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Vittorio Franceschi

DEAD WEIGHT

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by Vittorio Franceschi

translated from the Italian by Marla Moffa

Characters

(In order of appearance)

A young guy. With a helmet, about eighteen.

A wife. Of mature age but not old.

A father. Elegant with a tie, about fifty.

A daughter. About thirty.

A bum with a plastic bag. Age undefinable.

The Chorus is composed of the same five characters.

When the lights come up the five characters are already on stage, four chairs are next to them. The characters do not look at each other nor do they speak to one another. The stage is a neutral space, in the background there is a window from which a bare tree is visible. There is an armchair center stage, a mannequin stands stage right. Downstage, on the ground, there is a heap of clothes that forms the shape of a long body lying down, covered by a blue sheet. At the end of the prologue, the young guy with the helmet approaches the body while the other four characters sit down. After each monologue, the character who has just finished speaking returns to the Chorus. At the end of the Chorus, the next character takes the stage while the others sit down. The character who has just left the stage will sit in the chair that was previously occupied by the character who has just taken the stage, and so on until the choral epilogue.

Prologue

CHORUS - There's a day in life that the sky
cannot open up as promised
with its golden rays and its thousand thrones.

There's a day in life when the heart
and the legs and the arms and the hands
break. You see the clouds
pass in the distance and they do not know
who you are, nor how you've lived and if the smell
of spring that descends among people
is for you alone or for all
the lost souls in the world.

There's a day in life that pelts down
without warning like a black rain
and in no time a hurricane overturns
your old home.

That is the crazy day
that makes the donkey fly on the roof
and pushes the boundaries a bit further
the day that erases
the names from the doorbells.

That day you'll have to be ready
with the truth of the heart. You'll be alone.
Put down your bundle, stop
lean against the wall.
Do not be ashamed of your weariness.

You'll see in the dark rivulet
of your memory all of your life pass by.
Do not try to make it better
do not embellish it with nostalgia.

Look instead
in the old mirror
you always knew
that a messenger would come.

Welcome him. He will take you
under his mantle
of brown silk, closing the wound.

Listen to his footsteps
light on the gravel, he has stopped
under your window, there
he's calling your name.
Go and see.

First Episode

THE DEATH CURVE

The young guy, with the helmet under his arm and a small bunch of flowers in his hand, comes on stage and goes near the body on the floor.

THE YOUNG GUY – Fuck, Steffy. I told you that Mirko didn't know how to drive (*Lifts the sheet at the height of the legs*) Fuck! You had the best looking legs in the world and now look at them. On the asphalt there's still your skin, an entire strip, we went to look with a flashlight. (*Lowers the sheet*) They didn't clean it up, cars go right over it. Mirko is in a coma, he'll never make it. That's what the doctors say, not me. He's full of tubes and in any case they've amputated his leg. Those who go in to see him come out shaking their heads, it's like a TV commercial against scooters. The doc who amputated his leg is Chinese. I thought they only did acupuncture, instead they know how to hold their own with a scalpel too. (*Grabbing the helmet*) Can I put it here? (*He places it on the body, near the feet*) I'll put it here. You never liked helmets, you wanted to feel the wind in your hair. (*Places the bunch of flowers on the armchair*) They still haven't found the car. Now it's too late, they'll never find it, that son of a bitch got away with it. They've got too much to do, two hours after your accident there was another one in the same spot. In fact, I'm not sure if that scraped skin was yours. Maybe it was from the other one. A Tunisian, but he was on a bicycle. That curve, you need to know how to lean into it, you remember we used to joke about it, calling it the death curve. It's deceiving because halfway into it there's a ridge that's been there since they changed the piping, the asphalt dips down and when you pass over it you jump, Mirko knew that, not even a month ago he veered in that very spot and anyway he didn't even bother slowing down, the tire marks belong to the motorcycle that ran over the Tunisian, now everyone is blaming the hit-and-run driver but at most it can be considered “failure to assist” but you died on the spot, there was nothing left to assist, it's Mirko's fault and also that of the ridge which has been there for two years and no one does anything about it, in the evening the women come out with their lawn chairs to sit near the curve and watch those who die. As I was coming here my head was full of things. Because I wanted to apologize. It's not true that Enzo was cheating on you. We sent you that text message as a joke, because everyone kept saying you were jealous while I said you didn't give a shit about Enzo when instead you did give a shit and how was I to know that then you would have gotten together with Mirko. And to think that it was my idea, if I had only known! But how was I to imagine that you would go and choose the first one that came along, just out of spite, everyone knows that Mirko's a moron, who else would have their leg amputated by a Chinese? When we found out we laughed for over an hour. “Needle-thread, needle-thread... zissors, zissors, zcapel!”... (*Laughs for a moment*) Sorry, sorry. “Schumy” was free, and Baldo too, he had already broken up with Sabrina, and modestly speaking there was me too. Fuck modestly speaking. I'm a tough one, whether you know it or not. Why did you have to choose Mirko? As a result you went off the road. He's the one who went beyond the white line, not the car. Never mind that the car didn't stop, you're the ones who crossed over in the moment that the car arrived. He was so excited to have you behind him that he lost his head. After a fall like that, even if you had been wearing a helmet you wouldn't have made it. I don't want to insist but if you had gotten together with me, now you would still be alive and tonight we'd go to the “Minaret”. Not for the high, you know that for me getting high is just a pain in my ass. But to spend some time together, drink something and then leave before the others and go where there's more darkness,

