage to deny it," Riccetto shouted solemnly. Mariuccio, indignant and suffocated by emotion, began to shake his little hand, and already crying, he repeated: - It wasn't us!

Seeing him cry, Riccetto gave up and, still sitting on the trampoline, sang a little song, crushing the three little ones down there with his good mood.

"Cry, cry," he said every now and then to Mariuccio, stopping to sing for a moment. But he also felt a little sorry for him: he remembered when he was like them, when the big guys used to take him to the skyscrapers, and he went away like a fool, despised and ignored by the whole world, with Marcello and Agnoletto. He remembered, for example, that time they had stolen the blind man's money, and they had gone to swim at Ciriola's, that they had taken the boat, and he had saved that little swallow that was drowning under Ponte Sisto. ..

The midday sirens sounded from afar.

'Let's go to the bathroom,' he said to himself in a loud voice, 'since he's the principal, they can kill him if he gets drunk, and they're deaf, I'm sorry.' Of course, today I had to stay without a brecola!

Saying this, he threw himself headlong into the river, without paying attention to Mariuccio who had already consoled himself and was shouting after him: - 'Do you know that Genesio also crosses the river?

Genesio said to him: - And shut up, - and instead of taking a bath, he immersed himself in thinking a little about the latest things. But then he became curious about what Riccetto was doing in the middle of the river, and he watched him as attentively as Borgo Antico and Mariuccio. He approached the edge of the water, and turning slightly towards his little brothers, all absorbed in Riccetto's performance, he said in a low voice: - We'll go back home later, it's better until mum cries. – Having quickly made this arrangement, he was able to sit and watch Riccetto in peace, who in the middle of the river raised a never-ending moina. He flapped his arms like spatulas, splashing the water and raising buckets of foam, he went under

with his head holding his butt and hips up like a duck, he acted like a dead man floating with his belly out, singing at the top of his lungs. Then, with a sudden about-face, he headed back towards the diving board, climbed onto it, dripping wet, and, putting on a lot of airs in front of the kids who were looking at him with their mouths open, he dived back in with a little flip to the angel.

As soon as he emerged with his head, he began to swim with great strokes towards the other shore. Genesio, silently, quickly reached, splashing in the mud, the point of the river under the diving board where the water reached his chest, and broke away, swimming quickly like the dog.

– Are you crossing the river, Genè? – Mariuccio and Borgo Antico shouted after him, all excited. But he didn't even hear them, he couldn't hear them, swimming after Riccetto, with his mouth held tightly shut and high, and his head twisted to one side, so as not to drink.

The current passed and dragged him along with the rubbish for a few metres, then, still with his hands moving quickly under the water and his head twisted, he crossed the other half of the river. Meanwhile, Riccetto had already arrived on the other bank, under the white streak of acid from the bleach, and he had also immediately thrown himself back into the water, starting to swim again, as quickly as he had gone, towards this side. He got there in a few strokes, every now and then playing dead with his belly up and, resuming singing, he climbed to the top of the slope above the diving board, and, still singing, began to do gymnastics to dry himself. The sun was burning straight down, and around there, under the bleacher factory, there was a heat that seemed as if the very air was burning, while far away, on both the fields and the road, with the tanks roaring in the distance, it was the blinding silence of midday descended. In a few minutes Riccetto was not only dry, but also sweaty.

Genesius, however, remained alone on the other bank. He sat down as he did under the little stream of bleach, on the white mud. Above, behind him, like a landslide from hell, rose the bushy embankment with the factory wall, from where green and brown sorts of cylinders, tanks, a whole heap of metal boxes protruded, where the sun reverberated almost black due to too much light.

Mariuccio and Borgo Antico looked at their brother crouched down there like a Bedouin: – Aren't you coming back to Genè? Mariuccio shouted at

him in his little voice, still holding Genesio's rolled up clothes close to his ribs.

- I'm coming! – said Genesio from over there, without forcing his voice, standing still with his face between his knees. Riccetto dressed slowly, arranging the pedals, and carefully checking that they were not put on backwards - Now I'm going to warn the carabinieri that you're here, - he shouted cheerfully to Genesio, as he was almost ready, - and your father too!

As he left he was regained by optimism: but for this time he was content to make the usual sign of threat with his arm towards the little guys who were eyeing him suspiciously from below. But as he was leaving, half turned backwards, he glanced by chance towards the walls of the factory, and up there, in a little window lost among the large armored cylinders of the tanks, he caught sight of the figure of the father's daughter. caretaker, who had been busy cleaning the windows. – Bbonaaa! – said Riccetto immediately, half horny. He took a few steps forward, then regretted it and looked at us again, then took a few more steps towards the bridge, and regretted it once again. She was always up there, scrubbing the glass that shone like liquid in the air. – Let me stay a little longer, fuck..., – she said; he stopped and slipped between two rough frays and a clump of nettles, so that neither the children who were down there under the river nor those passing through the Tiburtina could see him. But then not a soul passed by at that hour, with that sun: he could only hear a few cars, and, in the distance, the rumbles and tears of the tanks.

As soon as he got into the bushes, he took off his trousers, pretending to have to wring out his panties a little more; and he stood there naked and half hidden, looking at himself and trying to make the mecca on the window look at him.

– A Genè, don't you come back from here? – Mariuccio continued to shout in a heartfelt voice. Genesio remained silent at those calls; then all of a sudden he threw himself into the water, swam up to the beam, but immediately went back and sat down again, numb, under the embankment and the wall.

– Aren't you going back to Genè? – Mariuccio repeated, disappointed with how things had gone.

“There's still a little bit left here,” Genesisio said from down there, “if it's so good here!”

– Come on, cross! – Mariuccio insisted, the strings in his neck swelling from the effort he made in shouting. Borgo Antico also started calling him, and Fido barked, jumping from side to side, but with his muzzle always turned towards the other bank, as if he were calling him too.

Genesisio then stood up, stretched a little, as he never used to do, and then shouted: - I'll count to thirty and I'll throw. – He stood still, in silence, counting, then he stared at the water with his eyes burning under the black wave still all well combed; finally he threw himself in with a belly flop. He quickly swam almost to the center, right at the point under the factory, where the river curved towards the Tiburtina bridge. But there the current was strong, and pushed backwards, towards the bank of the factory: on the outward journey Genesisio had managed to easily pass the current, but now on the return journey it was a completely different matter. The way he swam, doggy style, helped him stay afloat, not move forward: the current, always keeping him in the middle, began to move him down towards the bridge.

– Come on, Genè, – the little brothers shouted to him from under the trampoline, who didn't understand why Genesisio didn't come forward, – come on, we're leaving!

But he was unable to cross that strip which ran full of foam, sawdust and burnt oil, like a current within the yellow current of the river. He remained in the middle, and instead of approaching the shore, he was always dragged down towards the bridge. Borgo Antico and Mariuccio with the dog tumbled off the hump of the trampoline, and began to run quickly, on all fours when they couldn't with two, falling and getting up again, along the black mud of the bank, going after Genesisio who was carried faster and faster towards the bridge. So Riccetto, while he was doing the straight with the girl who however continued, confused like a shadow, to rub the slabs, saw all three of them pass under his feet, the two little ones tumbling screaming among the undergrowth, frightened, and Genesisio in the middle of the river, who never stopped moving his little arms quickly, swimming like a dog, without moving forward an inch. Riccetto got up, took a few steps naked as he was down towards the water, among the stingers and there he stopped to look at what was happening before his eyes. At first he

couldn't understand it, he thought they were joking: but then he understood and rushed down the slope, slipping, but at the same time he saw that there was nothing left to do: throwing himself into the river there under the bridge really meant being tired of life, no one could have done it. He stopped, pale as death. Genesio could no longer resist, poor boy, and flapped his arms in disorder, but always without asking for help. Every now and then he sank beneath the surface of the current and then rose a little further down; finally when he was already almost close to the bridge, where the current broke and foamed on the rocks above him, he went under him for the last time, without a cry, and only for a little while longer could his little black head emerge .

Ricchetto, with his hands shaking, quickly put on his trousers, which he kept under his arm, without looking towards the little window of the factory anymore, and remained there for a while longer, not knowing what to do. From under the bridge you could hear Borgo Antico and Mariuccio screaming and crying, Mariuccio still clutching Genesio's undershirt and shorts to his chest; and they were already starting to climb the slope with their hands.

– Tajamo, he's better, – said Ricchetto to himself, who was almost crying himself, as he quickly set off along the path towards the Tiburtina; in fact he was almost running, to get to the bridge before the two kids. «I love Ricchetto, you know!» he thought. He climbed up, sliding, and clinging to the stumps of the bushes up the slope covered with dust and burnt brushwood, he reached the top, and without looking back, he took the bridge. He was able to cut unnoticed, because, both in the abandoned countryside that stretched around, towards the piles of white houses of Pietralata and Monte Sacro, and along the Tiburtina, at that moment, there was no one; not even a car or one of the old buses in the area passed; in that great silence you could only hear a few tanks, lost behind the sports fields of Ponte Mammolo, plowing the horizon with their roar.

GLOSSARY

We believe that there is no reader who, despite coming across some of the words from the jargon of the underworld or the Roman plebs for the first time, does not grasp or intuit their meaning: however, more out of scruple and curiosity than actual usefulness, we list here a certain number of dialect and slang words with their translation.

Abbiccato: secluded, serious.

