



R E S T

A N D

F I G H T

A NOVEL BY PAOLO SIRIO



“I may be talking
about something
that does not exist.
Therefore I’m free to
say everything and
nothing”.

Philip K. Dick

(speech, “If You Find This World Bad,
You Should See Some Of The Others”)



1. Broken pens, souls with no ink. We meet under the sky of Vienna.

It's *raining*

I'm holding the pages of Notebook 21. It has been a valuable assistant when I needed it, a discreet friend when I wanted to keep our burning confidences under lock and key. Writing has unlocked my thoughts and guided my actions. We are meeting in the shadow of a crumbling wooden door, and we are walking.

Without an umbrella, we walk.

Without a light, we walk.

Without a destination, we walk.



A tower stands tall, unreachable.

We find it an irresistible photographic point; we take photo after photo, looking for the corner that will immortalize it in our thoughts. We failed. But your hand will remain forever in mine.

Guided... or deceived? Your actions, I mean.

When I was out of breath, when I wanted to run away but I remained for you, when I couldn't say what I was thinking.

My anxieties and fears. I poured them all into the notebook. And the notebook responded in my own words. When I walked without an umbrella, without a light, without a destination. It was my lighthouse. You should try it. But never read your own writing again. Save yourself the embarrassment. That's why I never read my own writing.

I did it once, and I almost couldn't climb back up the slope of that meaningless stream of consciousness. I already know that even at the end of this journey I won't be able to.

I don't even remember what I wrote the first time, do you?
I just remember that it was beautiful.

Take your time, don't feel guilty. Write until you can.

Write until you remember, write until you forget. This is what the notebook was made for. But what will happen when there are no more pages in Notebook 21?

“To be embraced and sustained by the light green water was less a pleasure, it seemed, than the resumption of a natural condition”.

John Cheever
(The Swimmer)



2. What does water mean to you?

Blub, blub, blub...

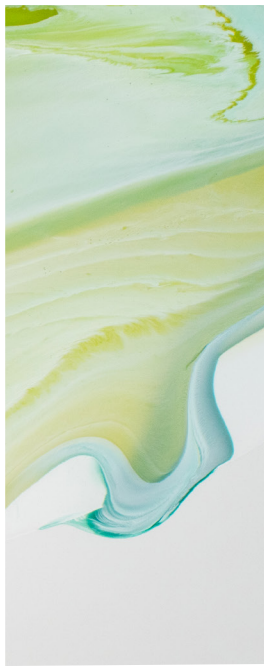
Water is resistance.
Opposition.

The weight you have inside,
and the weight you have
outside.

A force that only works when
you let go. And I never let go.

I've never understood when
people told me that I could let
go, that “you float”, and “you
can't sink while floating.”

I have never understood it,
and I've always sunk.



The sea is something else - it is air. It is childhood, family, stillness even when you don't even know what sound the storm makes.

I've learned that even a storm is necessary in this world.

Because I wrote three short stories in that silence, and each one was more disgusting than the last.

Then, being underwater. It's not a feeling, it's kidnapping.

It sucks the air out of me. Like the first time I heard you speak.

You were sitting at a small table, telling the worst things that had ever happened to you.



"If he hadn't lied to you, he would have been a different person than he is".

Maggie Nelson

(Bluets)

You were a light in the darkness that surrounded you.
But you can stay under water. You've never sunk.

The water around me was caused by something I thought I wanted, an unshakable identity I had built for myself and tried to project onto the white walls of cities. I wanted to carry it with me all my life, but later I discovered that it meant nothing. It was anything but what I had been chasing for so long. I only grabbed it when I stumbled into it. When you showed me by your example that you can still be transparent and upright in this world. Don't lose your humanity.

Believing in ~~yourself~~
unicorns

I realized that when I almost lost you.
It's always so easy, isn't it?

Actually, I went underwater once. I was a kid, or maybe it was yesterday. I was flailing around, hands and feet, arms and legs. I was wriggling. I could see the light, it was so close, but it never came. I didn't realize that the more I struggled, the further I got.

How did you get out of it in the end?

I've never said I did ...

“It would be criminal to mar this exquisite occasion with the grotesque story of his origin.

Later, perhaps.

So he nodded, smiled, listened, was happy”.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald

(The Curious Case of Benjamin Button)



3. I'm scared, it's true.

It's also true that you can stop being scared.

