

One Rainy Day

Luca left work barely five minutes after the beginning of the lunch break – it was always like that, a few minutes more here and there. But the environment was nice enough, his colleagues were pleasant to be around and the boss wasn't much of a ballbuster.

He opened the door of his second-hand Rav4 and settled on the seat with a gigantic yawn – so much that his eyes almost watered and he had to rub them. What made him so horrible sleepy each day was the sheer boredom of his job: writing, correcting and printing quality manuals from the drafts various firms sent. And quality manuals are the most boring genre out there, even when they're written well – but many of them were not; they looked like the authors made their best efforts to be obscure and confuse. But saying “Yessir!” even in front of the most egregious crap was an important part of his job. However his caffeine intake had reached alarming proportions.

Luca didn't bother to let the diesel engine warm up before leaving the parking space: with nearly 200 000 km on it, there was little left to wear out. He yawned again before turning the wipers on, and realized with a bit of horror that he swerved and was about to climb onto the sidewalk when he regained control.

“Fuck it” he muttered – at least, in that industrial estate there wasn't much pedestrian traffic; he then pressed the power button on the car stereo and the sound of pounding drum'n'bass filled the car.

Work wasn't the only source of boredom and ennui for Luca: his meteoropathy played a big role too. A few cloudy days in the mid of summer and he got the blues; now it was mid-November and the Lowland was throwing its worst weather at him: one month passed with no glimpse of the sun except for brief visions of a pale, cold, grey disk above the fog; it had rained or drizzled the whole time during the last week, and now the temperature was dropping; snow was expected too.

All that would have been bearable, tho, if Irina was there and two could spend warm nights together, and bollocks to the weather. She looked exactly like you can imagine: tallish, blonde, blue-eyed, fit and toned and foxy. Unsurprisingly, she came from Estonia and she spoke correctly Estonian,

Russian, Polish, German, and of course English and was working on perfecting her Italian. She worked as freelance translator; Luca met her when she got a contract for the translation into Polish of some manuals his company was dealing with. They immediately liked each other, but Luca had to court her a while before succeeding – but hey, his first job was salesman, and a successful one at that: being convincing was one of his strong points.

But Irina was not there: she left for Bruxelles the Sunday before to work as a translator at some EU conference or get-together of bureaucrats and she'd be back on the next Saturday. Because she'd get paid 1000 Euro – on top of free accommodation and largely free food and drinks – just for one week, she said.

So it was Thursday and Luca was bored and tired and down, and driving under the lead-grey sky along a dismal road in an industrial estate towards a canteen where to have a dismal lunch before going back for another three hours of the most boring job he could conceive – because that morning he had to dash and couldn't make himself a sandwich. When in the distance, he saw a kind of familiar figure walking at the side of the road, under a large red umbrella.

He slowed down and recognized that tacky, boorish multicoloured leather jacket: not many people dared to walk around with a Corona beer towel sewn on the back like a patch; that fad was already crass in the '90s. Luca had no doubt about the identity of the man: he had to be the jock nicknamed The Marpion for his habit of having a crack onto every single girl he met – and despite his being rude and crass and uncultured, he often succeeded. Of course his habit attracted the hatred of a number of men, but The Marpion's considerable physical size and lack of repulsion for violence kept him relatively safe. Relatively, because some blokes, either through brute force or intelligence managed to get back at him. The only odd circumstance was that he was just walking around that industrial estate instead of zooming around in his tackily tuned-up VW Golf.

How did Luca know him? Because before meeting Irina he had been in a relationship with Marzia, a nice but naïve local girl. They hung around the same old establishments where also The Marpion prowled – their town after all isn't that big. Eventually, the hunter chose Marzia as his prey and moved in for the catch; after a few weeks Luca realized something was amiss and one night

confronted The Marpion. The ensuing fight ended more or less with a draw, but the poor girl was so shocked and disturbed that she finally decided to take a journalism internship in Milano and was barely seen again since.

Luca went through a serious down and a couple more brushes with an enraged The Marpion; finally they got to hang around in different circles and ignore each other; Luca got his new job with a better, more stable pay (but he didn't expect the boredom) and moved to Parma. Still, Luca hadn't completely given up on the idea of getting some sort of revenge: not only he liked Marzia and their break-up did hurt, but it was a matter of principle; The Marpion had taken Luca's woman and couldn't get away with it.

And, that rainy day looked like a great occasion for revenge - there was little traffic, no other pedestrians on the road, only factories and warehouses around.

So Luca pushed down on the gas pedal letting speed build up; The Marpion was getting close any second but he still did not suspect anything and kept walking on. Luca was seeing all that like a slow-motion.

Sixty kilometres per hour, and Luca kept the pedal down; he decided to swerve at the last second not to give his target time to react.

Over sixty, reaching seventy kilometres per hour; The Marpion was only a few meters ahead and Luca steered to the right, into the enormous puddle of dark lurid water at the roadside. The prey realized what was going on too late: he turned with a horrified expression on his face, but couldn't move, frozen in shock. Luca instead was grinning and kept the pedal down, even wondering if the puddle would cause loss of control. But at that point, it didn't really matter.

Luca corrected the trajectory and observed in amusement the wave, almost a miniature tsunami, of water, mud and sand that the front-right wide tyre of his Rav4 raised from the puddle. It rose as high as The Marpion's chest and hit him dead-on, drenching his sweater and jeans and shoes. The car itself passed less than half a meter from the target, and that was Luca wanted since he saw him at the side of the road: to give his opponent a nasty soak in lurid water; surely he did not intend to run him over.

From the rain-covered wing mirror, he thought he saw The Marpion cussing and cursing and making rude gestures, but Luca had gotten a bit of his

revenge and happily speeded onwards: the rest of that day was going to be good.

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