not where we parked that night that you were crying, but on the other side, where there's the lake with the trouts. Now we'd be there and if the moon were out I'd look at your breasts under the moon. I liked you a lot, damn it, a lot. Enzo used to say that you had the most beautiful boobs of the milky way. Remember the time we had that contest. You, Erika, Gioia and Sara. The judges were me, "Turbo", Gioele and Tinto. The other girls all got undressed, but only you refused and I liked that, damn it, it showed you had character. Besides, all those boobs in the light of day aren't even that nice to look at, the sunlight brings out all their flaws, the moonlight instead envelops things and makes them become mythical, like a figment of your imagination. I voted for Sara but Erika won three to one. Gioia got pissed off but honestly hers are a bit flabby, they lack seduction, my grandfather says that women's boobs go on carbide, that's what it is, Gioia's boobs don't have carbide. If you'd have taken your shirt off, you'd have won hands down. *(He walks in a small circle muttering something under his breath, then turns back to the body)* The truth is that I still don't know nothing about nothing. Maybe if you were my girlfriend I'd know something more. My mother says I've got to get a job but I still haven't decided what to do, do you remember that we talked about it and you said enough already, get a move on, and I said I didn't know whether to be a mechanic or a body-maker and you said to do heads or tails. Well.. now I think the time has come to do heads or tails. *(Digs out a coin from his pocket)* If it comes out mechanic I want to invent an engine that will win the Formula One and my stable will be called Steffy. If it comes out body-maker I want to invent two headlights in the shape of boobs and in place of the nipple I'll put the foglight, the kind of thing that would make Pininfarina faint. Heads mechanic, tails body-maker. *(He looks at the back of the coin)* We always say heads or tails but the tails doesn't actually exist, here there's some kind of strange thing, looks like a submarine. Well, heads mechanic, submarine body-maker. *(Goes to toss the coin but holds back)* I never thought about the afterlife. The other day on TV there was a show on space exploration. Now you tell me how we're supposed to find our afterlife in that infinity. The earth is so small that its afterlife must be small too because God would never have made something out of proportion. And how can you find something so small in such a big infinity? And besides who said that the earth's afterlife is near the earth? What if it's on the other side of the infinity? We have some close relatives, my mother's cousins for example... well, we're here but they're in Argentina. I'm going to think a bit more often about the afterlife, since you now live there. Do you have hot water? Or do you still have to invent it? With such infinite time I'm sure it's possible. One dies and ends up in a place where there's still no hot water. *(A disturbing thought crosses his mind)* If I wanted to invent electricity I wouldn't know how to do it. I turn the light switch on and off but in an unknown place I wouldn't know how to invent it. Maybe my mother's right, I've got to get a job. *(Moves hurriedly towards the helmet, picks it up but then stops)* Listen, there's one thing we don't know. Do you like an applause at a funeral? Or do you prefer we didn't? When it's my turn I prefer none. What the fuck is there to clap about? Gioia says you'd like the applause. Baldo and Sara say you wouldn't. Enzo says he's not sure if he's going to come to the funeral. "Schumy" is making a poster with your portrait, you know he likes to paint, it says STEFFY WE WON'T FORGET YOU. My grandfather says that everything gets forgotten. Grandparents are either pathetic or assholes. *(Pointing to the bunch of flowers on the chair)* Oh... there was a bunch of flowers on the curve, I wonder who put it there. *(He picks it up)* It wasn't Enzo, I asked him. Those women, I doubt it. I brought it for you. *(He places it near the head of the body, smiling)* Bye. *(Shudders slightly)* Maybe they were for the Tunisian! Fuck!

(Uncertain of what to do) Listen... try to stay calm, there wherever you are. Because you were always so agitated, you never stood still. One could never get a good look at your profile, after a moment you had already turned to face forward and then a moment later three-fourths of the way. You looked like a Picasso. No offense. But I would have been happy to kiss you even if your lips were coming out of your ears. And even on your eyes, one horizontal and the other vertical. That you then close and you say goodnight to me and in that moment Picasso is no longer and they go back to being your eyes. Goodnight, Steffy. If in the infinity there is a seat next to you put your jacket on it and if they ask you if it's free tell them it's taken. I'll come soon. *(He makes to leave but his glance falls on the bunch of flowers. He's perturbed, uncertain whether to take it or leave it. He then has an idea and digs out the coin from his pocket.)* Heads Steffy, submarine Tunisian. *(He tosses the coin and catches it in the air. He looks at it, upset)* Submarine... *(In an apologetic manner, after a moment of hesitation, he reluctantly picks up the flowers and the helmet and joins the others).*

First Interlude

CHORUS – Who knows how it happened. It was
the first birth in the world. Maybe
Eve went into labor on a river bank
and her cries of innocent pain

made the eagles soar
 many wings cut across the valley, the wind
 shook the olive trees and Adam tore
 the umbilical cord with his teeth, he had seen
 an anthropomorphic monkey do the same
 then they placed the little one in the water
 and since then, uninterruptedly
 in the current flows
 Cain's blood and placenta.
 Subsequently, before and after Christ
 more wings cut across the valleys,
 blacksmiths and potters came
 as did joiners and silk merchants
 Plato came and Machiavelli came
 Popes came and artists came
 with their infinite universal illusions
 and from the sky descended Stradivari
 from hell rose Paganini
 who wouldn't repeat himself and who held true
 to that superb motto and sure enough
 he died just once and was then carried
 perhaps by the wind of Bethlehem
 the humble carpenter my father
 because over time history was made
 of bricks of every possible size
 and below my house, just yesterday
 they opened a small tavern
 the counter is lined with appetizers
 served by Tanya from Moldavia
 who pours wine in pot-bellied glasses
 to all the patrons, to the nighthawks
 and to those who wake up
 early in the morning to go to work
 and cursing they wash their hands
 in Cain's water that still today
 flows from the faucets with indifference
 first hot then cold, transparent
 and disinfected with a bit of chlorine.

Second Episode

MEMORY IN THE HEART

The wife detaches herself from the Chorus, comes on stage and approaches the body on the floor. She holds a purse in her hand. She speaks sweetly.