I remember how hard my heart was beating at that time. You asked: “Where are we going to get this beer?” I don't know what you were thinking when you said that.

I don't know why I answered the way I did.

I know where that answer led me: overcoming the limitations I thought I had, living a new life, getting out of the water. Finally, thinking about the moments we would spend together.

Moment by moment.

Marked as the umpteenth smartwatch with those giant dials that I'm wearing just long enough to see a minute pass.

Sand falling into the hourglass that I bought for you in Dubai.

I'm on a resort beach, oddly sober. You insisted that I get a soft drink, and I wanted to please you. You didn't believe me. Our last phone call upset me greatly, so I decide to go back to the room and try to hear from you again. You are far away, and if the distance of the body doesn't bother me, not yet, the distance of the mind does for the first time.

I remember your words, when you asked, "Are you afraid?" This question frightens me. Because yes. I'm afraid now.

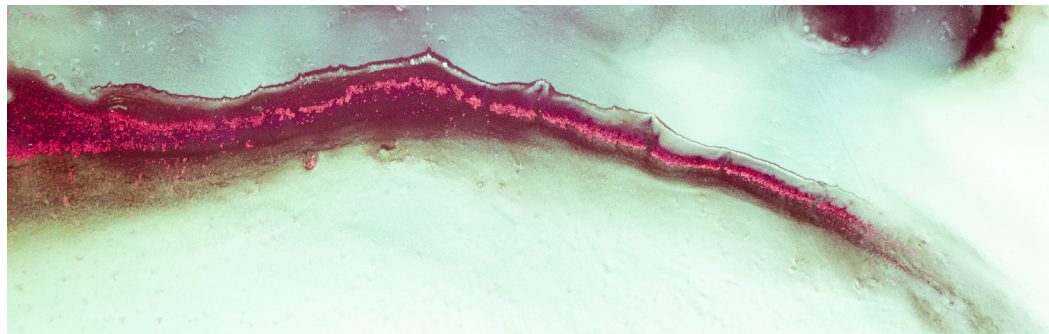
So, I'm going upstairs in a hurry. I'm glancing back as I'm running, more scared of the absence than the presence. It is a mistake, but I must see. I must know. Things in the dark cannot be seen, and if they cannot be seen, they don't exist. If you shine light on them, even just the light of your eyes, they become clearer. They become visible. They exist. They have always been there, and now they are running towards you.

Light off, light on. Live, die. Just one click.



My terrified flight. It ends there, at the foot of a desk. There is a yellowed piece of paper and a pen. Feeling at home, but away from home, I'm starting to write. What am I writing? My terrified flight. It ends there, at the foot of a desk. There is a yellowed piece of paper and a pen. Feeling at home, but away from home, I'm starting to write. What am I writing? My terrified flight...

I'm listening to the music of my pen gliding over the paper, my heart is beating, and I'm letting myself be guided. With my eyes closed, my fingers go by themselves, I don't know exactly where. Out of laziness, self-reliance, and overconfidence, which condemns one to death, I trust. There is always time for revision, when I transcribe, a mistake will knock me over the lines, push me off the edge of the page, and I'll fall into the blue room. Alone again. There I'll erase half of the things I wrote, and I'll spend hours thinking about how to make this page two.



While I'm writing, I find a moment of clarity, I stumble over the words, and open my eyes again. I turn around and see someone standing next to me. The figure has familiar outlines, but they are blurred. I don't have my glasses on. I'm tapping the desk on all sides to find where I've left them, cursing the day I chose such a thin frame, not once but twice. And, after a long search, I find them.

The figure is me. There's a large mirror behind me. But something doesn't quite fit. The me in the mirror is a man trapped in the skin of another man. A layer of flesh that does not belong to him, in which he must remain.