Pointy trees: cypresses (annà all'...: to die).

Allaccasse: to get tired.

To smooth: to caress

Allumà: look.

Arzà porvere: to make a fuss, to provoke.

Ammoppito: weak, demoralized.

Ammorgià: keep quiet.

Piled up: piled up.

Ammusato (ammusolito): sulky.

Apai: P.A.I., Italian Africa Police.

Apennicated: dozed off.

Appioppato: supported by weight.

Horny: sensually excited

Arruzzonito: rusty.

Attoppato: shine.

Withered: spoiled.

Fool: treacherous.

Bowler: boxer.

Bump: dent; swelling.

Brecola: stone, lyre.

Calata: pronunciation.

Callara (to ...): at full strength.

Campana (esse in...): be ready.

Cannofiena: swing.

Carrack: push, charge.

Carubba: carabinieri.

Capà: choose.

Caporelli: nipples.

Sub-head: dive.

Castrà: carry via and soldi, peel.

Ciancicà: to stammer.

Chiarina (slept at ...): sleeping outdoors.

Chirichetto: a quarter of wine.

Cica (hold the ...): stay quiet.

Ciufega: disgusting thing.

Coccia: peel

Comare Secca: Death (from Strada Giulia, because in Via Giulia there is the church of Death).

Body: thousand lire note.

Dindarolo: piggy bank.

Dislombito: exhausted.

Be nice: leave.

Farda: point on the body where the jacket ends.

Fardona: well-endowed girl.

Slices: feet.
Ficcà: go well.
Fronna: one hundred bill.
Escapes: run.
Stem: of muscular build.

Gaggio: idiot.
Chalk: traffic policeman in summer uniform.
Giannetta: fresh air.
Giobbà: simulate, cheat.
Joyful: girl.
Grattachecca: crushed ice drink.
Scratching: tickling.
Groncio: tired, weak.

Impappolato: stupid.
Impaturgnato: annoyed.
To charge: to press.
Incassà: to clash.
Incerà: see. (?)
Incollà: to carry oneself on one's shoulders.
Bundled up: full of money.
Ingrain: the same.
Intuzzà: to bump into.
Làllera: glass of wine.
Wash: mock.
Linto and pinto: dressed up.

Mammatrone (prenne me er ...): I'm moved.

Mecca: girl.

Moina: mockery, gazzarra, boasting.

Mollichella: swag.

Neno: old.

Not even the Czechs pay: don't have a penny.

Paccà: to feel.

Lever: spanna.

Parade: wire mesh.

Pecogna: money.

Pedagna (a...): on foot.

Brush: standing dip.

Picchio co la zagaja: spinning top with string.

Piotta: one hundred bill.

Pipinara: bunch of kids.

Wear earrings in your nose: be naive.

Ramata: fence.

Riocà, ariocà: repeat, do it again.

Towing: to find a company.

Sacco (saccata): thousand note.

Santa Calla (annasse a ripone a ...): retire to the hospice.

Sbarellà: to falter.

Sbiellà: to lose one's balance.

Sbolognà: slip away, get away with it; trim.

Sbragalone (breeches at ...): trousers with the crotch at the knees.

Smeared: dismantled, torn.

Scalarola: gate to the gardens.

Scaja: night walker.
Scavicchiato: smidollato, cascante.
Shell: chin.
Seranato: exhausted.
Sercio: pebble.
Sevatica: keep
Sfangà: make it.
Sformà: to feel bad.
Sgamà (svagà): to notice.
Dismantrated: dilapidated, torn.
Smagrà: to make a bad impression.
Smiccià: look.
Smorzà: stop it.
Smucinà: stir, mix.
Furrow: grassy clearing between the sod and the ditch.
Sonà la comparcita: teeth chattering.
Spagheggio: I'm scared.
Fired: joke, exit, bluster.
Spesà: to leave.
Sprangà: give in.
Stozza: begging.
Stramiciato:
Sturbà: to lose consciousness.

The water for the garden is fine for you: business is going well for you.
Treppio: crowd of people.
Tropea: drunk.
Tube: liter of wine.

Urtoso: annoyed.

Zaccagna: small pot; lira

Zagaià: to stammer.

Zanoida: prostitute.

Zella: dirt.

Zeppo: stick.

Other: grembiolino.

Zinna: this.

Slut: prostitute.

APPENDIX

THE WORKING METHOD

The fact that when reading fragments and pages from *A Violent Life* one might think one is faced with fragments or pages from *Ragazzi di vita* is not a coincidence: it means that the paradigm, the Spitzerian sample period, is the same, and therefore stylistically not there is continuity. And if there is no stylistic transformation there will be no internal, psychological and ideological transformation either.

In fact, I conceived three novels at the same time, *Ragazzi di vita*, *A violent life* and *Il Rio della grana* (this title, provisional, perhaps replaced by *The city of God*) in the same months, in the same years and I developed and developed them together. The only difference is that *Ragazzi di vita* is written in full and physically: the other two are not yet: they are written inside and partly laid out (*A violent life* is only two thirds ready). Therefore, while I was writing *Ragazzi di vita*, the other two novels were already set in their structure and partly in their details. *Ragazzi di vita* was supposed to be a sort of, let's say with bad taste, "overture", hinting at a thousand motifs, founding a world as "particular", complete in itself, of the world. The other two novels needed to delve deeper. While in *Ragazzi di vita* what matters is the world of the suburbs and the Roman underclass experienced in the boys, and therefore the protagonist, Riccetto, was not only a fairly defined character, but also a somewhat abstract, somewhat flatus thread. *vocis*, like all pretext-protagonists, in *A violent life* and in *Rio della grana* what matters are the two central characters, Tommasino Puzzilli in the first, Pietro in the second. Two stories that are in a certain way internal, internal as they can be in ordinary children, abandoned on the streets, without a moral world other than, compared to ours, prehistoric, or at another historical level, despite the very intense ideological bombardment, the «*panem et circenes*» of the Christian Democratic and Americanizing bourgeoisie.

The story of Tommasino Puzzilli is an introversion due to the fact that he is a boy who is not handsome, not strong and not healthy: a weak man, in short, who must necessarily be strong, in a world where this is obligatory. He therefore continually tries to assert himself: and we know where we end up on this path: to the pseudo-force of delinquency, of cynicism, of "straightforwardness", as they call it. In this case, Tommasino's desperate tension - who is not delicate, on the contrary, is very vulgar - is external, the story of his different political beliefs: he is fascist, anarchist, Christian Democrat and finally communist. Of course inside, the story is more monotonous; the mechanism that is triggered is always the same, under the influence of external circumstances (his friendship with some MSI thieves makes him a fascist; a certain improvement in his family who had always lived in shacks and hovels and who finally has a small neighborhood outside 'Ina-Case, makes him become a right-thinking and Christian Democrat; finally, tuberculosis and the environment of Forlanini, where there is a strong cell of the PCI, makes him become a communist). For better or worse, in the end, this drive "to assert oneself", "to exist", this ramshackle vital energy, lights up with some confused moral light.

Speaking of Gadda, in «Vie Nuove» I found in this great author different and apparently contradictory types of use of dialect, which I cataloged into four series. The first, I wrote, «is a series of types of dialect use of a Vergaian kind: that is, implying a regression of the author in the environment described, to the point of assuming its most intimate linguistic spirit, incessantly camouflaging it, to the point of making this second nature linguistics a primary nature, with the consequent contamination".

This is the definitive formula, which, while it only partially describes Gadda, describes me entirely. Why this camouflaging linguist selection? To be able to give, as Contini wrote, "an undaunted declaration of love". The sentimental and humanitarian background, it is true, belongs to my prehistory: but, it is said, "our history is the whole of history" and I would add "and also prehistory". I consider my realism an act of love: and my polemic against twentieth-century aestheticism, intimate and para-religious, implies a political stance against the fascist and Christian Democratic bourgeoisie which was its environment and foundation cultural.

For me, there is no external working method: the method is solely stylistic, and therefore internal. There are naturally some facts which, taken in themselves, can suggest the superficial, anecdotal idea of an "applied", "formula" method. In one of their satirical magazines, Lina and the knight Franca Valeri and her collaborators invented a type of writer, the phonetic data of whose surname vaguely correspond to those of mine. This writer (who was actually a writer, played by Valeri) kept two southern servant girls locked in a closet: when he had to work he took them out of the closet and made them "talk". A "magnetophone" operation, therefore, with some slight corrections in the sense of "contaminatio": absolute naturalism corrected by a slight but in its own way absolute "pure stylism". Aside from the comedy of the matter, Valeri hadn't misunderstood at all. Often, if followed, I would be caught in some pizzeria in Torpignattara, Borgata Alessandrina, Torre Maura or Pietralata, while on a sheet of paper I note down idiomatic ways, expressive or lively points, slang lexicons taken first hand from the mouths of « speakers" made to speak on purpose. This, of course, happens on specific occasions. For example, at a certain point in the story one of my characters steals a suitcase and some bags: is there a slang term for suitcase and bag? Of course! Suitcase is called "cricca", bag "bell": stolen goods in general, as well as "dead", are called "riboncia", etc. (instead of saying «etc.», or «things of this kind», in my novel I will always put «and blessed saints» or «and many blessed», if not a less lively «and many beautiful things»). I don't always transcribe this instrumental material at a very low and very particular level directly: I only do it in cases where a difficulty or stylistic necessity arises at the table, while I write all alone. So I leave the part that requires expressiveness blank, and I do my research, usually short and fruitful (I have a friend in Maranella, Sergio Citti, a painter, who so far has never failed to meet my requests, even the most subtle). There is also a generic passion of mine: in this case I write down on my own, perhaps secretly, "brightened" by some sudden and unknown form of heritage. In this case it is a question of reserve material, which in any case I put aside: so as not to have to go down to Maranella in case the aforementioned expressive need arises. At the bottom of the novel's scrapbook I therefore have a nice pile of pages of idiomatic ways, a little lexical treasure.

