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CHAPTER IX

CONSTANT DROPPING WEARS AWAY A STONE

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translation by Rebecca Williams

CHARACTERS

HIM

HER

NARRATOR

The stage is in darkness. The noise of two pneumatic doors in quick succession. The operation of the compressed air systems announces the footsteps of the visitor who moves to centre stage, as if in a castle surrounded by a moat. Meanwhile, a light illuminates the narrator.

NARRATOR In Italy, during the early 1990s, young judiciary workers, prompted by a strong desire for democratisation, uncovered plots and conspiracies revealing the existence of hidden powers, whose violence had already been seen in certain massacres which took place twenty years earlier. The worker's actions touched the tip of the iceberg but were not enough to realise the depth of the phenomenon. The institutions did not take enough charge of the decaying of the country. Politicians remained protected, the corrupt in office. This caused the collapse of the principle of morality: the story of the last twenty years. Despite this, the inspiration for the protagonists of our piece, Him and Her, comes from real people; they do not however resemble anyone. Therefore, please do not force yourselves to look into similarities or connections with facts or people who once existed or still exist today. Instead, concentrate on identifying the principles which bring the dialogue to life, since perhaps the figures in the discussion are nothing more than short-lived embodiments of two ideals which we still face. (*The set is lit up by the brightness of a radiant spring day which filters in from outside while neon lights outline the centre of the room with a cold dim light. At the window, back turned: Her*).c Mid-1990s, in the interview room of a women's prison. A small space with white walls and only one window, secured with bars. In the centre there is a basic rectangular office table with metal legs and a wood-like surface. Around the table are four plastic and metal seats, two on each side. (*Enter Him, giving a grateful nod to the guard who shuts the door straight behind him*). He is a middle-aged, handsome man with a career in law behind him, which has made him



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very well-known. He is tall and lanky and wears a corduroy suit which is slightly creased. He does not have any bags, folders or other accessories. (*Referring to the woman*). She is only a few years younger than he is, a prisoner. Her elegant ways are countered by a wrong note, a sort of inner dissonance which only at times and in certain gestures shines through but which, from time to time, seems to embarrass her. She is dressed simply and not coincidentally in a skirt and blouse. (*Short pause*). He says: Madam.

HIM Madam.

NARRATOR She turns around without moving towards him.

HIM Hello.

NARRATOR She hesitates for a moment, then she greets him, extending out her hand to him.

While she does this the Narrator moves away, though he remains visible and watchful, maybe sat amongst the audience.

HER It's a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for accepting my request.

HIM That's alright.

HER I hope I haven't inconvenienced you too much.

HIM I rested on the train.

HER A long journey... Have you met the governor?

HIM Yes, we said hello.

HER He has been very kind too. I was afraid that he would refuse.

HIM Why would he do that?

HER So as not to bother you. Someone with so many commitments.

HIM As you can see, we managed to figure it out.

HER It's one thing to come for one hundred people but another to make yourself available for just one.

HIM Don't let this get out, then.

They laugh.

HER How are you?

HIM Well, thank you. And yourself?

HER Do you often carry out these meetings with the public? They must keep you very busy.

HIM Quite often.

HER Not just in prisons.

HIM In schools too.

HER Yes, I read that.

HIM I'm very passionate about my relationship with the younger generation.

HER Do they pay attention?

HIM Yes, I would say so. They're rather curious.

HER And they're able to follow you? You wouldn't think it. For God's sake, it's so easy to follow you. You're so passionate when you speak.

HIM Everyone gets excited about the things they believe in.

HER About what they want.

HIM The idea of something which can be achieved.

HER Certainly. (*Pause*). I'm sorry, I'm not used to the world anymore. Would you like to sit down?

HIM Yes, thank you.

They sit opposite each other.

HER I felt that I could trust you.

HIM You know of course that for over a year I've no longer been...

HER Of course.



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HIM Good.

HER Right.

HIM I imagine that you had good reason. Or maybe...

HER My mood fluctuates a lot. Some days are really very odd. Today I... Sorry.

HIM Don't worry. We should not feel pressured in any way.

HER Thank you.

HIM You wrote to me and I decided to reply to you. And now, here we are.

Pause.

HER Young people these days. Do you find them...empty?

HIM They need a lot of...

HER (*interrupting him*) But it's good, right? I mean, you mixing with them. It's good for you. They have their whole future in front of them.