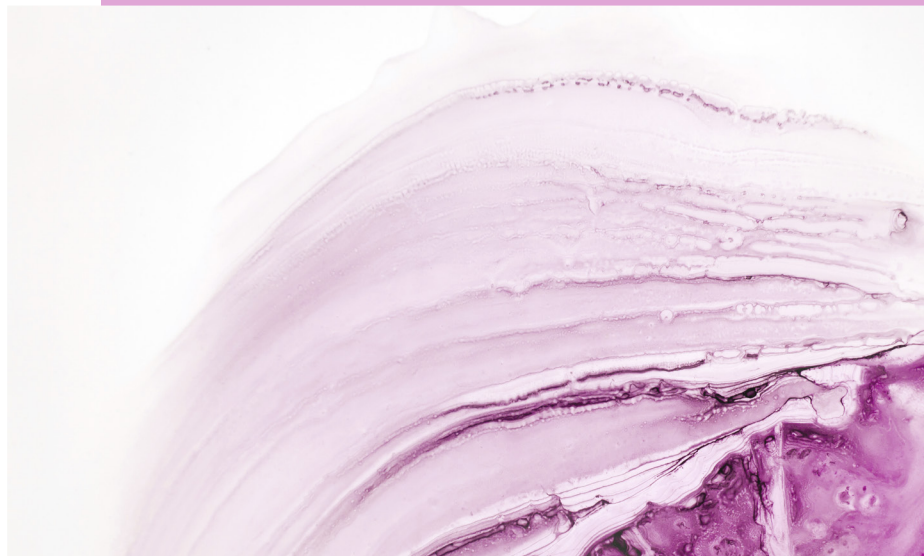
I don't know if it's because of his own decision that it would be too easy to define self-destruction, or because he has agreed to do so. But in that wrinkled, loose, flame-marked flesh, he must be there.

The eyes are sad, tired, and dull.

Who is that man?

“The last time we met you asked me... well,
you remember yourself what you asked,
I don't need to repeat it”.
I don't need to repeat it
I don't need to repeat it
I don't need to repeat it

Knut Hamsun (The Queen of Sheba)



This slow, inexorable journey.

~~Again, and again.~~ Nobody wants to make it, but they are all here. We are all here. Again, and again. Punctually. Cyclically, sadly. A great mass migration. Why are you here? I don't know. They will tell me once I am inside. If there ever was a reason to leave, they've all forgotten it. But everyone needs to go on.

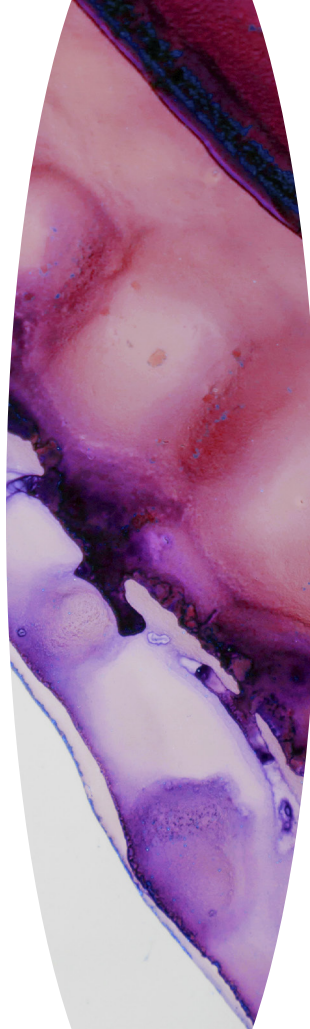
Waiting for the eternal waiting that we have decided to inflict on ourselves in the fullness of our faculties in order to cure an evil we suffer from but whose origin we do not understand. Waiting for the knight without blemish and without fault, who has both blemish and fault in considerable quantities, and who will throw us into the same discouragement into which we plunged when we began the journey, just so that the journey can begin again.

In this caravan of desperate people who have self-inflicted despair, they are transparent to one another. Being there is the same as not being there, that is the dilemma. They aren't looking at you, they aren't listening to you, so you won't look at them and you won't listen to them. They are all leaning over their noisy thoughts and their noisy smartphones.

As if they could find the cure for the disease in a box of transistors and high-definition images. Happiness.

Where else could you find it?

Anywhere but there.



Do you remember when we were together until five in the morning? Every day. The physical damage we suffered to get to know each other. It didn't matter where. In those stormy days of hearts and minds, we only cared about how much. We didn't dare to tell each other that we were good together, and we couldn't decide to separate. Even just for one night.

We were afraid to break that thin thread that was beginning to weave us together.

We let time decide for us, and it did.

The mirror. I see it again, I recognize it. We are two souls who only meet in a bed, who only share a reflection at night. Every morning, we embrace, and every morning, we go our separate ways. Divided, separated, me for me, you for you. We cannot communicate during the day, but we rest in the untiring certainty that sooner or later, at night, in that bed, we will meet again.