Thus the "color" of my working method runs out. Everything else happens in the solitude of my room now in a middle-class neighborhood, behind the Janiculum.

The difference between Valeri's character and me is that the relationship with the "speakers" in me was, and is, necessary. Be that as it may: every regression requires something a priori and voluntary. And it is clear that every author who uses a "spoken" language, perhaps even in the natural state of dialect, must carry out this exploratory and mimetic operation of regression - as I mentioned - both in the environment and in the character, that is, in both sociological how psychological. Seen Marxistically, this presents itself as a regression rather than from one cultural level to another, from one class to another.

I feel absolved in this operation from any possible accusation of gratuitousness, or cynicism, or aestheticizing dilettantism for two reasons: the first, of a moral nature (that is, concerning the relationship between me and the particular people of the poor, proletarian or sub-proletarians) is that, in the case of Rome, it was necessity (among other things my own poverty even as an unemployed bourgeois) that made me have the immediate, human, as they say, vital experience of the world that I then described and I am describing. There was no choice on my part, but a kind of compulsion of fate: and since everyone testifies to what they know, I could only testify to the Roman "village". Added to the biographical compulsion is the particular tendency of my eros, which leads me unconsciously, and now with the awareness of unconsciousness, to avoid encounters that cause possible (and even very slight, as experience teaches me) traumas of bourgeois sensitivity, or bourgeois conformism: and to seek the simplest, most normal friendships among the "pagans" (the outskirts of Rome are completely pagan: children and young people barely know who the Madonna is), who live on another cultural level, and in which the ideological bombardment has not yet touched the problems of sex except generically. Therefore - once the sociological necessity has subsided - I continue to necessarily live on the periphery.

The second reason is much more important, so much so that after all I could have also omitted the paragraphs succinctly exposed here of the first.

It is clear that lawfulness is also possible in a momentary, experimental regression from class and high culture, which occurs by "choice", by "will":

I would say that lawfulness is possible even if this occurs for purely aesthetic reasons (if such reasons existed): since, however unrelated, indissoluble from them, there is always at the bottom a documentary fact, a somewhat objective recovery of the world thus explored.

Before using the language of the "speakers" of the Roman outskirts, for similar biographical reasons, I had used another language without literary tradition, the Friulian of Casarsa: and, elsewhere, confessing, I have already described, a posteriori, why then it was bad I knew what the internal reasons were for that linguistic adoption: but, precisely, although the style, despite appearances, was in reality "sublimis" and not "humilis", it obeyed the rules of the most rigorous linguistic selection, it easily moved over every naturalistic data, and ultimately appeared to belong to the area of hermeticism, to the poetics of the Word, with the invention of an absolute language, "for poetry" - however, I don't know if at the very origins of the experience, or if born in a second moment, coexisted with the stylistic fury, in that Friulian, something real, objective, so that the peasant world of Lower Friuli somehow emerged into expression. And it is not for nothing that within that very system of mine - and not by application - a whole section was born that could also be called "committed", given the year, 1947-48, in which it was written: The Coran testament , which is one of the most extensive and perhaps most successful parts of my book of Casarsi verses.

Today the two components of my inspiration, the sensual-stylistic one, and the, let's say, naturalistic-documentary one, with a political background, are, I believe, I hope, better balanced. In descending to the level of a world historically and culturally inferior to mine - at least according to a rational gradation, which, irrationally, is absolutely contemporary with it, not to say more advanced, in its pure vitalism, in which history "is made" – in immersing myself in the dialectal and slang world of the "borough" I bring with me a conscience that justifies my operation no more or less than it justifies, for example, the operation of a party leader: who, like me, he belongs to the bourgeois class, and distances himself from it, momentarily repudiating its needs, to understand and make his own the needs of the proletarian or at least popular class. The difference is that this consciously political operation, in the party man, foresees or prepares the action: in me, a writer, it can only become linguistic mimesis, testimony, denunciation, internal organization of the narrative structure according to a Marxist

ideology, internal light . However, never literature supporting edifying, prospective action. Optimism and a priori hope are always superficial data: I know well that Freedom and Justice do not mean the happiness of moral fullness: and it would be a deception to promise the latter as a corollary, a mechanical result of the change in structures.

From «Open City», 7-8, April-May 1958.

THE SPEAKERS

The beloved toponyms.

If I were to break down the charge summarized in the name of one of the towns of this stalemate, of this confinement, which for me has become the area on the right bank of the Tagliamento with Casarsa as its centre, it is certain that the weakest accent would fall on the wonder of to see the mystery of the place so beautifully translated into the mystery of the name. My admiration for the unknown Celtic, Slavic or Romance poets who are credited with inventing the names of my love colony would, however touching, be a somewhat secondary fact. In fact, here is the meaning of the name Castions in this passage from my diary: «... what seduced us was the idea of the audience, of the rustic audience, of the atmosphere of heavy and distracted love arising from all those young people and boys, who during the intervals sweetened their turbulence with certain splendors of hair, with certain attentions of glances..." or, a little outside the circle of local intimacy, tainted by unbridled confidence, here is the meaning of Caorle: "... Perhaps finally, and above all, it was that phallic gilding that a foreigner like me smells in every negligible fact or presence of unknown places, that collective, indigenous, almost folkloric Eros that breaks and refracts like a prism in the crowd of unknowns dressed in celebration", or the meaning of Villotta: "When I arrived in Villotta, what a surprise! It was a fresh new country, a California country. I listened: a dialect was spoken that wasn't Venetian although it had a streak of it: it was the funeral mask of Friulian; and meanwhile I looked around, wondering if by chance I didn't still see the dove of the flood, a little tired, still flying around."

In any case, my candid glottological passion originates elsewhere than in glottology... Generally I don't enjoy the descriptive toponym even if it has that equivalence with reality whereby the physical weight passes from matter to expression: Fuessis, tortuous and rich place of ditches. After all, this is the process of great georgic poetry: the highest Virgil is here: «... liquitur et Zephyrus putris se gleba resolvit» and it is a fact of translation, the absolute, magical translation, the one that makes the object a equivalent

name, a new subject. The suddenness of the toponym extracts from the untranslatable physiognomy of a place just enough to identify it in an essential way, miraculously operating the connection of analogy and almost of the automatic process, if we accept the presence, I don't know, of an agricultural and climatic: similar verbal invention, identifying it personifies the place. The transparency of the air, the fold of the land, the indefinable design of the coppice forest or the canal are concentrated in the word, drinking the life of the definition. But the town is an inhabited place: there the physiognomy, face of an immense prism, ramification that is lost in the darkness of marriages between relatives, of the climate, of the production of the soil, and spills outwards into those dimensions of love that they are the hair, the mouths, the chests, the wombs (the body as a statue of precious material, self-object, flower) the physiognomy falls into the place, in the thickest and most massive of untranslatability, which only the name has the power to dryly extract into the light.

The Slavic etymology of Casarsa is perhaps the last nucleus of that mysteriousness that is necessary for a place to hold on to itself, and for unresolved loyalty to become the symptom of an incurable disease. The town of Casarsa is now deteriorated for me almost to the point of sentimental annihilation; its people, if family by family have lost the alarming lack of references to the inexplicable and reasonless grace of smiles and gestures, if every charming irregularity of physiognomy is reflected in the ridiculous decays of elderly relatives, no longer invites me to attempt relationships tender: the Casarsa festivals have in our memory the boring ringing of bells and the faded smiles of peers, who once again believe in the help of wine in the intricate thread of shared drunkenness. However, an inexhaustible remainder of mystery remains, which has crystallized in the name: Casarsa. When I pronounce it I concentrate in a single word the legend of my childhood, of the years in which I did not know how to speak: precisely of the time, therefore, in which the magical Slavic settlers founded these places in the name, and the pre-Romance and Romance forest still covered a large part of this bank of the Tagliamento. But even then I was expressing, in certain feelings of mine that were intimately colored by something special, what I would later become, with all the affective and poetic implications. I remember, for example, my little figure as a six-year-old child, during a storm, while I looked with my cousins at the flooded street and the walls of the house opposite ours stained

with damp so as to suggest to us the image of a bear and a fish. . But that childish emotion, due to the last dewy showers of rain, to the alpine smell of dinners and of the water drunk from the sewers, of the fleeting gusts of breath, is identical to certain detailed anxieties that grip me now, at twenty-five: the conscience and boredom may now have stripped Casarsa of its colors, but there is an indelible tint, which, as the years pass, becomes increasingly black in the Casarsa of the past. There is, beyond the line of my memory, this obsessive image of a damp stain. Already in '42, at just twenty years of age, I wrote in one of my collections of verses in Casarsese words like these (which, in my conscience, were barely differentiated from the humid feeling that suggested them to me): ... *pai vecius murs – and pai pras scurs* (for the old walls and the dark meadows: an expression which, more or less varied, returns insistently throughout the libretto, almost setting the tone for the musical landscape of my time as a child).