HIM You're right. It is very good for me.

HER Whereas we...

HIM You think.

HER Maybe that's it.

HIM It could be.

HER In other words, you're freer than you were before.

HIM I didn't say that.

HER I'm so stupid. Talking about freedom. Of course you're freer. Then again, you were free before. You simply chose the right side. Like around this table. It's a matter of intuition. You look towards the window; I towards the wall. (*Silence*). Let's start again. We are too awkward. It's ridiculous, don't you think? Especially in this situation.

HIM Maybe, yes.

HER You must be wondering why I wanted to meet you.

HIM Yes, surely you...

HER (*interrupting him*) Oh no, not like that. You hear it, right? We are still floundering, no, like I said, awkward. I hold you in high esteem. There's no doubt about that.

HIM Thank you.

HER I admire your decision too. A brave decision. There aren't many brave men around today. You were one. You *are* one. Where does this courage come from (*breaking off*). No, don't become embarrassed. I don't want to know. I would never dream of it. We aren't here for this. That's obvious. The thing is, I want to understand. I need to understand. I... Clearly, as far as the world is concerned, I have done something wrong and I must pay.

HIM Do you know what I think?

HER Yes. That dignity should never be lost.

HIM This whole dignity thing...

HER Tell me.

HIM It's something which has stayed with me since my childhood.

HER You were precocious.

HIM I lived in the South for a while.

HER Really?

HIM Because of my father's work.

HER Ah! Where?

HIM Near Salerno.

HER Near where I come from. I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you.

HIM Not at all. There was a little boy, one of my friends. I had been to call for him at his house before but one day, when he was ill, I stayed a bit further away from him and this was when I noticed something. Next to his bed was a bedside table which was usually covered with a beautiful silk cloth. However, that day they must have forgotten to push it



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up against the wall and I realised that it actually wasn't a bedside table but a crate for tomatoes which his mother had turned into a bedside table.

HER I can imagine it.

HIM This intrigued me. There was an enormous dignity in this and a sense of respect. Even though we were just children, we were entitled to our share of grace.

HER Your words truly touched me. In fact, there was a moment towards the end (*breaking off*). A phrase during your discussion. In response to an extremely stupid question. No, of course there's a reason. I didn't write to you to have a spiritual conversation. You aren't a man of the cloth.

HIM No, I'm not.

HER But you are a man with a calling.

HIM I have always borne in mind the direction of my choices, if that's what you mean.

HER You don't have any doubts; you're a lucky man.

HIM On the contrary. Doubt is behind every one of my choices.

HER Yet sometimes our doubts govern us to such an extent that we remain motionless, stuck at a crossroads. Are you familiar with sacred icons? There to help us choose the best path. But sometimes there isn't one.

HIM Yes, it's as if you're paralysed.

HER Has it happened to you too?

HIM Of course. When I was a boy, for example. When it came to deciding what to do with my life. For a time I was almost stuck. If I'm honest, I thought about studying physics.

HER And then at some point you thought, 'if I study law, I can become a judge'.

HIM No, not 'if I study law, I can become a judge', as you put it. Rather, 'I will study law *in order to* become a judge'.

HER You turned into a street and headed straight on.

HIM For twenty-five years.

HER Who knows why? Sometimes the reason escapes us, don't you think? I studied chemistry. I was good at it from high school. There weren't many of us in the class.

HIM I'm a very curious person and physics offers an enormous space to satisfy your own curiosity. It too is about discovering what has happened. It's just that it involves discovering the mechanisms which regulate the Universe whereas law is about what's inside relationships, inside the mechanisms behind relationships between people.

HER Interesting. I thought you would've had a mother who was passionate about literature. One of the many Madame Bovary's of this wretched country in which a bored woman, if taught to respect the sound Catholic faith, is forced to sublimate her fantasies into an obsession with literature.

HIM I don't understand what...

HER (*interrupting him*) She let Kafka fall into your cradle, Dostoevskij into your baby walker.

HIM Ah, Tolstoj as a matter of fact. My mother was a very down-to-earth woman. I must've been more or less four years old. There was an old man, a beggar, who would come to our house almost every day at lunch time and my mother would give him a bowl of hot soup.

HER The origin of your arrogance.

HIM (*shaking his head in disagreement*) When he didn't come, she would worry.

HER You weren't satisfied with being an average bureaucrat.