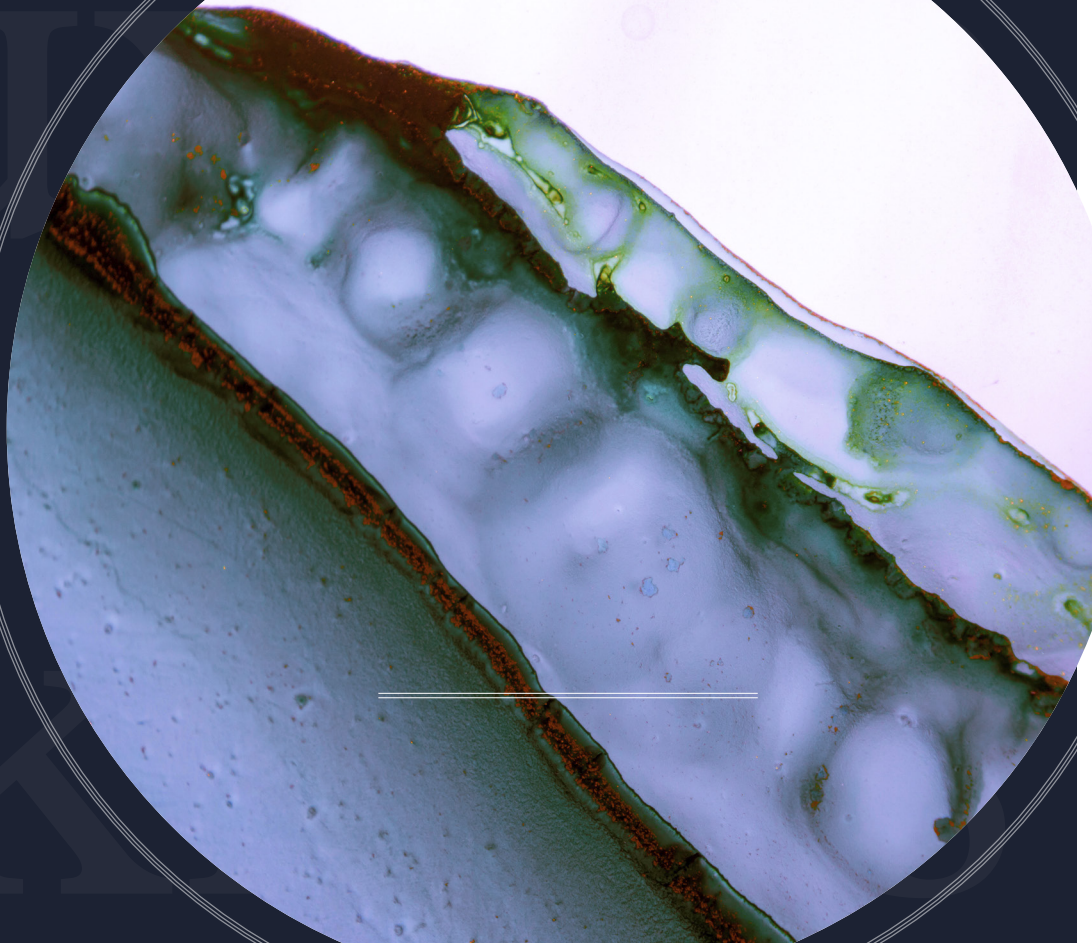
I wake again. My shoes are full of sand, but I am awake at last. I put down my pen, I move this uncomfortable, expensive-looking chair away from my desk. As I find the strength to get up, the man in the mirror is standing there, motionless. I remembered him looking-like me. As he always has been. And as he always will be. But, this time, away from me.

Don't believe what ~~they're telling you.~~
you thought you were.



“Human beings
walking together
through darkness are
lost to one another”.

Gunnar Gunnarsson
(The Good Shepherd)



4. The blue room.

A place pulverized between the folds of space and time, going back and forth. In places and in history.

I experience lost memories that come back to disturb and comfort me. They tell me that I am not enough.

They explain to me that if I stay alone, if I measure myself against nothing and nobody, I will never lose.

How you keep coming back remains a mystery.

"Don't worry, ma'am. ~~He~~ will blossom."

A professor sitting at a desk, short hair, and frameless glasses.

