



Karoline Dausien

HOTEL DONATELLO

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Huddled together, we wait in the night as the ocean licks the dunes. The wind is strong and somewhat spooky; we glisten with anticipation and wonder. Will they come? We have been patient and frugal, immobile, ready for an embrace. We saw the emails at reception, the credit card number, and the room preference - smoking permitted, view on the beach, second floor. Our desire, this capricious battery, keeps us going, then paralyzes our very core. Their lacquered hair will soon brush the pillows, and the bed will give in like a tired marshmallow. We are troubled by the thought of a warm breath soon filling this place, this room, this cell. Isn't it ironic that we will consume their sleep like hungry fruit bats, greedy and confused? We wait.

Oh, oh. Non me l'aspettavo. Nemmeno ci pensavo. Dal binario sento l'aria bruciante che mi turba il capello. Non so come arrivarci - quest' albergo discreto, come una camicia azzurra un giorno di primavera. Treno tassi motorino piedi bicicletta? Oh, oh, spero che mi voglia bene. Spero di non vedere le sue sorelle. Mi trovano sospettosa, mi chiedono domande strane, incuriosite dalla mia aria di borghese per bene, che porta gioielli d'oro e occhiali con le lenti fumè. Ancora mi trovo su questo binario emiliano un martedì di luglio e già lo cerco dappertutto, pur sapendo che, magari, si è perso su un vicolo di montagna meridionale, circondato di fici e di pietre bianche...

Eating pasta, she is resplendent. She sits, cross-legged, in an odd chair in the corner of the room, concentrated on her ceramic bowl. There's butter in there, and tomatoes, and onion. Salt. There's also Parmigiano Reggiano, which matured in an airport-sized hall for 36 months before being broken into pieces and sold to people like us, people who travel discreetly, tastefully, driven by pleasure. She defies what I expected for myself. Her grey hair is so long, and her skin almost bubble-gum pink, and she doesn't close her mouth when she chews. I am naked, and she is wearing a black robe, and I observe how spaghetti strands fall onto the bright floor, how grease frames her lips, how she laughs at me, amused by this person so keen on witnessing her consume a disarmingly simple dish.

Looks, glances, stares. A furtive movement of the hand. A hushed whisper, the trembling of a luxuriant set of eyelashes, shading eyes bluer than crushed lapis lazuli. The whipping of a perfumed silk scarf. Soft, round teeth, dipped in shiny saliva. One barely sees them as the mysterious figure runs past, in this misty street where fumes dance a most seductive ballet. A scream! A sigh. The muted laugh of a person who has not yet decided: am I scared or am I seduced? Puddles of dark water, reflecting ghosts, vamps, hustlers, the brief lives of a million cigarettes. Then, the urge to find a room. The figure again, a fragrant cloud of motor oil and musk, irresistible, one pursues it, the brutal echo of leather soles hitting the asphalt. A scream again! The figure pushes a door - end scene.

It feels like I'm melting into this semi-legal lobby, its doors covered in pink letters. I languish, sitting in a soft armchair, docked in front of a Persian carpet populated by Circean creatures. I wear ostrich leather gloves and an Astrakhan fur coat, my watch attached to my wrist by two ribbons of shagreen. In the end, I am not waiting for him. I am exposing myself to an unknown audience that will eventually be entertained by this silent spectacle.

They had never been in a place quite like it. It was palatial, a fitting stage for the enormity of their betrayal. The wallpaper was the color of an angel's cheek; the bed cover was so intricately embroidered it could have been framed and hung on the walls, never to be thought of as a bed cover again. They had not told anybody; when they were found out, the outrage had been consequential. Furious, their mothers beat their bronze chests. Their priests, usually so skilled in passing judgment eloquently, were muted by the event's sheer magnitude. Their archaic communities were ripped apart like blood cells blasted with radiation.

And they were proud of it.

They felt no guilt, no sorrow, no regret, perched atop a cliff that oozed into the age-old sea. At the center of this splendor, a fountain. They will hate us forever, said one. Blessed be the gods, as forever does not exist, said the other, unwrapping the dainty soap left there by a diligent soul. The smell of citrus, for them, only them.

Karim Crippa