HIM I've always believed that my work should help others too. Just like my wife did. She was a secondary school teacher. One day, a teaching post in a high school came up but she turned it down. She would've really loved to pick up Greek again but she was convinced that younger children were the ones in most need of being helped to develop.



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And so she refrained.

HER The ideal wife for a man of utmost integrity who prefers controlling those who have riches to having riches himself.

HIM Madam, unfortunately our time...

HER Time. Here there's so much of it that the mind begins to hallucinate.

HIM But our time, here and now, is on a fixed quota.

HER What horrible words. How can you be the man you claim to be if you speak in such a military way?

HIM I'm trying not to be rude.

HER You want to appear stern.

HIM: I'm not that sophisticated.

HER You want to intimidate me.

HIM Not me. I'm a very democratic person.

HER Me too. Who isn't?

Pause.

HIM Words are worth their own weight.

HER Like substances. Their own specific weight. Chemistry, remember?

HIM Exactly.

Silence.

HER Everything turned out for the best in the end, don't you think? It's quite unusual to break the ice in just an hour but we're breaking it. Pickaxes in hand. Do you truly believe that youngsters benefit from those meetings?

HIM Look, I'll tell you a story. A state school in the suburbs supported a poetry project. Some youngsters, many of whom had difficult pasts, dysfunctional families, etcetera, were given the chance to express themselves. Amongst them was a little Polish boy. He was blonde and very mischievous. He could barely put together an essay at first but here he started to write beautiful poetry, discovering a real and unexpected talent. Then, as is often the case, there was a change of management, some sort of shuffling within the teaching staff, and the project was cancelled. Two years later, that same little boy underwent criminal proceedings for having made pornographic films where he forced a disabled classmate into acts of sexual violence.

HER And what does that prove?

HIM It's quite clear to me.

HER That it was all for nothing.

HIM That the little boy could have saved himself, that he had it in him, that the ability to develop had been awakened in him.

HER That nothing could've been done. In fact, his teachers used to hold him like a kitten, by the scruff of the neck, far away from the baby sparrow which he wanted to tear to pieces and which, as soon as he was let to the ground, he was in fact able to tear to pieces while obeying the only rule he knew: that of his nature.

HIM You only see humans as animals.

HER We're not talking about race; we're talking about species. And the human species evolved from the animal species.

HIM But humans are characterised by their conscience, by their ability to make choices.

HER The person who has it, if they have it, knows why they have it. You're privileged; I'm thinking about your mother. It's obvious that she brooded over you, like she should have. But what about others?

HIM Well, it should be made possible for others to choose their own starting positions.

HER What for?

HIM To restore their ability to make choices. Do you remember Don Milani? If one pupil



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had a hundred words and another had a thousand, the nine hundred words which were lacking would need to be compensated for. I'm not saying that you ought to fill the whole gap, but that you should at least try to understand what the other would've said, had he been able to.

HER The influence of your wife. Don Milani. What was it called again? *Letter to a Teacher*. The Bible of education in those days, right?

HIM My wife has always been close to me.

Silence.

HER Don't be so touchy. These are things we all know. You're a man who is known to the public. People know about your life. Like they know about mine. Even if we don't like it, I less than you. And yet we both know what it's like to be alone. (*Pause*). You don't want to start pretending now, do you? There's so little time, like you said.

HIM I'm not a man who likes lies. I think you've realised that.

Pause.

HER You know very well who I am.

HIM Of course I do.

HER So why did you pretend?

HIM I didn't pretend. I simply didn't feel it necessary to talk about it.

HER So that's not why you accepted?

HIM Your letter seemed sincere, that's all.

HER There aren't any incentives.

HIM On the contrary. Life, especially our complex and difficult lives, fills us with incentives. It's just a question of seizing them.

HER I was talking about my days.

HIM Excuse me?

HER So wretched. Though listening to you speak has saved me from my misery for half a day. I wanted to give myself an aim, an incentive.

HIM Please forgive me but I don't understand.

HER I don't know. I'm trying to imagine. Deep down, we hardly know ourselves. Perhaps there are things I want to tell you. Perhaps I just want to listen to you. Who knows?

HIM Do you women do any activities here?

HER Not me.

HIM How do you spend your time?

HER I read. I read a lot. The presence of the other women is not uplifting. Terrible things happen here, believe me.

HIM I can imagine.

HER Can you imagine what I've had to put up with? I'm not any old prisoner.

HIM I know of similar cases.