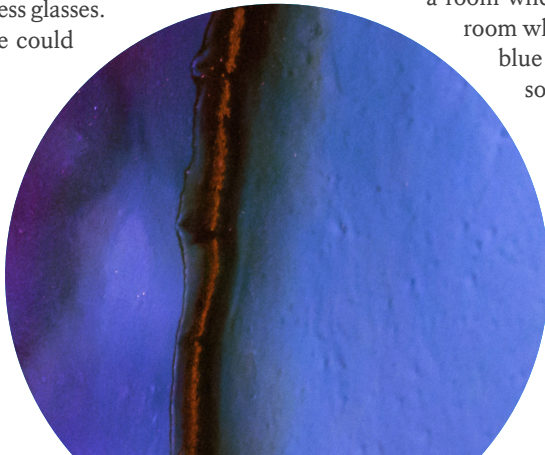
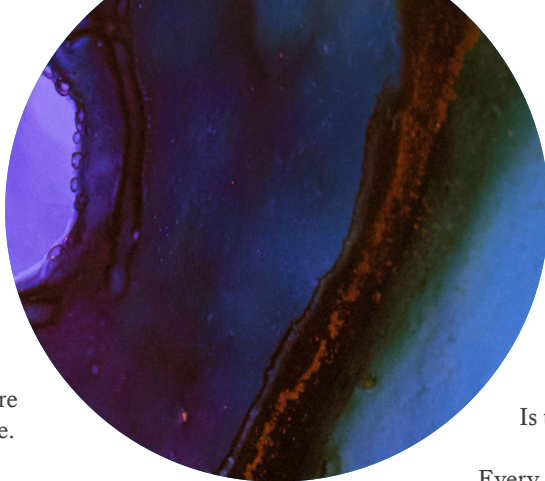
The grades that never improve, his epiphany. He could read something in me that I have not written yet.

My indelible gratitude.

Today it's the turn of the thought that should comfort me, but it doesn't. It never does.

The idea that someone could trust a talent of mine upsets me.

It is a burden, another one, and it makes me sink, too.



I know it intimately. I feel it. It's meant to be this way. It's a prerogative of the blue room.

It's deceptive warmth. It's ephemeral embrace.

It will not let you go, unless deeper.

Everything in here is dark, you can't see anything. You can hear: you have the illusion of hearing. Tic, tic.

Clomp, clomp. Clunk, clunk. Is there anyone there? Is there anybody there? It's me. It's me.

Every time you hear a distant echo. The closer you come, the farther away it is. Such a distant sound must correspond to a vast room. A room where there must be so much to explore, a room where you will find someone or something tomorrow, a room where someone or something will make your stay in the blue room more bearable tomorrow. The idea that there is someone or something is a fear and a desire. Not to be alone or to be alone.

Then someone or something turns on the light, and you discover that the blue room is a hole.

A hole where you have always been alone.

But who pulled you out?

I still wonder...

“When my
despair urges
me to

my false
consolation
enjoins me to

Stig Dagerman

(Our Need for Consolation)

abandon
hope, “for the day
is enclosed by two
nights!”

embraces
hope, for the night
is enclosed by two
days!”.

5. I never understood why you liked winter.

But why do you dislike it,
rather? The blankets, cuddling
under the covers, the fireplace,
Santa’s pajamas. Santa Claus.

Seeing the night inside that
you projected out. It’s not nice.

You wait for the light all the
time, and when it comes it
lasts a breath. Darkness, upon
darkness, upon darkness. Black.
Deep. It’s like a veil falling over
your eyes, and you tear it apart
only to find that there’s another
one. And then another.

And then another.

Have you ever driven at night? You can only see through the beams of light that come from the headlights you have. What's outside, nothing; it almost seems like it doesn't exist, and maybe it doesn't really exist. You need a great deal of trust. The ability to let go, which I never had before I met you, but which I acquired by swimming in the ice you break every day you talk to me. The digital speedometer turns red, and when it does, that means night for me.

What a color, eh? Weird. Visibility, sure. Speed, too. Danger.

Those days, when we watched Lanthimos until nine in the morning, you didn't drive. You were waiting for me to come with the night I had inside, and for the day to rise so you could let me go.

Who knows what you were thinking. Me? Darkness, upon darkness, upon darkness. And the cones of light projected by the headlights I had.

x *I hadn't understood yet that the light was you and the cones were your eyes as green as the sea.*

We are melting the darkness in our dark three-door. Outside there is a fog so thick it looks like milk. We can only trust the lights we turn on for each other. We gently lift the veil at an appropriate distance waiting for the exit to take us home.