But if I try to open this perception of humidity like a fan, if I enter into it like a tenaciously scented labyrinth of wet willows, mud, coal and fields, little by little the shapeless stain thins out like a fog, and I enter the nakedness of humidity, until I come close to that Truth that has been hidden from us for so many years and which would reveal to me the meaning of Casarsa. But the places and times in which all my lost time fell are already emerging in my memory. What was I doing on March 12, 1929? Here is a question that I could never answer except implicitly, if not provoking in me the two or three uncertain, unstable and suffused images of an unspeakable poetic enchantment, which arise around my damp and petrified impression in the color of the evening grass. I see the edge of a ditch lapped by very light, gray water, all full of the coolness of the sky which is reflected in it upside down and crossed by black clouds; or a peeling and crumbling wall with the little road that borders it and two or three tufts of dark green and diseased grass. Then little by little the landscape changes, becomes larger and more precise: it is a house of stones without plaster and blackened by smoke in front of which a small bank of very green and thick grass extends: in fact in the corner between the main wall and the projection of the chimney breast and the kitchen sweep blackens a motionless puddle, whose melancholic fixity is occasionally disturbed by the splash of a trickle of black water which falls from the bucket through a pipe made in the uneven wall, and ending with an overturned tile. All the remaining mystery is there, the meaning of Casarsa is summed up there. Having reached this point I

stop, or if anything, I regress: the fog begins to form again, I think of an imprecise sunset in which the complexions of the sky dazzle the streets now without light, immersed in an abandonment full of kids racing on bicycles with milk buckets, while some old man pushes a wheelbarrow, and some worker goes home in his blue overalls along the old grass and the blackened walls. I have often repeated this excursion into the patch of damp that occupies my memory, and, having arrived at the black puddle shimmering under the rainy sky (which still exists today, in a village on the edge of the countryside) I return back, arid, to the Casarsa of consciousness.

Stefano.

In San Floreano, one evening a few years ago, I was presented with, with greater clarity than usual, a stupendous interplay of relationships between my peer, in full and fragrant youth, an object of immediate nostalgia, and the evening world of his village. .

The boy sat on a pile of gravel along the side of the road and his bicycle lay next to it, its spokes glistening. The dark green air reverberated around him, inside the ditch, between the fences, in the foliage of the trees, the yellow and too bright lights of the rainy and barely clearing vespers.

On the curve, at the top of the pole, the small electric lamp was already shining sharply against the green and purple of the countryside and the walls and also against the yellow of the sunset.

But the relationships of colors and shapes were nothing of that human matter, of that boy I mean, that a light shell, an all too elegant accessory - they could be understood by that heart in a rarefied and confused way, as purely natural data in the meantime. and then secondary. Another feeling was pressing within him: the expectation of his companions still at dinner. And this first restlessness that kept him a little outside the normal course of life and polluted the comfort due to the evening holiday could be mixed with the fresh sensation of wearing a dress that was not exactly festive, but clean in its elegant weekday roughness, and of emanating a warm soapy smell from limbs burned by a day's work under the sun, and therefore burning with a calm fervor. He felt the neglected strength within himself expand from his forms and his attitude as a slightly ironic and provocative

carelessness or as a disposition towards virile cheerfulness. Furthermore, once the companions to whom he was linked by a conventional and solid friendship had left the house washed and changed like him, the disturbing uncertainty remained about how to spend the evening: perhaps he had already prepared his plans, given the accurate clothing and the bicycle ready at his side. But would he have agreed with his teammates? Meanwhile, in the nearby houses where the lamps shone humbly from the open windows, the sounds of dinners resounded, and, beyond the shadow of the porticoes, in the courtyards invaded by the tired light, the girls could be glimpsed walking briskly from the kitchen door to the of the stable, or on the steps of the gallery... Who can imagine what difficulties or what frivolities the boy's imagination encountered in following, with his eye trained by the most heated of curiosities, the red of the skirts or the beating of the hooves? Certainly they were thoughts that he despised in their state of pure excitement and naive attention, and therefore he transformed them in his thoughts into feelings normalized by the common, collective and without scandal language of his companions and elders.

These were therefore the concrete, ritual and unpoetic things that he let enter into the awkward circle of his mental language, and sank into the indistinct and hasty heartbeats; but what poeticity would not have pervaded his interior speech, full of fractures and leaps, incomplete, yet dissolved in its conventional smoothness with sudden tones of a happy child, if it had been possible to transcribe it in its entirety and with capillary realism on a page written in shorthand speed of a thought never turned to itself and soaring in an apparently simple yet so tortuous flight? What is more poetic than this thinking of a young farmer who without escaping, even in interior silence, the formulas of the language, pushes himself towards the space of the purely thinkable, deluding himself into adhering to the pretexts of any of his evenings and instead risking to get lost in the inventions of a language finally troubled by one's own hidden aspirations and sentimental vices? And then this is the part of himself that he does not know, although it is so rooted in the indistinct, active and purely vital matter of his environment: it is this corporeity of his feelings, this pulp of youthful life that he ignores and whose weight he feels humiliating, a sign of ignorance, and therefore confusion, non-participation, discontent.

There has never been a happy poor man.

But no envy is more acute than that felt for a poor man who seems happy.

That boy from the San Floreano curve was perhaps Stefano: in fact when we became friends he told me that he had known me by sight for many years. One Sunday this summer he was in bed, and I had thought of going to visit him, and keeping him company at that very hour in which, certainly and punctually, like two restless constellations burning with special light, he and I would meet on the table in a tavern to play brunette or in one of those ballrooms in Casarsa, Arzene, Cordovado or Ligugnana where the chanson de geste has its moments of most splendid and nostalgic passion: but now how to start a conversation on the bed of Stephen? how to introduce an unaware and incompetent reader to the point of blindness to all those presuppositions from secular life which required, without even raising the question again, that Stefano did not lie in his bed in his room, but in that of his parents? How can I explain my convulsive emotion that was almost suspended outside of me, in an absolute time? The bed granted by mutual agreement by the family to the sick Stefano, because it was the best in the house and the most presentable to a doctor or a visitor, had mattresses stuffed with corn husks: and although clean and shiny it showed with desolating innocence how ancient and his own misery is profound. But my emotion (due above all to having already imagined, behind the Sunday Stefano, a similar bed, a similar room and a similar house, with almost perfect precision, so that now, verifying what I had guessed, I almost felt myself entering the mechanism of deprivation to which that boy was physically and daily condemned), my emotion took a more tender turn, if I thought that with that bed and that furniture lost in the vast room, almost an attic with the floor smelling of bleach, the family had been born of Stefano, when his father and mother, coming from Gruaro, and therefore partly alloglots, had begun their married life and, at the same time, their poor legend and their ignored decline.

Stefano's mother was leaning on the edge of the bed, speaking with grace and liveliness, assisted by the warmth of her black eyes and the unconscious habit of folding her head with the gesture of an embarrassed but not shy child, and, as she spoke, she covered herself the mouth with the swollen hand (another source of emotion), certainly to keep his alloglot errors at least partially hidden, certain sweet Venetian mis instead of the Friulian jo, certain sweet ths which, by replacing the voiced s, gave the words I don't

know What a childish intonation. After all, how many things about Stefano were explained by his mother! There was in both the same ability to place themselves in a clear relationship, to always keep themselves in the light. And then his mother's origin and her different speech had provided Stefano with his main quality: a discovered sense of language, which, among other things, differentiated him from his peers and isolated him in terms of a more individualized personality. . He was the only one who, when speaking, gave novelty to the words, underlining them with the intonation of his voice, especially in mocking passages, or who exaggerated in using certain particularly significant words; when, however, the speech did not vibrate and was purely explanatory, then he used a less elementary syntax than the others, in which he inserted the consecrated phraseological ways like blocks of pure matter and with the same naturalness with which a farmer automatically uses a tool. However, even in the full institutionality of the Friulian dialect of San Giovanni, or rather of the suburb of San Floreano, he often found a way to invent a connection or a juxtaposition, which he was the first to enjoy, noting it with a voice raised by wonder .

That evening, supported by his mother, he spoke to me at length about the Crallers, his masters, and above all about the death of Pierino Craller: a death that was a masterpiece of its kind. In fact, in addition to a heartache, a certainty of death well known to the patient, and a family decline that was reflected in the underground world of the tenants, there was also some chatter, some intrigue, a will. In short, after Pierino Craller died, his ghost was feared in the family, and Stefano was called to keep him away. It was at this point that he, telling us about certain noises heard during the night in that foreign room, declared that he was sceptical, that he did not believe in an afterlife; that is, he was "incredible". Since it was the first time that I had heard this attribute in this sense (and that I had heard him making, at the same time, a statement of disbelief, in such a light and heroic way), all my trepid alarm bells rang within me, and I felt lightning-fast in the imagination of a San Floreanese linguistic and sentimental community, of which Stefano was certainly one of the most gifted inventors, a figure already ready to live in the light of his novel.