HER Case studies, sure.

HIM By no means is it my intention to belittle your pain.

HER You caused it.

HIM I'm not the cause of your punishment.

HER Sure you are. I wasn't your target, of course. Let's just say that you dropped the bomb on your enemy and I was one of the many civilians on the ground.

HIM Civilians are defenceless and I don't think you were. And, in any case, you know full well that I've never assisted in the investigation against you. I don't understand why you are talking to me and not to my former colleague about this.

HER But like you said earlier, 'I am no longer'...

HIM And indeed, I am no longer.

HER You're no longer the Grand Inquisitor.



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HIM I never was.

HER Of course, even in the most acrobatic existence, it's hard to believe in a prince who strips off all his power to descend amongst the poor and the unfortunate. But what a mighty and fantastic action, fit for a great historic fresco. Do you see what we have in common? We are figures from the past, still tied to an aspect of inner vastness. After all, according to you and your colleagues, I'm a great criminal. As you can see, you're not the only victim of other people's interpretation. We're all victims of the look which judges us; first the look of the experts and then of the people. Everything about us is huge, exaggerated. Even our misunderstanding.

HIM I have always fought against the stance of every judge. I have faith in people, I hold them in high esteem. Even when the situation...

HER (*interrupting him*) And yet, ever since you were a boy it's always been clear which side you're on. Or rather which level you're on. Better to be at the top than at the bottom.

HIM And that's where you're wrong, dear lady. I have an outlook, which perhaps I achieved with time, definitely in fact, and with experience. My wife certainly had many merits in this respect. As I said, I achieved it. A completely different outlook to the one you attribute to me.

HER Here we are again, at the same place. Like in a game of Snakes and Ladders. Interpretation. That's what you lot have done with the law, what the very nature of the Italian law has allowed you to do. You all bend the rules to your own needs.

HIM Rather, adapt the rules to the principles of the Constitution.

HER Oh yes, the Constitution. (*Pause*). You should go to a Knights Templar Abbey. You know, there are many beautiful ones. Walk around the whole place, from the entrance to the presbytery, from top to bottom, until you reach the crypt, and try to fathom its arrangement. You won't understand anything unless you have the humility to look for the endless circle which marks the place of the cornerstone. With this behind you, look straight in front and suddenly the whole design, and with it the spatial metaphor, will be obvious. Sometimes, simply the viewpoint being wrong results in everything being wrong.

HIM It seems to me as if you're the one who has a tendency to judge and sentence others and the viewpoint chosen by your interlocutor. And right now it seems as if I'm your interlocutor, even though I can't see why.

HER But I mean, no matter how much you left your career behind, you must still be used to investigating. You have a piercing look, you think quickly. Come on, you don't lose the habit of a lifetime after abstaining from your work for just a year. Why did I look for you? Perhaps because you're the cornerstone of my failure.

HIM I've already told you...

HER (*interrupting him*) You ask but you don't listen. That's not good for a man who constantly professes his belief in democracy.

HIM Democracy is also about respecting other people's rights.

HER It imposes tight limits.

HIM Duties, which are instrumental in exercising rights.

HER I thought that, at least between us, it was free game.

HIM I'm playing freely in fact. You're the one who is armed.

HER With what?

HIM With hate.

HER True. I bear hatred.

HIM You hate me, as a representative of a category which I don't really want to represent anymore.

HER You preach responsibility and then...

HIM (*interrupting her*) I've always taken responsibility.



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HER Why did you give up your career?

HIM Read what I've written about it.

HER Be nice. You're here in the flesh. Tell me.

HIM I think it's best if I say goodbye.

HER You're offended. I said something I shouldn't.

HIM I've devoted a whole day to you.

HER You're a good man. Nature has been kind to you and you kind to others.

HIM This morning I got up at the crack of dawn. I got on a train and came all the way here. And when I leave here, I'll take another taxi to the station and then, after another five hours on a train, my day will finally be done.

HER You rightly said, 'when you leave here'.

HIM (*with a nod*) I don't think prison is the answer.

HER Especially for the innocent.

HIM I also don't think you're innocent, if you really want to know.

HER I'm a victim.

HIM The victim of a system which is not yet fully-developed.

HER The victim of a sick, sham, perverse system.

HIM You've been investigated and sentenced for corruption, for aiding and abetting a criminal, and for receiving stolen goods. The charges against you are extremely serious. Personally I'm against the symmetry between crime and punishment, I'm not discussing that here. The point is that there are entire folders of documents which prove your guilt.