The stereo is playing the latest hit by my favorite band. I like it.

I'll find out later that the album will be the umpteenth disappointment, but I'm enjoying it in the meantime.

We are enjoying it. I'm singing loudly "approaching thunder, awaiting the light."

I keep thinking that it is going to be the title of my next tale, or maybe a tattoo somewhere, before I forget about it and move on to another unrealizable idea.

You ^{can} tolerate me.

tolerate me

What does madness smell like?

A shadow following us, in the streets of Livorno. I'm taking some notes obsessed on my iPhone. The death of creativity every other day and the spark that unlocks me.

I catch it before it disappears, as when I run out of the shower, undressed or almost, to write the note that will save my life.

It never does, but creativity has its illusions. I let it.

I'll never find out who the murdered woman from New Jersey is, why that shadow is rambling about it, and why it thinks it's so important to tell us about it, while we are sneaking from one harried streetlight to the next one. I imagine myself doing the same as you are reading this stream of unconsciousness, I smile, and I feel a bit ashamed.

→ *"It's a test. It's free,"* the shadow babbles. "It's a thought that comforts me. It's the idea that life is like a long video game with exhausting half-rhymes of boredom and segments that require a cool head you are not used to. However, any mistake you make never has consequences: you reload everything you have saved from the point that is the most convenient for you. Who cares if it is wrong, you can start over again. You succeed.

You win. So, you always try: it's a test, it's free. You are light.

Like a shadow.



Have you ever heard of it?
What?
The sound of Sunday.

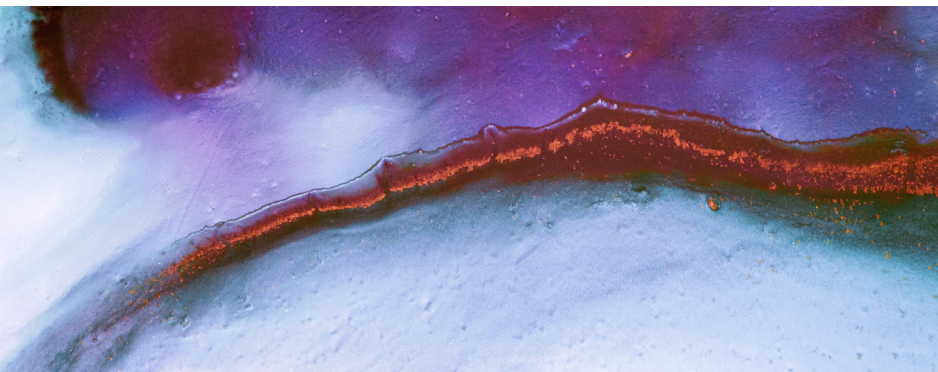
The thoughts stick together
and they shrink
s t r e t c h

until you can no longer perceive them,
and they expand until they crush you. The
lack of air, the dizziness, you try not to let anyone know. You get
up quickly because by now you've learned to recognize it when it
jingles, you throw yourself against the door leading to the terrace,
take a sip of oxygen with your mouth, and grab the dog by the
collar with your hand, you get down quickly because you have to
concentrate on your thoughts, and clear your head. You see the dog
running. Freedom. You emerge.

But you know that some piece of the puzzle is no longer in place.
You just have to find out which one.

The sound of Sunday.

Ironically, I started hearing it when you first appeared, and you made it stop.



Poking around in my mind, finding the disconnected parts, gluing back together all the puzzle pieces you had moved. Being both the problem and the solution.

... Have you ever heard that?

In the depths of Corte dei Miracoli, behind a large grey door, a blonde woman is singing. In the middle of a long corridor immersed in syncopated darkness, the fair-haired woman is singing, hidden or revealed by thick artificial smoke.

Fiddling with instruments I don't understand in front of a black curtain. She is pouring out her naked spirit in chilling cries that are dragging me into a dimension of darkness. Her revelation. Electronic music sounds evil. It bends your vertebrae, and pushes you back.

And back. And back again. It vibrates and vibrates, and vibrates again. Then it stops and it stops, and it stops again. It stops in stages as if choking its last breath before saying good night.

