

GIANMARCO

PERALE

ON THIS *BED*

ENG

20 STRAF
ANNIVERSARY

- Won't you leave him?

- No.

The street lights illuminated half of our faces. She turned off the car engine.

- Do you love him? I asked.

- I do not know.

Silence. Then she said: But I don't love you.

- I do.

- Do you love me?

- Yes.

A Carabinieri patrol car passed by us slowly, but didn't stop.

- I don't know what I'm doing - she said.

- Don't you know?

- No.

She turned towards me.

- We can't see each other anymore.

- You already said it. How many times have you said that?

- I know. This time for real.

- All right.

- All right?

- I have a question.

- Tell me.

- We can't close. You call me, you write to me.

- I know.

- Why do you do it?

- I make mistakes

- Are you making mistakes?

Silence. A horn distracted us for a few moments. She looked at me.

- I miss you.

I looked out of the car window. She took my hand.

- But I want to make my relationship work. I want to try.

I didn't answer. Then I said: We can't be friends. You know it, right?

- Yes.

Silence.

I feel like crying - she said.

- Why?

- For everything.

I looked at her without saying anything.

- What is wrong? - she said.

- Nothing.

- What is it?

- I had a dream.

- When?

- Monday. Or Tuesday. No, Monday.

- What dream?

- About you and me.

- Naked?

I smiled. She said: What dream was it?

- I was at an awards ceremony and you were home.

- What award?

- Books. And I was on the phone with you, on a video call. You were in your pajamas.

- And where was I?

- Home.

- Mine or yours?

- Ours.

She touched her collarbone.

- During the video call I observed the furniture. You had furnished it.

- Was it nice?

- Not bad. A little minimalist, a little classic. Some paintings. Lots of wood.

- Not your style.

- But in the dream I liked it.

She coughed. I asked: Are you cold?

- No. And then?

- You were lying on the sofa with Sergio and Giulio. They wagged their tails, barked and got between you and the phone. You tried to move them but you couldn't, and you screamed

and dropped your phone.

- Sure.

- I told you that I missed you. I was asking you how you were, how the dogs were, and you told me that everything was fine and that I needed to stay calm. That you were at home and that you were waiting for me and that I had to enjoy the evening. She stopped looking at me. Then she said: It sounds like a good dream.

- It was.

I looked at her knee and said: Will we be together one day?

- Yes.

A boy in a shirt came out of the restaurant on the other side of the street with a garbage bag. He crossed the street and threw it.

- You want to save your relationship - I said. - Right?

- Yes.

- And do you want to tell him?

- Tell him what?

- About me.

- No.

- Never?

- I said save, not destroy.

- You would save her, maybe. With the truth.

- I wouldn't save her.

I took a deep breath, then I said: Are you going to keep everything from him?

- Yes

- Forever?

- How can I tell him?

Silence. I started the car.

- Where are we going? - she asked.

- I'll take you home.

- Why?

We looked at each other for few seconds

-You would never leave him, right?

-I don't know.

-Do you love him?

More silence

- You love him.

- I don't know what it is. He is my family.

- Have you ever entered the Duomo?

- Never.

- Bad.

- But I'm not from Milan.

- Even worse.

I pushed her and she said: Do you want us to go in?

- No. I'm not a tourist.

- So I'll show you.

- Is it yours?

She smiled. Then I said, pointing at the Duomo: - There's no need to go in. It's here. This is it. Look at it. Handsome. End.

- And what do you want to see in Milan?

- Nothing. I know Milan well. I live there.

- What do you want to do?

- Shall we have dinner?

She checked her phone. I tried to see who it was. I asked: Do you have to go?

- What do I tell him?

- To whom?

- You know.

A child hit my knee while running.

- Tell him you're with Emma.

She didn't answer.

- Tell him you're with me.

She hasn't responded yet. I touched her arm. She sent a message, I don't know to who.

- Why me? - she asked.