HER And here's the policeman who peeps out from behind this noble soul. You keep everything under control, you know everything and yet you hide. Isn't war your thing? And where does our highly civilised non-belligerency pact end? Our promise of honesty? That too is false. A real subtlety in your choice of strategy. You haven't cast off the clothes of the Inquisitor. Do you expect me to believe you? Oh, come on now!

HIM (*standing*) I'll leave you with your thoughts. In an hour or so I can catch the train which will enable me to have dinner with my daughter this evening. If you don't mind, I can arrive home early.

HER You...

HIM Yes?

HER That's it?

HIM What else were you expecting?

HER What you'd expect from listening to you.

HIM And what would that be?

HER To talk to each other.

Silence. The man sits back down.

HIM You're constantly lashing out.

HER I don't understand you.

HIM Perhaps you don't want to.

HER Do you only believe in logic?

HIM Logic is what allows dialogue.

HER Do you find me illogical?

HIM In a way.

HER You're right. Stay. Let's talk.

Silence.

HIM Do you have children?

HER Yes, a son.

HIM Do you see him often?

HER He never visits.



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HIM I'm sorry.

HER It was my decision. I'm protecting him.

HIM Is he very young?

HER He's very vulnerable.

HIM An important decision.

HER I had to.

HIM You miss him a lot.

HER I don't have anyone anymore.

HIM I understand your situation.

HER It's gradually gotten worse.

HIM You mean your situation?

HER Of course.

HIM Perhaps that's why I came.

HER I think so too.

Pause.

HIM Still, I have to confess that if I could turn back time, I'd still do things exactly the same.

HER So that isn't the reason why you gave up your career? I don't mean us, but everything that happened.

HIM No. That was because I no longer believe it's the right path.

HER If you could turn back time, you'd still do things exactly the same, even though you realise that it's not the right path?

HIM I operated within a system of rules and I operated by applying these rules. It was only due to working within this system that I discovered imperfection.

HER And you gave up.

HIM On the contrary. I fought, we fought, because that system was becoming more and more independent, making up for its imperfection.

HER But you weren't successful.

HIM In this country, the mechanisms which form the system aren't assembled all together. The power mechanism is still constructed on the basis of opposing forces and every attempt to reinstate the judiciary in this system is a move towards making it harmless.

HER You felt your hands were tied.

HIM No, I felt that the time had come for me to find a different path.

HER After the death of your wife?

HIM *(after a moment of hesitation)* Yes. *(Pause)*. There was a constant exchange of experiences between us. That was the wonderful thing about our relationship. I knew a lot about the problems within the school and she knew a lot about the problems within the law and this continuous exchange continued until the end. After, I often told myself that I should have dedicated more time to her, to her alone, to my family, but I know that this wouldn't have worked. Our stability was based on this, on her acknowledgement of my idealistic nature, at least that's what she used to say, so much so that at one stage, when I set out to enter into politics, she objected. She said I wasn't made for it, and she was right. You see, someone may think that my work is somehow related to politics, to political activity, but this isn't the case. To me, it's something else.

HER And yet many people think of you like that. Your position and your figure give you a social role, a charisma, which makes you good with the public. After your discussion, a few months ago, a prisoner, talking about you, said that one day you would become the President of the Italian Republic.

HIM What nonsense.

HER But you have the potential. Your image is pure light. And you wear it with such



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natural nonchalance that you move around this country like an avenging angel. Perhaps this was the quality that made you give up practicing revenge in order to completely take upon yourself practicing protection.

HIM I've never been religious. We are born and live in this world. And the world is made up of others...

HER (*interrupting him*) Others who claim continuously...

HIM (*as above*)... others who are just like us, people, who have the same physical, mental and even juridical characteristics as we do. I have a body, a mind, a heart. The sum of all my components gives me an identity, which is represented by a surname, which is the history of my family, and by a name which holds the shell of my being. If I hear someone say my name in a big conference room or in a stadium, I jump because in life's chaos someone else is awakening my conscience. If a loved one says my name, depending on the tone of their voice, I tremble, I'm moved, I become angry, I get upset, I respond. And this happens to you, to the guard, to your cellmate, to the governor. It happens to us. So why should we take refuge in our individual stronghold, pretending that others, who have such a systematic and natural influence on us, are of no importance to us?