*The lights are turning off and on.
Silence, sound. Silence, sound.* ←

The lights are on, and she is screaming. The naked spirit emerges from the dark stage and vibrates. It vibrates again and vibrates even more. No matter the distance, or how many grey doors, stickers with enigmatic women's faces, and manga quotes I'm trying to put between me and that voice. The lights are off, the blonde woman is shouting, is shouting something I don't understand, and the further

I get from understanding, the more she pulls me to her.

*She is pulling me....
She is pulling...
She...*

6. But why do you dislike Sunday?

This thing is both a beginning and an end. You ask me to write everything that I can't stand and that bothers me the most, who knows why,

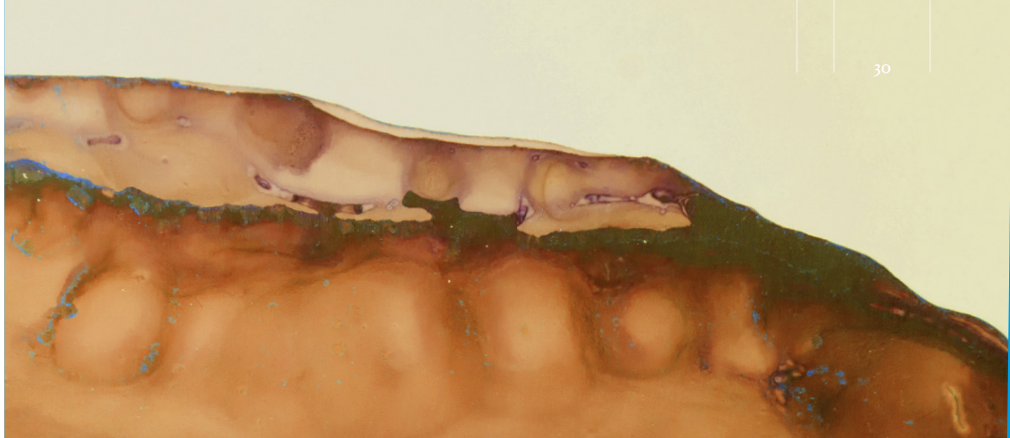
First you are afraid. You're afraid because you're facing a mountain to climb. You are not sure that you can do it. On the contrary, you are convinced that you probably can't. It may be the most beautiful mountain in the world: you don't care, you are focused on the moment when you can say: yes, I have done it.

I've finished. And that's it. In fact: it better not be beautiful, so you can tell yourself that you didn't miss anything important, while you were running, against what and whom you're not supposed to know. You love to whine, so you'll have something to complain about and in the sourness that rises to your throat, all things considered, you'll find a shred of bliss.

"Hold me,
abandon yourself to me,
confidently.
I won't miss you
and you won't miss me".

Gabriele D'Annunzio

(Hold Me)



The end? I've stopped wondering since you came here.

Time slows down and speeds up while following its own inscrutable laws, the beating of your heart, the conscious choice that not everything must have a purpose in life. Maybe now I've really finished, and I have a space where I can repeat the words without worrying about synonyms, I can steal them from history and dedicate them to you.

There can be a moment that means nothing, and everything is essential when I am with you.

It may never end.



But you already know I love cliffhangers...

Civic number 2. A garage.

Asa's Mezzanine are playing.

We barely get in but, like an ethereal presence, I'm going to sit down on the first stool I can find. Do they know I'm here, too? Among these threads that connect instruments and souls. I see small paintings of masks, demons, and ladies in yellow on the wall.