THE WIFE – All it took was that I step out in the hallway to speak with the doctor that quickly you took advantage of the situation. A husband can't refuse the last breath to his own wife. I was entitled to it, after thirty-two years. *(She bends down and makes a light gesture, like a caress, without lifting the sheet)* I think that evil chose you because it knew that with you life would be a breeze, you've always been a fatalist and little inclined to put up a fight, certain as you were in your heart that it wasn't possible to leave a trace in the world. You used to say I'm just a tailor, not a stylist, and even the most beautiful of suits will one day begin to droop at the elbows and become a rag. Instead you were a real artist, one of the last because today nobody knows how to make tailor-made suits anymore. With all due respect but Armani and Valentino could only dream of making a suit as well-cut as yours, you could make fat men appear thin and short men seem tall, and if that ain't art then you tell me what art is. When you used to take your clients' measurements, there was such silence, not even a fly dared to buzz, it was like taking part in an ancient ritual. *(She moves a few steps away)* Something terrible is happening to me, I'm embarrassed to tell you: I can no longer remember your face. Just two days after. How is it possible? I try but nothing. So everything becomes so dim so quickly? Or maybe everything before was already dim and the only reason why I could remember your face was because I had it right there under my eyes? Luckily there are photographs, today I pulled them out, but see, there too, it's strange, it's like going over the outline. But what about the inside? Our thoughts aren't present in photographs, at the most there are those of the photographer. In fact, as soon as I closed the album everything in my head turned hazy again. So I went into your studio and I looked at your work table. The chalk and the scissors were there with the yellow measuring tape that you used to wear around your neck... what a strange sensation... even the sewing machine... on the pin there's still a spool of grey thread. And then on your notepad, there are some phone numbers and names but I don't know who they are, maybe one of them, the Engineer Valotti, he's the one who asked for the double-breasted jacket and then changed his mind. There are those who leave a "be right back" sign, you left your objects... and in fact nothing would ever make you think that you're not coming back *(Winces, then backs away almost staggering and sits on the armchair)* You're not coming back? I wander aimlessly in the house, every now and again I stop to look outside. The wall is always the same. But when one of us dies, why doesn't it crumble a bit? Why doesn't a crack form, even a small one? I sit down. I get up. I sit down. I hear a storm but there isn't even a breath of wind. So I close my eyes and try to recall in my mind the layout of all the rooms in the house, the design of the whole perimeter, do I seem crazy to you? Entrance, living room, bathroom, kitchen... even the recesses, the nooks, the edges of the bearing columns that stick out from the walls... even the cornice of the ceiling... because I think that it is there, inside that design, that you and I lived together and something must have stayed behind. *(On the verge of tears)* But I don't see a soul in sight, neither living nor dead. Yesterday, after your sister left... oh... she asked me if she could have something of yours, I told her choose what you want, she took a scarf, the blue one... after she went out I was in such a state... you know that ambiguous time of day, towards evening, when all the margins begin to blur and if you happen to be on the edge of a lake you fall in. You could hardly see the clock tower and there weren't any swallows, they must have already gone. *(She searches in her purse and, continuing to speak, pulls out a handkerchief. She softly blows her nose, then puts it back in her purse)* I get lost in the

dark, imagine in the darkness that's in my head. The mistake was not having kept a diary. Today we'd know everything that we did and on which day, and instead... thirty-two years blown away like the dust. You know what came back to mind? Filippo's light blue flippers that we forget in the hotel and that yellow towel with the ducks. But our story, yours and mine together... meeting, choosing, loving each other. I think that once this moment passes everything will be clear once more. I sure hope so, because today's haziness is unbearable. Even our honeymoon... I remember the places where we went, the landscapes, but not the thoughts, what we said to one another. Facing each other in those tight coaches, with our knees that sometimes brushed together. The Camargue, those violet sunsets. And those wild horses outside our windows... *(As if reliving that moment)* Look, look! Tu-tum, tu-tum, tu-tum, tu-tum... *(Imitates the sound of the train)* In our memories landscapes last longer than thoughts. Maybe because nature is never banal. Every once in a while you tried to be witty. "Watch out I'm going to take your measurements!" ...And I would reply waist fifty chest ninety-eight and we'd have ourselves a good laugh. Do you know that if I think about sex I don't remember anything precisely? And to think that before I couldn't even get to sleep at night. Do you want me to tell you about the legendary first time... one speaks so much about it but I don't remember anything, don't get offended, my memory of it seems enlarged, in other words there was that period... you were never serene and in private I would read up on sex to try to make sense of it all. That's it really. Then I think it was work that became the first priority. The assignments, the reunions, the papers that I would bring home to correct and your clients that were always coming and going, I could hear you chatting in the hallway... *(Appears embarrassed)* Oh, I've been meaning to tell you... I've been thinking... that I'm not going to put your picture on the tombstone, I think I'll just put your name. After all before the photograph was invented they used to put just the name and cemeteries seemed more sacred somehow. A month ago the upholsterer died, the one on the corner of via Goito, you remember, everyone knew the store was just a cover up and that he was actually a loan-shark. Today he rests in peace with a nice color photo that shows him smiling happily to everyone that he ripped off. Poor Tilde, he even took her wedding band. Faces, faces, faces all forgotten and we pass in front of them with indifference and our bunch of flowers. No, I won't put a photograph for you. Only your name and the date. A sign of decency and discretion, I'm sure you agree. It's like going back to something that's more innocent, closer to nature and to the earth, to which we all must return on tiptoe. True memory is in the heart and it lasts until the heart lasts. I'm not sure if I'll move. I've grown attached to this house even if the three flights of steps begin to weigh on me. Also because no one delivers the mineral water anymore, the Pakistani have made more than enough money and don't want the bother. Maybe if there was an elevator... there's room for one but they'll never vote for it. Thank goodness we decided to rent, remember we were on the point of buying? Home owners are a rotten lot, as soon as they possess something they begin to growl and to bite. But you were never the growling type. Filippo is serene. At his age you react in another way. He's got his whole life in front of him. That's what they say, no? I hope he makes it. Makes what I'm not quite sure. Did we make it? What is there to make anyway? I've got to go, there's the funeral home guy outside. He's young, cheerful, fit, a nice looking fellow. He's dressed in light colors, he's the one who introduced himself first. There are no longer those sad looking gravediggers, with the face of a gravedigger. Everything's really changed. I asked him if he could wait just a moment, he's probably out there grumbling. He said he had to take your measurements. *(Her eyes swell with tears, she leaves quickly)*

and joins the others).