One day in the Culòs tavern, while we were playing cards, a metal cigarette case appeared on the table, coming out of Stefano's clear pockets - it seemed to be made of old silver, minutely and naively worked with dense ornamental weaves at the edges, so that in the in the center there remained a

space of a few square centimeters of smooth surface on which I glimpsed, at the first casual glance, something like a pink and humid vespers. I took the cigarette case in my hand, while Stefano told me about its origin with his voice rising in tone and a vein of melodic and dry emotion due to the fortuitous way in which he had come into possession of it, I stared at him curiously, having already potentially entered into a condition of poetic heartbeat. That pink vesper was nothing other than a photograph of Stefano, firmly set in the garland of minute silver festoons and lightly tinged with pink, which, combined with the vague weariness, gave the whole thing that delicate, sensual and nostalgic color that it had always tinged in the the image of Casarsa is in my memory. In this pink of a withered flower, of a half-extinguished sky or of a slightly bright complexion, as if behind a tense and humid veil, the photographed face of Stefano appeared, but of a Stefano from two or three years earlier, still a teenager, florid, calm and melancholy, with his cheeks and lips softened by his childish plumpness, which also made his nose less sharp and his blue glass and insensitive gaze quieter. That face of a boy already tall in stature, who offered himself to the camera with the distance of a flower and with the barely shadowed awareness of a presence of himself in his proud beauty of age and in his intrepidity as a neo-initiate to the systems of envied life of adults, clearly evoked in me in an instant the novel of a creature barely alive to be endowed with the stupendous attributions of sex, and operating in the circle of the insurmountable resistances of environmental institutions, yet capable of carrying out its own tenuous cycle, never to be traced again, and similar, in its lightning-fast, fatal fragility, to the mark that a shooting star leaves in the summer sky.

There was in that almost childish image of hers all the clarity that I would later find in her mother, as a source, and in her transparent language. In fact, how can we explain elsewhere that in her physical presence she is so light-hearted in abiding by the rules of honor of the language of her community without fearing to vary it with personal and risky inventions? The crossing and the transplant, giving Stefano a particular and different appearance (the straight, hard and somewhat archaic line of the nose and forehead, the smooth complexion and those two irregular and burning eyes in their opacity) forced him to a kind of introspection which, in turn, then pushed

him to fill the gap of diversity that had opened between him and his peers with an expressive effort.

Naturally, although he tends to be outside of it, Stefano remains very faithful to the convention, whose rules he has learned, better than the others, which cannot be transgressed unless at the risk of a dishonor the very thought of which is rejected by conscience. The shame of being different. Moreover, the very physiognomy of the San Florea area, the physiognomy common to the two or three most important families that make up the hundred inhabitants of the village (the Querins, with a florid appearance, sweetly bright and soft, but with a touch of unscrupulousness in arching of the nose, and the Martins with nostrils and eyes of ancient peoples and long woody bodies) was breathed and absorbed by Stefano and his brothers, so much so that they also fall within the interpretation of the Sanfloresane type, fusing in that sense of softness, of slightly abundant and laughing flesh, oval in shape and elaborate, gold-streaked hair, which sums up the youth of that place for me.

Pieri Querin on Ascension Day.

I don't know in what burning warmth, in what impulses blunted and depressed by shyness, in what floating of sentimental ghosts imbued with the modesty of adolescence, Pieri immerses, hides and suddenly illuminates his body.

The Querin's fleshy and antique pink cheeks, now reddened by the first suns, the aquiline nose, the two lips resembling rose petals not only in color but also in the uncertain and humid shape, and finally the brown hair darting streaks of gold along the edge of the wave from the forehead to the ears and neck, with the florid movement of the partisan hairstyle, make Pieri Querin a pure, local element of his environment, and, unlike Stefano, they still burden him with elementary naivety.

When I saw him for the first time, we probably already knew each other, because he greeted me; he couldn't have been more than fifteen. He was in Casarsa, in the corridor of the Town Hall, in front of the dusty square with his little winged Victoria at whose feet, at that moment, there was no one.

He was leaning with one shoulder against the door jamb and his bare legs crossed. Against his dazzling blue shorts, not of a child but of a young man, his hand stood out awkwardly, clutching some sheets of paper, while the other was immersed in his pocket. He remained silent in shame after the greeting, feeling his own shape like an unbearable encumbrance, a barrier harshly raised against the clear and impetuous current of his kindness. Suddenly he moved away from the door and ran towards a nearby shop, where he disappeared. However, he couldn't stay hidden there forever, and after a while he retraced his steps to be embittered, against the door jamb, by the shyness that ruined his fresh joy. However, when I said a few words to him, he replied in a somewhat hoarse but confident voice, happy to talk to me about himself.

I also remember another evening that year, when, going towards San Vito, I saw him alone, sitting on the parapet of the bridge in the cyclamen-coloured twilight; he watched me go by, with his knee wrapped in his arms and his cheek on his knee; immediately, recognizing me, he regained his composure, and as he greeted me he had a look in which a light of gratitude overcame his shyness.

So, like Stefano, I also have a fresh and ancient image of Pieri, from a few years earlier, in the time of his adolescence, to which I can add the present one.

In the days when my friendship with the youth of San Floreano was born, Pieri, originating from that circle but presenting himself to my eyes with particular qualities of tenderness, almost reached the point of humiliating himself in a kind of excessive admiration towards me, for which he always sought to be close to me, to sit next to me in the tavern or the cinema, to get my attention, my smile and my silence. Once upon a time this might have filled me with joy, given me, however fleetingly, a fortunate image of myself; but then I had to realize that I was always ruining those too delicate friendships through my excesses, and thus learn the most difficult of hypocrisies: to spare myself. So I let Pieri stage his sweet and shy carousels almost without noticing him; I maneuvered secretly in the dim light from which his nostalgic presence emerged and I maneuvered so as not to lose him: how could I have withstood another betrayal, even if unconscious, and

indeed precisely for this reason? Ascension Day was the most beautiful of our friendship.

In the morning, still excited and in love with each other, we from Casarsa found ourselves at the curve of the avenue with those from San Floreano, drinking in each other's eyes and in our festive clothes, the trust of those who love each other and a kind of feverish cheerfulness, almost a residue of the ardor that the night had failed to extinguish and which still vibrated in the fresh light of the morning. Stefano came out of his kitchen with the accordion over his shoulder; we formed the company and set off, singing, towards San Vito.

The boys, still a little drunk from the night before, felt that the joyful energy of each of them was multiplied by their number, and this forced them to proudly and loudly demonstrate their health and their violence.

The square of San Vito was already full of silent men, tenant farmers, sharecropper laborers, with their black and gray Sunday clothes, around which the clear and burning light of June played. The boys, who were joined by those from Ligugnana with a shout of joy, always linked together by the subtle ardor that was like the thread of a fuse ready to explode, had entered the cinema hall and found in the middle of the crowd the space for what was already their gang. In front of the enemy flag they had a superb and almost threatening demeanor but permeated by a quiet joy.

It was a heroic morning: their protest of whistles and shouts, in the end, suggesting the possibility of a doubt about what had been demonstrated with such officiality, had made their opponents furious more out of disappointment at having missed an opportunity, yet another, of unconditional and respectful credulity, than for the provocation of their revolt. The whistles, unheard of, underlined absurdities that others considered sacred: and the air of the room was transforming, burning in an empty and hallucinating tension, and reverberated by a drama for which no one was any longer responsible. The windows had suddenly been opened, and the light that had flooded into the interior already seemed to belong to the realm of memory. The insults of the opponents, the responses of the boys, the raised fists and their slow exit, seemed like pre-arranged and wonderfully remote events. It was just outside the door, in the small crowded courtyard full of bicycles, that, assailed by the reproaches of a small landowner, Pieri spoke.

I don't remember his few poor words: it is only certain that he spoke, hot with indignation, erect, bold, innocent.

He was immediately silenced in a humiliating way, but, although full of unexpressed pain, confidence and ardor continued to flame in his silence. Pieri Querin was a heart that remained a heart, a fruit with all its warm and living mystery, a presence expressed only in the language of objects: therefore his dedication was unconditional. He could have been the purest of martyrs, there was no doubt: if in front of a crowd, hypothetically exasperated to the point of fury, he had stood firm and erect as on the morning of the day of the Ascension of Saint Vitus, drawing his courage from an uncultivated and possessed chest, from a natural goodness, from a dream dreamed outside of himself in the heart of his absolutely loved environment, and had not hesitated to let the flesh, the smile and the eyes of his relatives die in his unreflected body, the Sunday brightness of his house, the tools scattered in his courtyard, the willows of the curve of San Floreano, which in him had found a life of pure equivalence.

A boy from Casarsa and one from San Lorenzo.

The kitchen with the red brick floor, two or three poor pieces of furniture, the showcase full of moving photographs; the party dress and the work dress are strictly distinct; the meals consumed sitting on the hearthstone, the work of the fields divided and concretized in closed images (he who stands on the cart driven by his younger brother pumps the blue sulphate along the rows of vines, he who returns home along the provincial road lying on top of the enormous pile of hay piled up on the cart; he who towards evening, once the work is finished, washes himself at the pump while his younger brother waters the calves...) all these facts are for me blocks of marble material, free from imperfection, anxiety and of discontent, and they build his life as if it were necessary and natural, not as if it were, and as it really is, a continuous sacrifice that humiliates him and burns him with the unexpressed aspirations and vicious discontents of which he, like the dragonfly of his I fly, all I know is fatigue. Against the compactness of the person of this ideal peer, Stefano or Pieri or a hundred others, my sympathy often clashes in vain, does not enter, does not cross the limit: if there is still

an image of myself in him from which I am further detached due to regret, I only partially recognize her, and besides, nostalgia has already covered her in mystery. But it is precisely through the connivance and complicity of a peer that I can get closer to the center without form or explanation but burning with life that is in his chest, and feel the birth of those thoughts of his which are the equivalent of the sun of the asphalt, of the fields fresh and deserted, the colors of the vibrant square.