HER Perhaps because we're not big enough to please the whole world.

HIM But the human conscience is like a placenta. It can grow and defend and nourish that something that is forming: the person. Yes, a person with untouchable dignity and inalienable and equal rights. A person with the ability to acknowledge others as similar human beings with a body, mind, heart, name and dignity, which is identical, and rights, which are identical.

HER Your wife was right, you are an idealist, one of the last few remaining of the dying race. But what your wife was wrong about was saying that you aren't suitable for politics. You're the incarnation of politics. The polis, the city, the space belonging to humans and governed by harmonious principles, which is the response to the Tower of Babel. It would be if humans were really capable of the growth which you're looking for through your wanderings in search of men, or rather through the wanderings in which, looking for men, you desperately try to make them become. Do you know the comments my inmates were whispering during your talk? You can imagine.

HIM It doesn't surprise me, given that I consider prison the opposite to a place of rehabilitation. More like a school of criminality.

HER Oh no. They weren't that delinquent. Don't be so full of yourself. They were actually very feminine and therefore, if you really believe a word that was said, they were human once more.

HIM From the discussion which followed, I didn't feel that what you're saying was the tone of the dominant thoughts amongst the audience.

HER No offence. I remember the discussion well. It was then that it occurred to me to write to you.

HIM Yes, you spoke to me about a phrase.

HER: About a very clear phrase in response to a very clear question.

Pause.

HIM I don't remember.

HER The discussion went on forever. The girls didn't want to let you go. There was quite a circus around you. You were like a tamer of female silliness, showing off your eloquence to these wretched women who, when they were fifteen years old, churned out their first bastard.

HIM Don't be nasty.

HER You came here, to a rough district, to listen to them. The school of criminality, right?



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You said it yourself.

HIM Are you going to tell me what you're getting at or are you starting to attack me again?

HER Now my dignity has disappeared, right? Just one word out of place and you catch sight of my teeth, forced once again to deal with me just like a true tamer, but without the red jacket and gold buttons of course. You have a different sort of uniform, that of the progressive man. Which, at the end of the day, is the sports attire of a squire walking beneath the willows of his estate on an autumnal afternoon. Everything is there: decadence, nostalgia, melancholy, nobility, self-pity. In fact, I wasn't wrong in thinking of a bored mother in polite society. A vague sense of death at preschool age and here we are.

HIM Which phrase struck you?

HER I wanted to ask you something...*(breaking off)* If I had been that woman, I would've asked you... *(breaking off again)*... I made you come here to...

HIM Go on.

HER That woman, the one who asked you the question, she's inside for trafficking drugs.

HIM Yes.

HER And the others, wretched women, who spouted abuse at me, who... *(breaking off)*. I know what you're thinking.

HIM What?

HER You're thinking, 'why did I come? Why did I stay here with this woman who has worn me out? What a bore and what a burden to be one of those she's chosen to be. Wouldn't it have been better to have been satisfied with being ordinary strangers who don't give a damn about others and tell them where to go? No, you stay here instead, with me.

HIM Do you know what I'm thinking?

HER Tell me.

HIM That you're this angry because you won't admit that you've done something wrong, when everyone can see that you have.

HER I earned that money.

HIM You insist on proclaiming your innocence but, putting the outcome of the proceedings to one side, your way of life...

HER *(interrupting him)* My way of life was marked with the greatest simplicity.

HIM Even the ideas you express. So then...

HER *(interrupting him)* What? What have you got to say about my ideas?

HIM That essentially you reject democracy.

HER If by democracy you mean extreme control of private property...

HIM *(interrupting her)* Your fortune amounted to billions and billions of Lire, works of art, jewels, state shares. Shall I continue?

HER My fortune, as you call it and as the press called it, is the product of my work and my entrepreneurial skills in investing some legacies of my family's assets.

HIM Which I understand to have hardly been middle-class.

HER Don't be crude.

HIM You accumulated sums of money with which we could have built roads, hospitals and schools. You stole from me, from the guard outside, from your own cell mates. From the woman whose mouth you took that question out of, the question which you're not able to form, not even now. And it's a shame, it's a real shame. Because it's in situations like this, it's when you're faced with something extreme, that you harbour the desire for redemption, truth, freedom, but real and true freedom. The freedom that has to be earned. Let's take Italy's history. What was it that gave rise to the hope of starting again after the devastation left by the war? Do you know?