- You?

- Yes.

- Why me what?

She grabbed my arm and moved me from the entrance of the subway.

- Why now?

- I do not understand.

- We are colleagues.

- Yes.

- How long?

- Three years?

- In September.

- In September, yes. Three years.

- And now here we are.

A pigeon hovered a few centimeters from her head. She suddenly ducked with her hands up. - Where are we? - I asked.

- Are you stupid?

- Where are we?

- Why did you tell me those things?

- What things?

- Come on.

- What things?

- Mike.

- That I like you?
- That you love me.
- I said it once.
- You said it.
- Yes.
- Why?

She scratched her head hard. Then she untied and remade the ponytail.

- You are tanned. - I said.
- Will you answer me?
- Because it's true.

She massaged her temples.

- Every time you send me a photo, any photo, and I know that I can only view it once, I put myself in the best conditions to be able to look at it for as long as possible. If I'm in the car I pull over. If I'm under the sun I look for shade. I keep looking at it for a few minutes, with my finger on the screen. And every time I close it I wish I had never opened it to open it again.

She didn't respond immediately. Then she said: But I have Luca.

- You have Luca.
- I have Luca. Yes.
- Okay.
- Okay?
- It's not okay. But it's okay. I know. You have Luca.
- He's my boyfriend. And I love him.

I looked at the tip of the Duomo.

- Do you love him? - I asked.

Silence.

- You love him.
- Yes. I think so. In fact, I love him. And I fuck him.
- You fuck me as well.
- But I don't love you.
- Not yet. No.

She took a deep breath, then said: Should we end it?

- Are you asking me?
- I want to know what you think.

I looked around, I took a step forward and looking at her hands

I said: I would like to be with you.

She didn't answer. So I said: I would like to be with you. But

not you.

- We have to end it.

- It's true.

- I'll fuck you and then I go home and Luca has made pasta for me. Then I fuck him it and come back to you and fuck you.

Silence.

- I can't go on like this.

- No.

- And I'm not leaving him for you.

I didn't answer.

- If it has to end with him, it will end because it has to. Not because of you.

- It makes sense.

- Do you seriously think that you and I could be together?

- Do you think so?

- I asked you.

- You know what I think.

- Tell me again.

- I want to be with you. And I think we could be together.

She looked at the floor. I got closer and took her hands.

- Do you have to redo your nail polish?

- Thursday.

- At Martina's?

- Yes.

- Don't she have availability earlier?

- They're not that horrible.

- Well... I booked a table at the Mudec.

- I don't know if I'm coming.

- I have booked anyway.

- What is the menu?

- You'll find out.

- What if I don't come?

We stared at each other for a few seconds. I picked a hair from her shoulder and said: You really can't?

- I don't think so.

- Okay.

- What do I tell him?

- That you are with Emma?

- I don't want to lie anymore. I can't take it anymore.

Silence.

- You'll never leave him, right?

- Let's not start.

- Are you coming to dinner?

She took a deep breath. She said: - If I don't come, who are you taking?

- Nemo.

- Okay.

- But I would prefer to bring you.

- I know.

The waiter arrived and we ordered two long coffees.

- I thought of something. - I said.

- What?

- Next Saturday Plaza is in concert.

- I know. Where?

- Hippodrome.

- Right.

I looked in the direction of the barista and saw him preparing our coffees. Then I looked at her again.

- Would you come?

Silence.

- You shouldn't make anything up. - I said.

- Emma doesn't like Plaza.

- She could cover for you.

- I told her we're done.

- She would understand.

- Mike.

- She would understand. And we could go. Then we end it.

- What time is it?

- 9pm.

- Will I be home by midnight?

- One o'clock.

The coffees have arrived. Neither of us said anything. We drank them in silence. Then she said: - I could come.

- Good. And if you're tired and can't go home, I booked an hotel.

- What hotel?

- Straf.

- Really?