Now, if the internal plot of the duration of an episode of the novel of one of my peers is so complex, captured right within him, and translated into a language which, in addition to adhering to real pretexts, such as the language conceived by the young farmer, and bordering on the pure imagination suggested by sentimental anxieties, also serves to imply all the infinite and moving assumptions, the heartbreaking habits, what tangle of difficulties would I encounter if I wanted to freeze in a written measure the duration of an episode, perhaps lightning-fast and barely detectable in the plot of a noon or a vespers, of which the protagonist is none other than a child?

One evening, passing through the main street of Casarsa, I accidentally glanced into the interior of a house. It was May. There was the old color of the bells in the air, mixed with the blue of the dinners and the festive steps of the children, who gathered in front of the church, and of the workers returning from the Arar fields.

At the thresholds of the houses, in front of the doors, some old men were already sitting in the worn and peaceful after-dinner halo. And along the state road, every now and then, a car would unravel the faint explosions of its engine, almost jamming up around it in its run, the happy noises of the town that was stunned by the evening peace. So what was that ten-year-old boy doing in there alone in the middle of the kitchen? With one hand he held a mulberry branch and with the other he tore off the leaves with rapid and silent strokes of the billhook. Over his head shone a light bulb, with a white plate, faint and faint because the light of the day was still intense; along the walls up to the small hearth, mulberry fronds were piled up, more black than green, forming a very fresh hedge around the lamp and the boy who was brandishing the billhook.

In San Lorenzo another evening, as I was passing by on my bicycle, I heard an unusual and high-pitched bell ringing on my left at the end of the

clearing before the little bridge. I turned, running, and saw on the roof of the little pink church, silhouetted against the shiny sky and some enamel clouds, the figure of a boy with his legs spread; bent over, he was wildly shaking a bell hanging from a stone and wrought iron support on the ridge of the roof.

His childish gestures, awkward, and not without a funny impertinence, were imprinted black against the silvery screen of the sky. Below, in the clearing, his companions reveled in the adventure, and all of San Lorenzo was deafened by the furious and bitter ringing of the bells.

For the boy with the billhook in his hand, under the lamp, closed in the faded kitchen, I thought before anything else of his ability, with amazement, seeing him now so entered into human habits even though he still bore the very clear in his limbs and gestures 'impressiveness not only of a recent initiation but even of a recent entry into the world. The infantile tenderness, so close to the tenderness of the maternal flesh and almost of the earth itself, was already leavened by a virile attitude: if it was not rather a form of modesty and defense now tinged with a certain irony towards one's own person which made his deliberately slightly funny gestures. Of course it was clear that he was upset about something, about one of the unspeakable things that are starting to happen to children in the game of that existence of which they are now part with the competence and almost the right to judge, to feel offended, to meditate on revenge, always within the family, between the hearth, the field and the church. In the empty kitchen, however, he felt, above all, that someone was missing: probably his mother. Perhaps this was why she offended the little boy and made him tear up the leaves with those decisive blows of the billhook. After all, the evening, which inside the kitchen, on the leaves and on the boy's face was so naked and sad, outside in the street, on the roofs, on passers-by breathed its blues as if drunkenly until they exploded in extreme tranquility, in nuances that trembled beyond the bends and the gardens, subdued repercussions of a happiness that expanded into the sky.

So it was easy to suppose that that evening, he kept the boy's mother out for some work in the garden or on the canal, or to chat with the other women, leaving him alone and worried in the sad kitchen.

As for the boy who was ringing the bells of San Lorenzo on the roof of the church, I felt in him almost only a thread of real life, as if he were nothing more than a black drawing sketched against the sky. However, despite the distance which made him almost non-existent, his rough behavior excited by the unexpectedness of the adventure and his somewhat clumsy and cheerful audacity were enough to suggest that that episode of his childhood was due to a a little more imaginative than that of his companions, even if made up of the same touching and reckless vitality. And it was in fact in the hearts of all his companions grouped in the square that his heart was refracted and that I sought him out as if he shared the common San Lorenzo health with such ease that he was not distinguished from it.

Landscape of the environmental novel.

From Casarsa to San Floreano, just two kilometers away, one could verbally fix at least four different nuances when pronouncing a sentence or a question: nuances blocked in my memory, untranslatable, but essential to be able to follow that thread, that local genius - perhaps no longer linguistic, but physical and loving - which in my imagination takes the shape almost of a precious stream channeled into the rocky and golden solitudes of the chests, throats or hair of those who live along the road from Casarsa to San Floreano. In Casarsa - but here too it will be necessary to specify: in the old Casarsa, with its dozen decrepit sixteenth-century houses, whose portico, which leads into those areas which have aged over the generations, from the tectonic mass of internal vegetable gardens, vegetable gardens, stables, enclosures, stone walls, not infrequently displays in the center the soft blues or black colors of some crudely Renaissance painter - we speak a solid and gray Friulian still intact and exemplary in its archaism. This Casarsese is spoken by old families of small landowners, in which marriages between relatives have not been rare, and who by tradition are attached to the church: this explains on the one hand the survival of certain otherwise inexplicable traditions in this road crossroads and can on the other part of justifying the sensation of those who detect in this speech something like a gray smell of incense, a motionless Sunday boredom, an echo of liturgical choirs sung in the dim light of the apse by young people and elderly people

all combed according to Catholic tradition, with the line partly and the high tuft on the wooden and irregular faces.

Beyond the station, along the long and squalid avenue with a frank language that unites the two towns, you enter San Giovanni. What joy, if not always expressed certainly always suspended in the air of San Giovanni! What a continuous possibility of lucky encounters with companies inclined towards the warmest and loudest camaraderie! There are certain summer evenings in which, after having crossed three or four villages by bicycle, you happen to pass through San Giovanni and hear yourself in all its serene expanse of lights, of songs in a low voice, of noises lost in their vibrating resonances within an atmosphere of dust, of dew, the genius of the village summer. There is no village that can compare to San Giovanni for freshness of inspiration in assembling groups of friends in the shadows of the large square, in populating the streets, in raising sudden cries from some vegetable garden lost in the warmth in evoking song motifs mentioned from afar in chorus by companies gathered at the exact point so that their echo reaches the town full of nostalgia without rancor, like a glittering silver drawing on the edge of the village. After all, at every hour of the day and in every season, as soon as you enter Colle, you can breathe an air of cheerful novelty and a willingness to break away from weekday habits: the nostalgia for Sunday and the freshness of the holiday reigns perennially. The echo of laughter, of challenges, of fists beating the brunette, never disappears from you.

In this warm soundscape, even on days of winter frost, in which the wind rubs the streets, the walls until the whiteness of their living skin is exposed to the dreamy sun, the figures of the novel stand out, barely distinguishable from each other. the other and from a heavy and golden collective soul that fades and wrinkles from village to village, from farmhouse to farmhouse. And how this soul finds a way to materialize in large images, in living verses, through holidays, Sundays, rosaries, seasonal work in the countryside, common evening habits, but in such a way that the anonymity of peasant life burns of such nostalgia as to be unmistakable - thus also the people of the speakers who experience the same freshness and the same warmth of their country, lost in it as in their depths, acquire sudden transparencies of personal life, when, appearing within the duration of a

episode of their unconscious romance, there is almost a friction between them and the environment. Whether these boys or young men or girls are Friulian and not Venetian, Sangiovese and not Casarsesi, from Borgo Marano and not from Runcis, appears clearly from the relationship in which they place themselves with the presence of the landscape or the weekday and festive habits of the town: the shades of heartbeats are infinite. Every random fact, every glance thrown around, thus takes shape in the composure and finiteness of a poetic episode.

From the topographic-sentimental legend of Friuli.

Always living in the presence of himself, at the tip of the sword, and being enchanted by the life, blocked in closed and wonderfully nostalgic episodes, of his country, was perhaps due to his being partly foreign.

The noble Ravenna blood of his father (in his imagination: an old palace in the heart of Ravenna, worn and faded as in an old print, and then, behind a quick and heartfelt vision of the sea - Porto Corsini -, an interior, red and melancholic in its nineteenth-century splendor, where an old countess of his remote relative converses with Carducci) had come to merge with the Casarsese blood of the Colussi (in turn, in the imagination: an old village in the country, gray and immersed in the most deaf half-light of rain, barely populated by antiquated figures of peasants and stunned by the timeless sound of the bell).

But his grandmother, his mother's mother, came from Casale Monferrato: a Piedmont painted in bright pink, like in the Atlas of his childhood, which wrapped the immobile events of his grandmother's family in a fiery and precious shell: a house of shelter, a dance party, his young grandmother doing her hair, a house emptied, enlarged and blackened by poverty. But from the hills of Monferrato, which he had never seen, a green and serene breeze blew into his life, preserved as if artificially in a memory with no further function, which had survived. It was at this point, when he thought of the name Monferrato, a warlike name, which then merged with some iron feudal history - learned by chance and with happy pride at the Gymnasium - that Poland presented itself to his now traditional imagination. Her mother's great-grandmother was in fact a Polish Jew - from whom her mother had

inherited the name of Susanna, married and brought to Friuli by one of her ancestor who was a soldier of Napoleon. The Poland that so automatically and happily appeared in his boyish eyes was of a mouse-grey colour, and was all tinged with Risorgimento colors and music: suddenly it was torn apart and in its center the old image of his great-great-grandfather was formed, who kills his horse in the middle of a burning expanse of snow, rips open his belly and crawls inside to protect himself from the deadly cold.