HER Tell me.

HIM It was desperation. It was an understanding of the need to change. Of the fact that



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these were the ruins of a world built on injustice, on inequality, and the only way to start again was to begin once more from something of a completely opposite nature. If we're no longer able to identify with others, to understand their needs, it's because we've forgotten what happened fifty years ago. Not as individuals, but as a society.

HER So, the only solution is for a war to break out every fifty years to enable us to start again.

HIM I didn't witness the war myself. I don't have a personal memory of it. But I still remember my grandparents' words, when, in their country house, pointing a finger against the window, they would tell me that from there they had watched Milan burning. And their story was so vivid that I saw the glares of the flames myself. Perhaps when I go around meeting people, discussing my thoughts, I do exactly what my grandfather did, when, with his finger against the window, he kindled once more the memory of the city on fire, and my emotion too. And those horrible words are in fact extremely useful because saying that time is on a fixed quota doesn't upset me as much as saying restricted, short or very short. Those horrible, extraordinary words fix the way we should behave. A lifetime isn't enough to change things. We need to pass the baton, to ignite those who will take our place, to hold out, if you like, or to teach, if you prefer. Now I feel like a dispatch runner. A dispatch runner in a Greek tragedy who runs right to the city to report what he saw on the battlefield. And my battlefield was this country.

HER So, you believe that I can start again, from this hopeless state. It's the exact opposite of what you maintain, condemning the prison system.

HIM Not at all.

HER Yes, it is.

HIM Why are you in despair?

HER Leave it.

HIM Answer me.

HER Are you really asking me that?

HIM Sure.

HER You? How can you ask me something like that?

HIM Please, answer me.

HER Should I really trust you?

HIM I've trusted you.

HER If you hadn't made my husband's name public...

HIM (*interrupting her*) Try.

HER I don't ...

HIM Why?

Silence.

HER Do you mean me? Despite all this?

HIM I'm asking you.

HER Because... we... people... For my son.

HIM For your son?

HER Because my son can't handle it.

HIM I understand. Your pain is within you. And this means that your conscience is alive. (*Pause*). But prison, by harming your dignity, just gets in the way of change.

HER What should I do?

HIM First of all, admit to yourself your liability.

HER And this concerns only me.

HIM When I discovered your husband's name in these documents, I discovered the other side to power. Before you spoke about a calling, I think. Do you want to know where I had clear confirmation of my calling? In the square in Milan, during the funeral services of the



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victims of the massacre in Piazza Fontana. (*Short pause. She does not react*). The subsequent false leads, a true lesson.

HER Which taught you to doubt.

HIM It taught me severity. Ten years later the public prosecutor, who was a friend, was killed by a commando of the *Prima Linea*, who obviously had nothing to do with the massacre but who shot him because his efficiency restored credibility to the state. There was a need to react, to be more present, even more down-to-earth. My curiosity, which in itself was nothing, became a talent. It helped to discover how things were going. There was a need to talk. Everyone needed to know.

HER My husband committed suicide. It's not true that he was killed.

HIM I'm sorry for what has happened to you. For the consequences which have resulted from my first investigation, even though I did nothing more than lift the lid.

HER I know. The prosecution moved the proceedings.

HIM Putting it mildly.

HER What do you mean?

HIM It was already too late and the rest had come out anyway.

HER My husband lived like a Franciscan in order to give back what he owed to the state.

HIM Maybe.

HER But that wasn't enough. And so he ended it all.

HIM Or they got him.

HER The impact of public opinion crushed him.

HIM Your husband made an attempt on the stability of the state.

HER He was the victim of a conspiracy.

HIM A state on the brink of delegitimisation must be able to expose its representatives, if they betray their pledge of alliance. To get to the bottom of it, all the criminals had to be exposed, all those responsible discovered. Every detour from legality contributes to the disease of the system. If I have skeletons in my wardrobe, sooner or later someone will come to hold me account of them and, before that can happen, I will be one of their accomplices. And, like this, society itself is dying.

HER You know better than I do that that didn't happen.

HIM And you know better than I do why it worked out the way it did.

HER No, explain it to me.

HIM Because the hidden powers were too strong.

HER Or rather because you lot wanted to save your Constitution. You came after us, you buried the corrupt under years in prison, but you didn't realise that corruption is in the foundations of the Italian Republic. Occasional moralists. You know better than I do that neither you nor I will see the society that you imagine. What will it be like in twenty years from now? I'll tell you. It'll be like it is now, only worse. Homo homini lupus. That's what is to come.