Second Interlude

CHORUS - Poor thing, she was so sweet
such a good soul.
-How did it happen?
I don't know, I heard
it was something bad, a tumor.
-Yes, in her bones.
-In fact you could tell, lately

she had trouble walking, she limped.
-Well, sometimes there's just no telling
there was a cousin of mine and she too
as of late had trouble walking
and she often rested on a ladder
but her cancer was in her bladder.
-Ah, wherever it gets you it gets you.
It's a badness you can't undo.
-It's all a matter of good luck.
- They sure have had it rough in the family.
- Heavens. They seem to be subscribers of the cemetery.
-First the grandfather and then the sister
just one month later, it wasn't a blister
but a neglected tumor.
-Where?
-Her breast.
-No one dies from breast cancer anymore.
-You don't die if you catch it in time.
At least once a year
you have to do a mammography.
-And that's not even enough, just think my dear
that my first husband's sister
used to get hers done once a year and then she died
hit by a tram: her shoe was untied
instinctively she bent down...
in the very moment that the number 28
arrived.
-I got married on the 28th.
-That too is all about timing.
-What did you say? I didn't catch it...
-What I was saying was... the ups and downs of life.
If it's meant to be there's no point to frown
even fish can drown.
-At fifty it's not fair.
-Why at sixty it is? One can't deny
in life it's just not fair to die.
-But even being here... today
there's not all that much to say.
-In any case better to be on this side
In the afterlife I doubt there's a second ride.
-If this is what this is about then neither do I
but still, nevertheless, just to be wary
when I remember I say a Hail Mary.
-Those who have faith are the lucky ones.
-But, my son who goes to catechism
says that the priest says that
at least once a year
you have to go to confession

and at least at Easter, receive Holy Communion.

-Once a year?

-At least.

-That's not so much,

how bad can it be.

It's like a mammography

on your soul.

Third Episode

NEW MAN AND HOMO SAPIENS

The father detaches himself from the Chorus and comes on stage. He approaches the body.

THE FATHER – I was never of the idea of buying a house with visible beams because the woodworms get at them but your mother had her heart set on it, she always had a predilection for antiques, but how was she to imagine such a thing. Well, if you're intention was to punish me with that macabre performance I've got bad news for you, you didn't succeed. To begin with, it was the landlady who found you hanging there and the identification was done by your cousin Milena who is always the first in line whenever there is a mishap. It seemed like a scene from one of my novels, do you remember "Alarm-bells"? You liked it, you read it twice and when they made that film with that German actress you said it was crap, that they had betrayed me. I was a hero for you then, you used to look at me with pride. *(He pulls out of his pocket a pack of cigarettes, puts one in his mouth, is about to light it but then thinks twice about it and puts it back in the pack)* You still didn't know that your father had given up a long time ago on art and glory and wrote only for the money. I wonder if I had talent. Who knows. Do you think I had talent? In any case I didn't need much convincing, I opposed little resistance, that too is a kind of talent, I liked English shoes and regimental neckties. *(Looks at his watch)* At ten I've got tennis, I'm playing doubles with the Majollo brothers and with Carlo Barbini, do you remember Carlo Barbini? The one you used to say looked like an ostrich with a racket, with his long neck, potbelly and thin legs, I still remember the time you beat him. Boy, was that a treat! He never got over it, to be creamed by a teenager was a hard one to swallow, he kept saying it was because of his headache, ya, headache whatever... Sorry if I don't lift the sheet but I don't feel up to it, anyhow I know what's underneath it. *(He takes out the cigarette again, holding it with his fingers without lighting it)* Listen, I'm sorry, I guess you could say I wasn't much of a dad but you as a son were a real piece of shit, let me tell you, with all that youth bulging out of your eyes and without ever stopping to think about what your mother and I did, never a thought, it was just you railing against everything from morning to night. You constructed walls of contempt! If I want to remember your smile I have to look at pictures of you when you were little. How true that youth is nice only once it's gone. But I was young too and I didn't make a tragedy about it, I just waited for it to pass. At your age there are a lot of advantages. You still have all your hair, you get a hard on every five minutes and your teeth are intact even if you went on complaining for over a year about a little cavity. And as far as injustices in the world go they have always existed and there isn't a revolution that can eliminate them because evil is rooted in man, in those ugly malignant beasts that we are, now that you lie there cold you probably understand that. But when you were still warm where did you look to? Didn't you see the faces of those who shouted together with you in the march? Did you really think that they wanted a better world? I met so many of them like that, in '68, I saw them up close, it makes me laugh. Poor Ho-chi-minh. Do you want to know why you went around smashing windows and burning rubbish dumpsters? Because it's easier to tackle a problem obliquely rather than face it straight on and what's oblique is the burning dumpster. Yes siree, with it's hypocritical and tricky flame it burns the present and pushes the truth a little bit further... to the next month, to the next year, to the next life. It's a small do-it-yourself-big-bang with which you try to regenerate your unlucky personal universe, that's what it is. Thank goodness your mother died before you, I can still hear her cries, she would have hung herself too on that beam. Once in a while cancer is merciful. *(He takes a cigarette from the pack, looks around, goes to the window ledge, sits on it and lights up)* Don't think what you did makes you original, you're not the first to kill himself after