*** The Tagliamento descends vertically from Carnia to the Adriatic, dividing the Friulian plain in half; the Resurgence line, which roughly corresponds to the Sacile-Udine railway line, intersects with the Tagliamento near Casarsa, so that the Friulian plain is divided in four sectors, four right angles of that round corner in the center of which Casarsa is located: Lower and Upper Eastern Friuli, and Lower and Upper Western Friuli. The center of Casarsa is somewhat moved to the south-west but from this base it was possible to cycle around all four sectors very comfortably. By now his topographical expertise was widespread. But the fjord configuration of the borders between Veneto and Friuli, the islets, the peninsulas, the rocks, the bays, the beaches, the lagoons and the linguistic promontories, gave that plain, superficially uniform in its blue brightness, such a variety of nuances and traffic jams that would drive an obsessed linguist like him crazy.

In Valvasone (five kilometers above Casarsa, along the Tagliamento) and in Malafiesta (about fifteen kilometers south of Casarsa, still along the Tagliamento) an almost identical Friulian was spoken: well, having arrived one Sunday, for the first time, in Malafiesta, he he stopped by very often to greet young people and boys, believing them to be his friends from Valvasone. The similarity of types was wonderful. He had observed the same fact between the Bannia-Fiume group and the Gruaro-Giais-Cinto group: the speech was almost identical, characterized by the sound *th*, a phenomenon that he had noticed in the dialects in the mature phase of Venetization (the Ladin substratum was precisely recognizable for that *th* sound transformed into a deaf *z*, for example in Montebelluna), and the faces, the bodies, the tone of voice, the cheerfulness, the inspiration were almost identical.

In western Friuli, especially Basso, it was possible in ten minutes by bicycle to go from one linguistic area to another more archaic than fifty years, or a century, or even two centuries. Common habits had leveled the life of all those countries, also given the absolute convenience of communications and the absolute lack of natural divisions, and yet, intimately linked to the language there was a physical diversity, a different smell of life. Immersed in these different smells, a young man from Bannia or one from Malafiesta had the same curiosities and obeyed the same mechanism of life fixed in stupendous patterns, to which they, the happy extroverts, adapted with suffering and ineptitude, or with skill and carefreeness. , which suspended them in a climate of epic love. But why was the young man from Bannia blond, massive and friendly like the one from Gruaro? Perhaps when the young people of Valvasone and Malafiesta had diphthongized the circumflex vowels, removed the s from the plurals, pronounced the sibilants with th, they would have become blond, and would have kissed differently? However, he knew that behind the speech there was the type, and in the type the village youth found his freest and most heartfelt seductions.

*** As a boy he got drunk on the Atlas; and although he preferred to lose himself in the intense blue of the Pacific or in the decal pink of Australia and Polynesia, closed in the enchanting network of parallels and meridians, it was nevertheless not uncommon for him to decide to leaf through the Atlas until he reached the figure of Italy, and there he avidly sought the little circles of the cities that were dear to him. He then felt cruelly offended that Bologna, where he was born, was not marked with the beautiful irregular square of Rome, Milan or Genoa; but on the other hand he was very satisfied to see that little Casarsa, albeit with a minimal ring, was marked in the center of Friuli at the intersection of the thin red threads of the railway lines. The mechanism of those satisfactions of his, which remained clear in his memory, consisted in recognizing as an emblem a reality of which he was truly a witness. Wasn't Casarsa's little ring, with the four red eyelashes of the railway, a translation of that enormous and humid Casarsa where he, as a child, existed? Translation, and therefore game, entertainment, miracle.

Having entered his first strange youth, the Atlas mania transformed into a kind of romantic passion for the landscape, from which his bicycle rides and his exciting discoveries were born. One of these first discoveries was Valvasone. It was on a rainy day in 1936. Under a sky of bitumen, and a dripping countryside, shiny as nickel, he arrived in Valvasone almost in a trance, and immediately saw, behind the moat, silent, the castle walls, scattered with small red and blue shutters and pots of geraniums on the windowsills. Having then entered the town from the western gate, near the castle, after about fifty meters he suddenly turned and saw in front of him, grey, black, emerald green, the most chaste landscape on earth. The tower, with its pointed door, the adjacent houses with their porticoes similar to niches, and in front, a dark green lawn, in the center of which a small well raised the embroideries of its polished stone and wrought iron. With the inhabitants of Valvasone, for many years, however, it did not happen that he found himself in the relationship of an encounter, one of his sweet choral encounters with the youth of a town. He had only contemplated them. But it was perhaps precisely for this reason that he would have been able to clearly draw a picture of that fund of unknown that is preserved in the strangers of a nearby town. The Valvasone type was dark, of medium height but handsome, with an olive complexion, dark hair, and all pervaded with a softness, a restraint and a seriousness where the noble air, of a city of silence, of his ancient country shone through. The young men, slim, with tall and well-combed hair, had something exotic, or very indigenous, in the elegance and warmth of their gestures. It was on a summer evening, at the cinema, that he had a more vivid proof of their presence and their warm and silent passion. There was an exciting air inside that room, which gave the exact sensation of a regression: but of a minimal regression, of a few years, which at most could date back to the early days of cinema. In fact, having dropped the notebook without him realizing it, he later found it all in pieces under the bench: the young man who was sitting behind him with his companions, a shiny and expressionless blond, had thus declared his love to the foreigner.

*** Pordenone – the name – appeared in his life, placing itself on a completely different level from the others. Meanwhile, he had long been tied to the memory of a briefcase bought in a shop in the town, where he

and his father had accidentally ended up: he had probably made the journey by train and they had only stayed in Pordenone for a few hours after lunch, and of all he had only seen the inside of the stationery shop, due to the awe he must have felt there; in any case it is certain that Pordenone had since then been part of the family atmosphere as a place equipped with those useful things that he despised: however, despite this aura of domestic, commercial and prosaic elements, the name of the town did not fail to inspire in him a kind of intense respect, almost of panic, perhaps due to the augmentative appearance of the name, certainly due to the level of greater modernity and greater progress in which the common opinion of the entire area placed it without reservations. Thus the glimpses of Pordenone that he glimpsed by pronouncing its syllables perhaps had that splendor and brightness that the poor imagine in the homes of families belonging to a higher rank. Finally one day he happened to go there by bicycle. It was a memorable event, to be explored in depth in a separate chapter of the fictionalization of his childhood in Sacile. It was a teacher, his neighbor, who had the idea of taking him there, probably not imagining the strong flavor of a family celebration, of an Easter holiday, that her presence gave to that journey.

Coming from Sacile, immediately after Fontanafredda, you could feel the presence of a large city. He had understood it immediately, since then: there was a ferment on the horizon, almost a dormant orgasm, which reverberated on the white walls of the farmhouses or unraveled in the roar of the cars still imbued with that shiny, mirrored alarm that burns on the asphalt of intersections, under traffic lights. But when, shortly afterwards, the houses began to thicken and the first signs appeared, the first crossroads leading to hamlets and villages, which, although on the fringes, now lived in the disenchanted city air, here were the first signs of a well-defined architecture. wider than that of the villages to which it was linked: a path descended almost perpendicularly down the high embankment of the road, up to a grassy square, where a large church of recent construction, among the poor houses, stood nailed to its Gothic outline expanded into the sky with the hypertrophic pinnacles, then, a little further on, the truly indescribable appearance of the bell tower, which as soon as it was in the city, disappeared, half minaret and half funerary stone, darting into the pale, impalpable and vast sky of Pordenone.

Although this promise of vitality and vastness was not kept since the center would remain in his childhood memory all gathered in a narrow, shady and humid image, where a strong smell of haberdashery blew, he fell in love with that impression of grandeur that you could breathe on the threshold of the city. It was perhaps free, but every time afterwards, coming from Casarsa, down towards Borgo Meduna, he stopped on the bridge above Noncello, he thought of certain landscapes by Hölderlin. There was that romantic love, that restless tranquility, that subdued splendor, and that color of returning to one's homeland, which, suggested by Hölderlin's reenactment, were fixed in the landscape so full of distances, as in a slightly yellowed print. The Arcadian waters, the well-groomed meadows and groves of the Noncello depression, blued by the immense inverted sky, were limited, on the right, by a small green hill surmounted by a pink farmhouse, and, closer, by the long red-brick factory with its chimney belching plumes of black smoke into the washed out sky: and, on the left, here is the great panorama of Pordenone, wedged into the horizon and varied in grays and browns, inclined towards the south: all this was extraordinarily magnified first of all by the depression of the river, which added its depth to its width and length, and then from the thick penetrating perspective lines of the roads, the bridges, the railway embankment, the Noncello stream, the chimneys, which, diverging or crossing, all seemed to point towards the restful vertical of the castle perched on the gentle hill.

*** The landscape changed over the years. The background of Casarsa or San Giovanni, still too tied to the childish perspective, dark, intense, shadowy, progressed towards an increasingly surprising clarity, from novelty to novelty, as if the walls, the faces, the fields were stripped of their ancient and confused mystery to be clothed in a mystery full of freshness.