I nodded my head yes.

- How much did you pay?

- You don't ask these questions.

She smiled at me. - I'm not going to an hotel.

- No?

- What do I make up?

- Let's think about it.

- I've already thought about it.

- Okay.

- And I don't come to the hotel.

- All right.

She touched my hand and said: It's difficult.

- For you?
- For both of us.
- Do you think about me during the day?
- Yes.

I looked at the bartender again. He wiped the counter with a blue sponge. She said: But my story with Luca isn't over. I don't know what stage it is at. I don't know what I feel.

- And for me?

She didn't answer. I asked: Was a mistake telling you that I love you?

- No.
- Maybe it was.
- Why?
- We can't be friends anymore.

She hasn't responded yet. I continued: And you are not my girlfriend.

Silence.

- We are nothing. I said.
- It is not true.
- And what are we?

She removed her hand and crossed her arms.

- I can't call you anymore. I can't write to you anymore. I can't fuck you anymore. I can see you at work but without touching you. I can only ask you to bring the salt to table 12 or the pizzas to table 1.

- Enough.
- Enough?
- Enough.
- What are we?
- Lower your voice.
- Tell me.

- Lower your voice.

- What do you want from me?

- Mike.

- What kind of relationship do you want from me?

Silence.

- We will never be friends. I don't want you as a friend. I want to fuck you. Go to dinner with you. Sleeping with you. Travel with you. We are not friends. We will never be. What relationship do you want from me?

She got up and said: Let's get out of here.

- You go.

I remained seated.

- Are you sure?
- I don't want to see you anymore.

We stared at each other for a few moments. She retrieved her bag from the chair and headed for the exit. I watched her walk and didn't get up. I locked eyes with the waiter.

**Hi F.
I am writing this letter and hope you are well.**

I'm at Straf, it's 4.12am and I'm thinking of you. It's raining outside. The bed is huge and on it we would have devoured Chinese food shortly after fucking, drink cold vodka. We would have shower. I would have kissed the foam on your back, felt your hands on my head. On this bed I would have suffocated you, made you come, I would have eaten your feet, spat in your mouth, I would have slapped you, pulled your hair. I imagine seeing you coming out of that bathroom with a towel wrapped around your head. Seeing you take off your bathrobe. I would get up and push you onto the bed. I would move this pillow and rest my head on your breasts and ask you not to go back to him.

Saturday afternoon I was with Luca on the sofa. We talked about Giada and then about you. He sat next to me and asked me if I loved you and when I realized that I love you. I replied that I understood that I loved you by paying attention to microscopic things that concern you. When I get to the canteen at work, I always keep a seat free hoping to see you arrive. If you sit next to me I hope you ask me for salt, oil or whatever you need. I look at what you have on your plate and think about what you might want. If you want an apple. A biscuit. And I wait and wait, and I hope you ask me and not someone else. I hope that you ask me to pour you some water. I check the time constantly. If you fix your shirt in the mirror I hope you can't button the right cuff so I can do it for you. So I'll stick around in case you need me.

This afternoon in this room I thought of you saying goodbye to me and I thought of your tears. Then I fell asleep, I don't remember what time it was, and I was in the dream but I was also a little awake. I saw the two of us at a pastry shop table. I had longer hair. We laughed, we ate. I watched this scene from afar and hoped it would never end. And it seemed to have been there forever. That it had no beginning and that it had no end. Then I woke up and I was sad because I wanted to dream more.

I was thinking about you and me at that table. You were the moth and I was the fire and we both knew that sooner or later our time would come. That we would realize our projects and our desires and our trips together. That we would go to Iceland and see the aurora and get drunk on the streets of Tokyo and fuck at night in a New York skyscraper higher than the clouds. That we would climb mountains together and swim in the ocean and chase our dogs through weeds and dry leaves. That nothing would destroy us and that everything that existed between us did not yet have a shape but it could already not be stopped.

G.

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