a political disappointment. Look at Majakovskij, even if some say he shot himself for a woman but I don't buy it. A guy like him? He leads the proletarian revolution, turns the world upside down and then kills himself for love, like any lousy decadent poet? I say he killed himself because revolutions are nice until the day before. But the day after, while you're busy trying to build the new man, homo sapiens pops out from under your bed and steals your watch and the sun of the future. But it's true that even the bigger man at times leaves small traces of sperm on his flag. In brief, as all idealists conclude, it's all jinxed from whatever side you look at it. *(Throws the cigarette out the window, after checking that no one was passing by)* Let me feel what effect it has to place one's hand on the forehead of a dead son. *(He kneels in front of the body. He then places his hand underneath the sheet and takes a deep breath)* If you have something you want me to understand, now's the moment. In this moment I can understand anything, but hurry because it goes by quickly. *(He closes his eyes)* There were many daisies in the fields when you were a kid. Do you want to talk about the blue sky with the trails left by the supersonic planes that you admired wide-eyed? Yes, now and again we had some gentle Sunday afternoons, some happiness during a birthday that lasted half an hour, the time to open the presents; a pebble picked up on the beach that in that moment seemed so precious to us and the next day was just an ordinary rock. You cried for a long time over that bee sting, we put ice on it but you kept crying and saying the wasp the wasp and your mother, but no, it was a bee... she felt the need to specify. You knew how to draw so well, yes, there's no denying it, you knew how to draw beautifully and when at the age of 16 you said you wanted to become a painter I was happy, your mother a little less, in bed that night she said painters go hungry. *(Opens his eyes)* She wasn't all wrong, the world doesn't know what to do with its artists when they are alive. Artists are an incurable good in the healthy body of shit. They have to die so that shit can triumph and then it can glorify them and sell them at an auction. We are naturally driven toward evil and when you understood that you didn't make it. Just like Majakovskij. Noble souls. Useless souls and a bit twisted, you send yourselves to rot together with the few souls that understood you. *(He removes his hand from under the sheet, then looks at it)* What a joke, huh? All slaves of chaos, both men and camels. And none of them, neither rich nor poor, will pass through the eye of the needle. To shout and curse is too easy, you have to conquer the absence of heaven and it's more difficult than conquering Cuba. It took me fifty years. Well, at least I did it. *(Gets up)* You know, one gets on well with a sponge in place of the heart. To accept ourselves with all the filth in our soul is a chore not even Hercules would have shouldered. *(Looks at his watch)* I better go if not I'll never make it to the Club because after nine only even number plates can circulate and mine is odd. Yes, I got a new car. I went for an eighty-thousand euro SUV, after all who am I supposed to leave my copyright to? Thanks to your dumb-ass move I'm without heirs. You know that I made the best-seller's list for Italian novelists? Last week I was fifth, now I'm third. Before me there's a TV comic and a midfielder of the national team. Maybe I'll leave my copyright to the morgue, they really need to change the tiles here. Now there's some beautiful ones, they're made by designers. Even toilet paper is made by designers. In no time they'll be designing the drool around our mouth. And even blood, no more of that flashy red. They'll make it rosé, not so low-necked and tighter on the waist. Gotta go. I'm going to go argue with Barbini. Barbini always argues. Out! No, it was in. No, out! No, in, there's the mark! What mark? Here, on the line! There's no mark! There's no line!... It's true. There's no mark, no line. But what am I talking for? Anyhow I know that you can't hear me. We'll never see each other again, neither as souls nor as any other rubbish

invented by priests or philosophers. Done. Let it last what it will. You made it short. It's a shame. You had a nice backhand. (*He turns and quickly goes to join the others*).

Third Interlude

CHORUS – Seated on a Boeing that glides
looking at the city from above
have you noticed by chance
that none of today's buildings
have chimneys? That means
that we are no longer waiting for
white smoke signals. For centuries
man has told his story around the fire, creating
legends. They were Gods
and Heroes, they were Little Tom Thumbs

and Cinderellas, they were chimeras
and centaurs. Today
the thread of that story
has been interrupted and in the fireplace
smoldering under the ashes
there's ice.

Now you can see it from below
the grand finale: as in
the eternal heap
of an ossuary
skulls and shinbones mix, so
the souls mix
and the voices of time
pant, picked clean
in a crusher that overflows
with light years and tears
in the presumable and tacit innocence
of the cosmos.

And you, comic playwright,
intent on resoling Aristophanes' sandals
keep it in mind when you pound
on the keys and hammer out lines
some a bit vulgar some a bit refined
for today's audience that is both refined
and a bit vulgar: each instant that is struck
in the world, to nurture
this madness that we are
destroys a kingdom.
Millions of docile animals
are slaughtered
for the raw need
of the stomach, that is never tame, and that allows
evil made into man to reproduce.
Guido, I would like that you and Lapo and I
be slaughtered together with them
for civil justice and for decorum.

Fourth Episode

PIG OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The daughter detaches herself from the Chorus and comes on stage. She drags a small suitcase and wears a woolen beret. She stops for a moment and looks at the body. She then looks away, comes downstage and sits on the suitcase. As she begins to speak, a flow of words come out with few moments of silence.