HIM Our children must be able to...

HER (*interrupting him*) Your children rather.

HIM And your son maybe.

HER Judge...

HIM Don't call me that...

HER ...my son tried to take his life twice. And twice he was saved just in the nick of time. Now he lives in a safe community. He can't take it. He can't go on living. Do you understand me? Do you know what I'm saying? Why did you think I stopped seeing him? Why did I have to do that?

The woman gets up.

HIM I don't...



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HER Happiness... No, the chance of being happy.
HIM Sorry?
HER Your phrase. It was about that. It was that.
HIM Yes, I understand.
HER The connection between the ability to choose...
HIM Or rather, being free.
HER And the chance of going in search of your own happiness.
HIM If we can choose. It's difficult if others choose for us.
HER Living is easier. Perhaps it's difficult to be happy.
HIM Because we think we can choose and we think we can be happy.
HER But if you think you are happy, then you are happy.
HIM Logically, yes. But in reality...
HER Do you see that logic isn't enough? I think I called you here because I needed to meet you.
HIM To patch things up.
HER To forgive you.
HIM To then be able to forgive yourself.
HER I'm not guilty.
HIM You need not tell me anything in that respect.
HER Did you think I wanted to reveal something? Is that why you came?
HIM You know very well the way things were.
HER You saw an opportunity.
HIM Sit down. We're not starting this again. Everything was going really well.
HER We had made peace.
HIM In a way.
HER I made peace with the man who ten years ago...
HIM With the man who a few months ago you listened to at a talk.
HER Who was the same man who ten years ago discredited my husband.
HIM Because your husband was part of a secret organisation which sought political purposes through military-style organisations.
HER And you think I would be stupid enough to convince myself, through your smooth approach, to reveal something which would be picked up by the listening devices which the police have planted around the room?
HIM What are you saying? What makes you say that?
HER It's all a conspiracy. You, the governor, even that woman who asked you what happiness is, although you would have to be really stupid to ask a question like that. It's obvious, it was all put together. And I fell for it. I really believed you had good intentions or at least that you were making an honest attempt to establish a dialogue. But instead...
HIM Instead you're the one who is ruining everything and I don't understand why.
HER It's very simple. Because your aim has only ever been to get me to confess. Because I was supposed to fall into the trap. Forgiveness, redemption, and all that, all in a bath of left-wing laicism. A summary of the worst things of our culture with their trails of guilt, conviction and judgement, piety, and ideological fantasies. Woe betide the rich, happy the poor. I wanted to look you in the eyes, to be alone with you, to understand who is behind that mask.
HIM Why are you still so scared?
HER Scared? Scared of what? Of you? And what if I were? Have you never been scared?
HIM I once went to buy a pistol, to defend myself if it came to it.
HER Oh you're human. You're human too.
HIM And, because I'm human, I then decided to destroy it.



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HER I, instead, still have fear. Why? Because you lot isolated me. Because I lost and then was left out of the game. And so your theory is correct. Now leave. We don't have any more to say to one another.

HIM Just like that you're going to undo everything we've done?

HER And what have we done?

HIM We talked. That's what you wanted, right?

HER And words are actions? (*Silence*). You see? I've won. Some animals can't be tamed. Your generosity doesn't wash with me. You didn't succeed, you didn't succeed. Go home to your beautiful house, to your daughter who hopefully will have left you a hot dinner. I'll return to my cell. And these tapes can be thrown away too because we haven't said anything, apart from trivial nonsense.

HIM I don't want...

HER What? What don't you want?

HIM For it to end like this.

HER Do you have a bad taste in your mouth?

HIM Yes, it's painful.

HER That's something then.

Pause.

HIM You're right.

HER Ah, really?

HIM Yes.

HER About what?

HIM (*getting up from his chair*) It's getting late. The time which we had at our disposal, it's gone. (*He nods at the guard, then in a loud voice*). I'm leaving.

NARRATOR The door opens. The man gestures farewell. (*The man remains still, holding out his hand to her. The woman turns towards the window and remains as if frozen in her initial position*). The woman is at the window with her back to him. The man remains standing for a moment, his hand stretched out towards her. After a long silence she lets out a deep sigh and continues to stay still. The man turns on his heel and leaves. Darkness.

The entire space is slowly plunged into darkness.