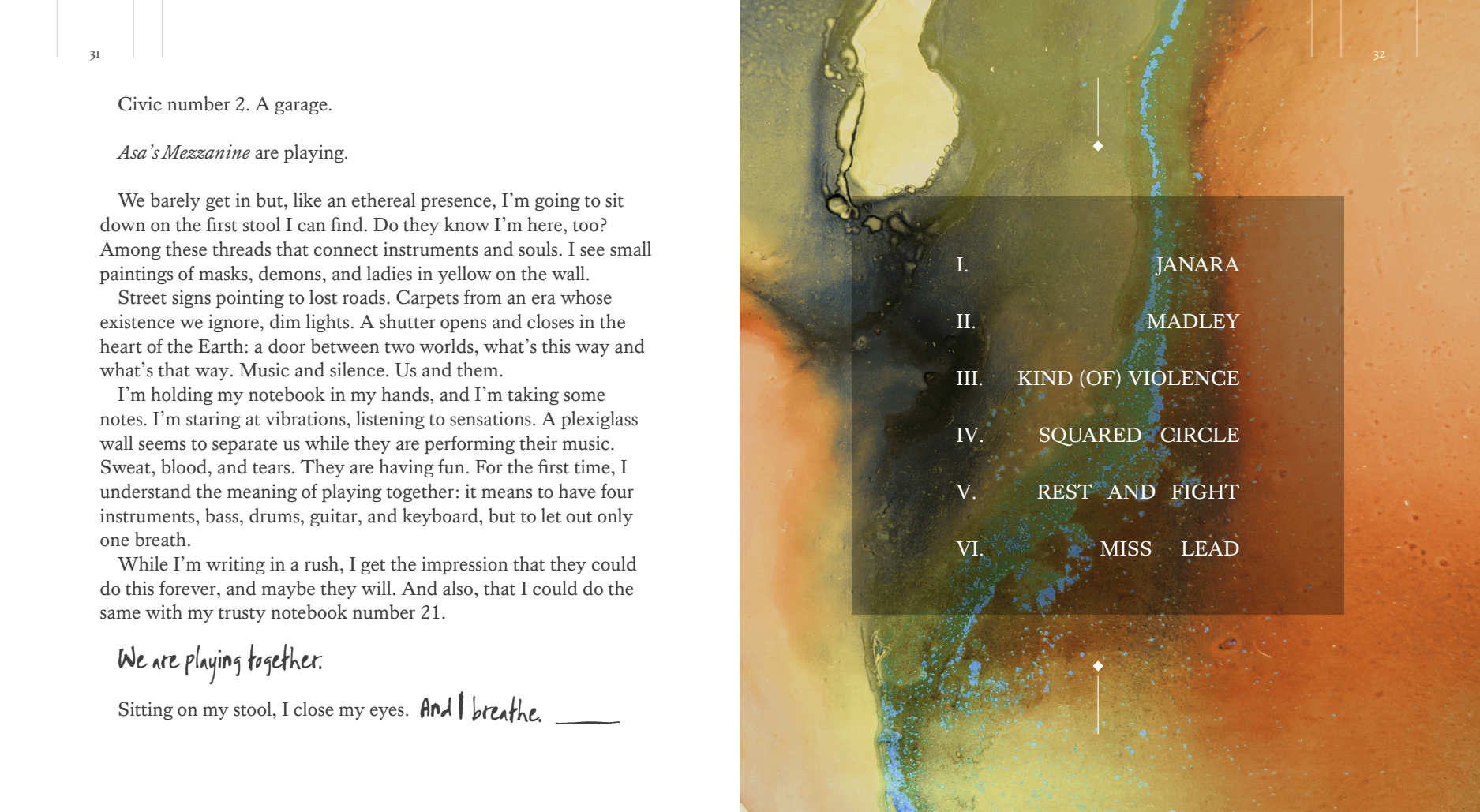
Street signs pointing to lost roads. Carpets from an era whose existence we ignore, dim lights. A shutter opens and closes in the heart of the Earth: a door between two worlds, what's this way and what's that way. Music and silence. Us and them.

I'm holding my notebook in my hands, and I'm taking some notes. I'm staring at vibrations, listening to sensations. A plexiglass wall seems to separate us while they are performing their music. Sweat, blood, and tears. They are having fun. For the first time, I understand the meaning of playing together: it means to have four instruments, bass, drums, guitar, and keyboard, but to let out only one breath.

While I'm writing in a rush, I get the impression that they could do this forever, and maybe they will. And also, that I could do the same with my trusty notebook number 21.

We are playing together.

Sitting on my stool, I close my eyes. *And I breathe.* _____

- 
- I. JANARA
 - II. MADLEY
 - III. KIND (OF) VIOLENCE
 - IV. SQUARED CIRCLE
 - V. REST AND FIGHT
 - VI. MISS LEAD

C R E D I T S

*This work is the result of an intense collaboration,
love for music, and the desire to tell you a story.
We hope it moves you as much as it moved us while creating it.*

“Rest And Fight” short story written by: Paolo Sirio

Translated by: Antonietta Maria Zazzara

Asa’s Mezzanine are:

Filippo Nassi, Lorenzo Morellini, Virginia Lisi, Antonio Mugnaioli

Special thanks to:

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Finally, thanks to all of you who cared—our friends, our families, and anyone who contributed with enthusiasm to make this project a reality.



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