THE DAUGHTER – Sorry mom but I'm not going to look at you because you're not there you're where I want you to be a little bit here and a little bit there like when we used to go window shopping and we didn't seem like mother and daughter but two close friends strolling along and being silly you always said that those were the only nice moments in your life I should have called you more often and taken more walks with you and I shouldn't have listened to you when you used to say that things were going better with that son of a bitch may God curse him he ruined both of our lives I hope to find him before the police do because this time I'm really going to kill him we should have killed him together before he killed you they say it was done with a scarf maybe the one I had given you as a gift but how could anyone kill a woman like you so minute with those little shoes like a little bird you were all one feather like a hummingbird and to think that you once asked me to forgive you for bringing me into this world and by doing so you gave me one more reason to have my abortion after all my father is the one who got me pregnant how disgusting Godzilla please come back down to earth and crush him like a worm so that your big paw can be worshiped on altars everywhere just like the Madonna's foot that crushes the snake

the good thing mom is that we don't own anything so we won't provoke other mishaps which is what usually happens with rich people when a grandparent dies and sons and nephews kill each other over the booty I went over mentally what it is that you left me but aside from the fact that we aren't even the same size I don't want to keep anything skirts shirts out out burn everything because that little that you had has been touched by him everything contaminated by his hands and I will burn everything and if the house were ours I would burn that too with all its pain locked inside and with its walls full of crooked paintings like a Via Crucis turned upside down by the devil with the last stop being my virginity which he drank when I was fourteen and the first being your maternity which can be called obscene since he was cursing when having his orgasm

and so it is that I was born not in Nazareth but directly on the Golgotha the two bones that intersect each other under the skull are mine I'm sure of it I'll have a DNA test done the only thing I want to save are my dolls that you took care of for me while I was serving time and so they also became a bit your dolls as well after all you're the one who gave them to me because you knew I loved them especially the old ones especially the ones made of felt instead I hated the Barbie that whore doll that teaches little girls all over the world how to become whores too

but being in jail is not so bad I started studying again and a year goes by fast and it helped me to reflect on a lot of things my cell mates were nice they were all older than me it was like having many aunts and cousins and we often laughed together it's my personality you know I make people laugh because I'm pretty funny even if being the girlfriend of a drug pusher makes you look like an idiot everyone kept saying what were you thinking hiding the stuff for him but I had fallen in love... and so I thought I want to at least finish high school and so I asked the prison management for some books

you know I never imagined that a dictionary could be so interesting almost more so than a novel because even a dictionary has its own plot that takes you down a thousand paths and leads you to a thousand surprises to puncture means to make a small hole in something it comes from the Latin punctura punct means pricked and comes from the verb pungere instead venom comes from the Latin venenum which comes from Venus meaning a love-philtre but every once in a while in the night between one word

and the next a scream or a gunshot is heard because thrillers weren't invented by writers or movie directors, they were invented by all the dictionaries in the world with all those adjectives and complicated substantives and nouns and clandestine pronouns that pelt down from the Greek from the Latin from the Arabic and who knows from where else if you know how to read them they teach you to see the color of this life in the sense of it being a mongrel bitch but beautiful and so you see that thanks to prison I've become like one of those intellectual shits that used to make us throw up on those TV talk shows

that asshole of my father won't go very far they're looking for him all over the country that idiot fled with the company truck because he's also an idiot more than fifty people saw him and besides he doesn't have any friends he's always been considered a pain in the ass where can he go they'll catch him in the country while he's taking a shit under a tree let's hope he doesn't hang himself like Jude that would be too easy he's got to serve ten life sentences

aside all this being a sales clerk suits me must fine even if every evening the owner checks to see I haven't pocketed anything if you've been in prison you have to accept this as well but it will end I'm sure of it I'm made of another dough mom you made me a fighter I'll stick it out I'll make it mom I'll puncture a hole by holding a knife with my teeth if I have to I promise I swear this today to you who is who knows where but it's as if you were here in the flesh and who knows if you're listening I often think about what happens after

never mind Faith I wonder which is the right God if he's above below or if we have him inside in some tiny vein in our feet but giving a purpose to that little crumb that we are is not a thought to disregard even if giving ourselves a meaning is a little bit like trying to catch a butterfly in flight if it rests for a moment maybe you can manage it but if it flies in a zigzag as they usually do it's difficult really difficult or better nearly impossible to catch it with your hands but I try anyway I try because trying is beautiful I feel that it's beautiful I feel that I like it and if one day I should have a child I'll teach him that trying is beautiful and maybe one morning while I'm opening the mail it will be the butterfly that will come rest on my hand where did I read that the zigzag is a fantastic variation of the straight line in any case never give up this I now understand never give up this is the best way to improve (*She gets up, removes her beret and folds it carefully. She kneels in front of the body, slightly lifts one corner of the sheet and places the beret on the body. In doing so, she involuntarily touches her mother's head and shudders slightly. She stands, takes the handle of her suitcase, makes to leave and after a few steps stops*)

I think I'll have you buried in the earth it's the most appropriate place for someone who's walked so much and besides a tomb costs a billion cemeteries are for the rich I'll put you in the earth so that slowly you'll become a cyclamen and then a may-blossom and then an oak or a pine and then a hill and then a snow-capped mountain and I'll come to take walks and I'll give names to your paths and also to your rocks rock of laughing mom meadow of mom washing the dishes spring of mom ironing my skirt peak of mom telling me what to do lake of mom crying and one day in winter if you help me we'll make an avalanche and with it we'll bury him we'll bury him with a sign around his neck PIG OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY so that five thousand years from now they'll find him intact in the ice and in all science books there will be his photo with the caption PIG OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY and children will remember for the rest of their lives the face of that pig that they studied in school and they'll say how ugly pigs were in the twenty-first century while we in the meantime will have already become

pollen bee chestnut honey we'll be that light breeze that moves the leaves of the cherry tree and the blackbirds will still peck at the cherries as they always have for billions of years upsetting the farmer and planting pits everywhere so that new cherry trees can grow everywhere see mom for example I wouldn't mind becoming one of those blackbirds. *(She stands immobile for a moment, then turns and, dragging her luggage, joins the others).*

Fourth Interlude

CHORUS - A tomb costs
eight hundred and twenty euro
plus eighty
if you add the grave light.
So that's makes nine hundred
plus VAT.
- With the plaque?
-No, for the plaque
you have to go to a marble-cutter
if you want I can give you a list.