He threw himself into the rediscovery of that environment, which was the environment of a young man, no longer of a boy, and the hitherto closed doors of the rectory or of the taverns, of the houses of the employees or of the farmers, opened before him, opening up about their natural secrets, which still made him tremble.

Then he threw himself out of the closed circle of Casarsa and San Giovanni, around, in the neighboring villages in the neighboring

municipalities, immersed in a freshness, in a melancholy or in a festiveness that took one's breath away... The Alta, arid, vast, scented with resin ash, with dry grass, with its stone villages with large porticoes, its clear streams along the road, in the heart of the village with the wash houses where the children played... Castions, Arzene, Domanins, Dograva, and on the left The immense riverbed of the Tagliamento...

The area towards Pordenone, more modern and rich; the Lower one down beyond San Vito, still along the Tagliamento, but fertile, cheerful, healthy and plebeian...

In each place there was a different youth. He knew her at parties. And anxious friendships began, now in one village, now in another: and each of these friendships, always the same and different, had a virgin light every time: in them the smell of Friuli was renewed, now the winter one, dry, shiny, of soot frozen on the hearths, of wet slopes, of hardened clods, of squares swept by the Bora, of burnt reeds, now the spring one, wonderfully warm against the earth and the still freezing walls. And each town, with the friendship of its youth, which was born there during the festivals, had its own special smell, which for some time gave meaning and trepidation to the whole existence.

In this immediate joy, which he sought from festival to festival from youth to youth, however, an underlying element of anguish always persisted, a dark sensation of never being able to reach the center of that life which was so heartbreaking and enviable, unfolding in everyone's hearts. those countries.

*** The road seemed endless to him, and when he was near the town he realized that there was something underneath. In fact, the village was silent, there were few lights, and groups of young people, instead of running towards Rosa, returned to San Vito. So had the dance gone awry?

Rosa was in a strange situation; the abortion of the party still gave a Sunday air to the very sad Monday. Groups of girls sang, provoking the young foreigners who arrived on bicycles from the nearby villages. On the deserted platform, invaded by the night, some children had settled, stamping their feet on the planking, making the whole place echo with that crazy jubilation. Then some young men arrived, who, having also entered

the platform, began to sing a Romagna song that he had learned as a boy. They sang at the top of their lungs, invisible. The children, arrested in their saraband, had gathered around those wicked people, and, no less wicked, they soon learned the refrain, adding the freshness of their voices to the bass drums of the drunken youths: «I hold a loaded pistol... loaded with golden balls..."

*** The young man's smile, blue, empty and clear, was the background, the smooth wall against which the speeches of his companions had fresher and more human resonances. Not yet up to their language and their implications, the boy approved of them with a knowing, confident smile that meant only one thing: «Here is my heart. I have nothing else to give. My eyes are blue like those of the sailor who believed Marx to be an apostle."

Outside the office the sun was dying against the red sign. His crimson, which hit the groups of workers, unemployed girls and the carabinieri sideways, in the large asphalt square, with the large blue bicycle depots, the empty green gardens, the canals and the long rows of trucks, paled with faced with the red of that sign. The Potemkin sailor born in San Giorgio di Nogaro, who knows, or in Cervignano, or in Latisana, or in Teor, always smiled, convinced, light: background of white lead and blue to the words of the jargon of the meeting in which he was drawing, grim and praising, the ghost of the strike.

Around, behind the large factories of Torviscosa, with red-violet and red-brick walls, layered one on top of the other like a cliff, the boundless cane plantations stretched out. And at the bottom of them, pale blue, corroded and washed out, the sea depressed the horizon of the Bassa, absorbing and discoloring the sky.

The lines of workers on bicycles along the Venice-Trieste state road, the freight trains rattling at a shuffling and irregular rhythm after hours, the fumes from the factories did not crack the gray of the old swamps, nor the emaciated, drunken light of the nearby Adriatic.

It was with wonder, in that Florida or Ukrainian air, that he heard people speaking in Friulian; a Friulian who buzzed quickly and tightly even in the circumflexes, peremptory, clear, light. He seemed to hear in the frequent deaf hisses, almost, the splashing of the boats, which would soon be able to reach San Giorgio, along the canal that was being built: boats of two or three tons, wedged in a line of water black and shiny, between the endless rows of poplars and the immense extension of the reeds. And the whistle of their sirens would have shaken, familiarly, to the very fibers of the Adriatic air of that adolescent San Giorgio, all aimed at the future. And it was that future of his that was fermenting in his language: which, after perhaps having been fixed for centuries in that marginal area of the Bassa, barely corroded by the stench of the salty bora blowing from Trieste, now resumed the course of a more personal story of his own. and imaginative, and precisely out of necessity, outside the fate of the language, desired by the hearts of speakers aware of a new phase. Just as a light cloud at dawn, little more than a vapor, reflecting its light, illuminates the countryside and the sky before the sun, so that fermenting, precociously evolved language shed a light on the landscape that would be of the future.

*** At the bottom of the Bassa, behind endless expanses of reclamation, swamps and valleys, the summer cinema of Caorle resounded half-empty with the sound of records, closed by a palisade that isolated its electric brilliance against the darkness of the sky. On the row of freshly painted chairs, right in front of him, a boy from the village had taken his seat, who was now rolling a cigarette, exchanging a word every now and then, in his darting dialect, with his companion. When he had rolled up the paper, salting it well on the little tobacco, he looked around, fixed his eyes on him and asked: "Do you have a match?" He looked at him in turn and before giving him the fire, he asked him: "What is your name?" "Armido," the boy replied promptly. He and his companion represented, by contrasting with clear evidence, the two different races of Caorle: a pale one with very golden hair, a short profile, a face already a little delightfully wrinkled; the other Armido, dark, with a big head, a round and badly shaped mouth, delightfully similar to his fisherman father. And in them the suggestions emanating from that celebrating Adriatic public were concentrated, celestial and salty, like the sea.

Thus, on this side of the sea, now rigidly far away, Caorle was contained, with its heavy shivers, by that summer night of hers which almost made one bleed at the thought of all the other unseen summers.

And it was perhaps that open conflict between the audience and the firmament, that atrocious palisade of reeds in such direct relationship with the moon; or perhaps that very black young man with very black shiny hair, who, addressing his friends, boasted loudly of his adolescent sex; perhaps finally, and above all, that phallic gilding that a foreigner like him smelled in every smallest fact of unknown places, that indigenous, collective, and almost folkloric eros, which broke and refracted like a prism in the crowd of unknowns dressed in party... but he was just a single hot painful wound. Ah, how he realized he possessed a chest!... A chest hard with pain and jealousy, hard with an envy that made him die, if he looked at the others, who were also possessors, but how much more fortunate and lighter, of a chest ...

In the streets of Caorle, after the cinema, the party was not yet dying. Inside the small illuminated kitchens, with their stupendous eighteenth-century furniture, full of trinkets and mirrors, old men and women were sitting around the white lace tables. Young people walked along the sidewalks, under the colorful and splendid facades of the houses.

While he was still eating a slice of watermelon at one of the hundred tastings in Caorle, he felt someone touch him on the shoulder: it was Armido, with his beautiful light blue shirt.

«Ah, it's you!», I told him. Armido laughed. He then offered him a slice of watermelon and was amused to see him bent over the counter with a knife in his hand, full of embarrassment and gallantry.

They walked along the seafront above the dam. While they walked with the sea on their right immersed in his boundless tinkering and on their left the sighs of Sunday happiness dying among the colorful houses, Armido suddenly exclaimed: «Here, this is the borino». Then, after a short pause, as if ashamed, he added: "But we call it the Burin." «It's a cold wind – observed his friend – who knows in winter». "Oh, yes, it's cold, it comes from the mountains."

He was surprised: didn't the little fisherman know that the borino, as the name clearly indicated, comes from Trieste? And he pointed it out to him, teasing him a little, but the one who was astonished, and with a much deeper amazement, this time was Armido: «But no – he insisted – it comes from the mountains». «In fact – the other said to him – aren't there perhaps mountains around Trieste?»

But Armido didn't give up: perhaps he didn't want his wind to be so explainable: «Perhaps it will come from that direction, he murmured – but it was born far away, at the beginning of the world».

They sat on the shoulder of the seafront, behind Armido at the end of the horizon, far offshore, they could see the lights of a steamship... and below them, the surf was breaking, clearly, invisible, against the rocks.

But it was already late for Armido, and so they went back down to the centre, among the houses of Caorle all painted green, blue, red, black - and now merged in the darkness, silent on the last passers-by, the Sunday drunks, the youngsters they came home singing. In front of the door of his house, near the port canal, Armido asked him: "Will you come back?" He was moved, he almost wanted to cry at the thought that he would perhaps never see that new friend of his again.

«Oh yes – he replied – next summer I will return».

"Really?" said Armido happily.

"Of course, and I'll also come and spend a night fishing."

"What a joy! Come, please: there are many nights when only the other boy and I go fishing with the owner's boat."

“And you stay out all night?”

«All night, and we return at dawn». They were silent for a while...

«So... see you another year, Armido... Goodbye!»

"Goodbye!" said the boy, his voice trembling; then he entered his house, one of those stupendous Caorle interiors that looked like inlay, embroidery.

1948.