- Thank you. Is there one in the vicinity?
- There are lots of them. There's Bigi, Rovatti, Gambino...
- The one that costs less.
- Probably Frolo. Yes, he does his job well and doesn't take advantage of the situation he's been in the business for years.
- Mr. Frolo, what do you recommend? He was a great-uncle, still part of the family but a bit distant.
- I recommend the marble from Verona, the red one, it costs a bit less but it gives a certain tone to the loculus.
- And how much is that?
- Normally it would be five hundred. But if you don't need a receipt with four hundred and twenty we can call it a deal.
- And the inscription?
- There are several to choose from, this is the catalog.
- No, I leave it to you, let's be quick about it.
- There's the one in gothic gold that gives a nice effect. And to one side we could put a small vase? A flower fits nicely.
- Fine, that will do.
- And what about The Cross, do you want it?
- He wasn't a believer, he used to swear every other word.
- I said so for respect. You know... for the relatives.
- You're right, put it. They're many.
- What was your uncle's name?
- Great-uncle.
- Sorry. Here, write his name down for me. In block letters, please. It's so easy to make a mistake... and the marble is expensive.
- Funny you should say that, because he had, in fact, an unusual name: Storazio, like Orazio but with a s and a t in front we never knew where this name came from.
- You're telling me? I've got a history of engraving strange names: two Carlocchia's one Frigidino, one Pirpino, one Specchia and two Specchio's, one Romola, one Rema one Pochettino and even one Blasfema

she was the daughter of an anarchist from Carrara
who at the age of twenty became a nun.
- How long will it take?
- At least twenty days
as soon as it's ready I'll have it fixed.
-Who should I make it out to? The Frolo Company?
-If it's the same for you
make it out to yourself
and then endorse it.
-It's common practice nowadays...
-To save a bit, everyone does it
honest folk, not crooks.
Just to pay my taxes, in my situation
I would need to engrave thirty plaques a month.
With the cemetery The State is very severe
believe me, there's no evading here.

Fifth Episode

BARABBAS

The bum detaches himself from the Chorus and comes on stage. He is holding a soft hat in his hand, which he hastily stuffs in his pocket.

THE BUM – Hey, Barabbas, it's me Tick. It's nice and peaceful here, ain't it? Instead of a lousy

cardboard box they've given you a starchy clean sheet. *(He approaches the body)* Let's see if they've also given you a pair of shoes. *(Lifts the sheet from the end near the feet)* Barefoot in the park. But at least they washed them, look at how nice and clean they are. They must have used turpentine, for mine they'll have to use muriatic acid. *(Laughs)* Hey all of bumland is in mourning, you were Barabbas, not just any old bum. Did you know that the costs of the funeral aren't normally covered by the City Hall? No, us dead bums they bring us directly to the incinerator, but we protested because Barabbas deserves to be buried with full honors and Bingo is going to make a speech and so they better give us a piece of ground or we'll start a ruckus. *(Goes to the windows and yells)* We'll start a ruckus, I said, eh? We'll dig up the graves, remove the dead and bring all the tombstones to the Mayor's office. Is that clear? Is that clear? *(Turns towards the audience)* It's clear. We're the salt of the earth, even Christ said that he met Barabbas in a bad moment if not maybe they would have become friends. And I'll tell you another thing, we want a monument. A monument to the bum, a legendary figure of the modern age dressed in rags. It has to be made of bronze and it needs to be standing, like a true hero, and on the ground there will be a carpet of dollars, pounds, euro, roubles, yen and gold bars, all the milk and honey of the shitty power and he's trampling on it because it makes him sick and he's looking at the horizon saying, stick it! *(He sticks up his middle finger, turns and speaks out the window)* This is the pose for the monument, eh? Stick it! *(He repeats the gesture and turns toward the audience)* And his suit will be full of big fat bronze coated bedbugs and we'll put a bronze pigeon on his head with artistic bronze colored shit that drips down, that way we'll show the real pigeons that shit on monuments who's king, because on our statue the pigeon that's taking a shit will already be there, we made it ourselves, so they can go shit on the head of Vittorio Emanuele the first the second the third Carlo Alberto Filippo Umberto Emanuele Filiberto, we are autonomous and independent in everything, as its always been over the saecula saeculorum since the times of Julius Kaiser. I imagined Barabbas funeral procession passing through the streets of the city center, all the shop windows black, the rolling shutters lowered... old ladies doing the sign of the cross on their doorsteps... you're there lying flat on the fish cart that is being pushed by... by?... by thirty-six little stray bums, come on it's fantastic, tell me you like it, women are throwing flowers and tuna fish cans from their windows and the police band is playing Novaro's National Anthem, which is actually Mameli's Anthem even if he only wrote the words and I never understood why they still call it Mameli's when they only play the music because the music was written by Novaro, there's a nice patriotic mystery, Michele Novaro the unknown musician, he too is one of history's bums, but we'll redeem him. *(Sings the notes of the Anthem)* Parapan - parapan - parapan pan pan pan pan! *(Yells like a soccer fan: "Michele - Novaro - one of us!")* Hey, we're in Eurovision, eh? All the bums of Europe are present, some with turbans others with busbies and those with four knots in their handkerchiefs, they carry signs written with markers LONDON BERLIN ISTANBUL VIBO VALENTIA, they've arrived with all modes of transportation, crammed in the bellies of ships and ferries, some even by foot. A flutter of plastic bags, our flags have seen a thousand wars! Long live Barabbas! And Bingo takes the word. "Barabbas is no longer here but we are! Where there's a river there's a bridge, where there's a railroad there's an overpass, we are the umbrellaless who said no! We refuse to look into the mirror but if you look into our mirror you'll see yourselves more beautiful." And the women from their windows throw more flowers and more cans! And someone even throws himself but we catch him! Olè! And we sing and dance all the way to the cemetery and the police dances with us and

there's a cop who removes his uniform and becomes a bum and in a matter of minutes his beard has already grown and he's full of fleas, come on, tell me you like it... and everyone sings and throws handfuls of dirt and at the end the gates close and everyone with their heart full goes back to bumming about the world in Moscow, Lisbon, Paris, Oslo, Warsaw, Bratislava, Portogruaro. What do you say Barabbas, would you like a funeral like that? What was your real name anyway? And what life did you have before? You never told us. In all these years I met an engineer bum, three architect bums, eight doctor bums of which seven were gynecologists, one podiatrist, an unfrocked priest, an ex Prime Minister and an ex Advisor of the Prime Minister, four showgirl bumettes, two Swiss fortune-tellers, thirty-seven philosophers, twelve lawyers, one avant-garde director, two full backs of the Bologna soccer team, one trot jockey, four gallop jockeys and about eight hundred painters of which five hundred and twenty-six transavanguardists, three hundred and twenty-eight informalists, one hundred and sixty-seven naives that graduated from the Bocconi University, one figurative who constantly wanted to commit suicide, two situationists that kept asking themselves every five minutes "where are we?" and many neobaroquists, neoabstractists, neoimpressionists, neocubists, neofuturists, neoneoclassics, neofauves, neopop, neoclip, neoblog, neostarvingartists. But you? Who were you? In bumland we never ask indiscrete questions but a little at a time even without asking some things come to the surface. But about you nothing. One thing was certain, you were a giant, you had the stuff that leaders are made of. I'll never forget that time under the highway overpass after lighting the bonfire: "There's no messing with us! We won't let them vaccinate us!" Fuck, what an applause! And what hacking coughs! Even the rats were clapping! And Bingo from the windowsill: "Oh, captain, my captain!" ... Legendary Barabbas! Pustules, scabies and bedbugs. The good old days. I'm glad to have known you. I'm glad to have chosen bumland, what did you used to call it?... "The crème of the restless shit". And it wasn't easy. We were nineteen years old. It was a Tuesday. All of a sudden I discovered my true vocation. It happened thanks to an overturned bin with its trash bags scattered under the sun. It was as if it were saying leave everything and follow me. And so I took my vows. My first cardboard box was that of a dishwasher, it was soft as cashmere. I was happy because I finally had answers to all questions. The world? It rotates, in its orbits that are all open for discussion. Knowledge? If you've broken a piece of bread you've known all there is to know. Literature? When you've read Pinocchio you've read everything. Death? No one dies better than a bum. *(Recites as if quoting a classic)* "Like an old lion, he moved away from his pack and went to curl up on some steps looking at the sky that for once did not pelt down on him with all of its Bibles and its Gospels, its laws and its threats." A bum doesn't ask himself who are we nor where do we come from or where we are going. A bum "is". In harmony with the universe that "is". In peace with the nothing that comes, happy not to have killed. And he closes his eyes stretched out on a bench or hugging a young poplar tree or a rusty road sign that reads Pegola di Malalbergo 3 km. Hurrah. Well, I better get going, I don't want to bore you to death especially since you're already dead. But I want to say goodbye in a proper way, I want to look you in the eyes even if I'm sure they've closed them because a corpse with its eyes open makes the altar boy run away. But you know what? I'm going to open them for you. Because they can't get us, we do what we want based on the rule "so it is". I'll open them and for the last time I'll look you in the eyes the way only we know how to look at each other, from bum to bum. *(Lifts the sheet from the end near the head)* Hey, you're not Barabbas. Who the fuck are you? This isn't my cadaver. *(Lowers the sheet and shouts)*

Sons of bitches, they've cheated me! (*Goes to the window and yells out*) Where's Barabbas? Where did you put him? Is anyone, here? (*He turns toward the stairs*) Anyone living? They've already thrown him into the incinerator. But he didn't want to become ash. He had already made a pact with the chief worm and all of his advisors. (*Goes back to the body*) Who are you? Drowned? Hanged? (*Lifts the sheet once more*) Nice nose. I wonder whose body this was? It's dark, huh? Real dark. Fuck, what darkness. (*Lowers the sheet*) Yep, there's a period of time but then it's closed. Dear Mr. Dead body... there's a period of time that at the most can be extended a little bit, like when you say hey what's that glimmer of light in the distance... you remember Geppetto inside the shark's stomach? But then, gulp! And then... God forbid one should have to start all over! Better to be in the darkness and in the deepest spot possible. Because underneath the grass there are roots, under the roots there are buried cities and under the buried cities, but really deep down, there are the seashells of when we were born. Better to be there at the bottom, where there was once the sea. (*Singing softly to himself, he joins the others*).

Epilogue

CHORUS – Much pain is better
than little love

in the fog of time faults and blandishments
get lost, have you calculated

how many pairs of shoes
one wears out in a lifetime

and how many times you said goodbye
you plowed through with fatigue the tough

crust of the earth in your travels
you saw the sea and volcanoes

and oases that seemed mirages
you know the taste of water

all you need is one sip from a fountain
to distinguish Rome from Madrid

the petals of a geranium in Paris
are oval, in Vienna round

the clouds instead are the same, in church
men remove their hats

and women put them on, so
a couple who has faith can live

happily with just one hat
you know that children make noise

everywhere, whether they use
their hands or a fork and you know

that many of them, as adults
will commit crimes and this

is all that you have understood
and that you have put aside in your sac

as to indifference, it has hurt you
more than many blades, much blood

you have shed for it
remember when you go out

to turn off the light, you don't know
when you'll be back and bills are costly

don't burden your children with them
do whatever possible so that your life resembles

those few things that are virtuous
robust and happy that you imagined

without ever finding and don't be afraid of fire
give yourself up to the flames if you want to save yourself

much pain is better
than little love.

DEAD WEIGHT (A CORPO MORTO) debuted at the Duse Theatre in Genoa on April 15th 2009.
This production of the Genoa Repertory Theatre was performed by Vittorio Franceschi and directed
by Marco Sciaccaluga. Set design by Matteo Soltanto, costumes and masks by Werner Strub, music
by Andrea Nicolini and lighting design by Sandro Sussi.

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