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Brief Essay on Coincidences

NUTRIMENTI

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An erratic knight and the moon, Carmela buonodorosa, the dialect poet Francesco Zaccone and a love letter sealed with a heart.

Colajizzu was thrown to the floor by his donkey. He was angrier than usual because he'd used a branch from a Scotch broom to give the poor animal a thrashing. The animal had suffered in silence and carried on plodding along until Colajizzu hit him on his side where he had a scratch from the day before, and that's when he stopped dead and refused to move. Colajizzu, who was more focused on the thought that Rocco Pirru had stolen his water, began to jump on the donkey's back, and ordered him to move. He was so tired of being taken for a ride by Pirru, bored of his wife's complaints, that he would no doubt have had to listen to again on his return, and he was being mocked by his donkey in the middle of the piazza. He hoped to start the donkey up again and to remove his thoughts that played on his mind, so he raised his arm and gave a forceful hit with the branch on the donkey's side, right where he had already been wounded. Silence fell on the street and the few people watching thought that he might even kill the poor animal, but instead he stayed silence for a few more seconds and eventually carried on with his journey, with small drops of blood falling from his side.

'I'm in charge, you see! I'll show you who the boss is.' The man said proudly. But it was short lived, because once the donkey got to the middle of the square, in one fellow swoop, knocked Colajizzu to the floor. Everyone watching began to laugh and made fun of him. All but three people. Franco Mendicisa, who ran to Colajizzu's aid, Pepè Mardente the blind man, a man with a heavy bag slung over his shoulder, who never laughed at the misfortunes of others, who had written a representation of Colajizzu's ruin a few days earlier, 'we go through life convinced that we are in control, but it just takes ones thing to happen to realise we are not. It is like riding a horse. We believe we can control an animal with reigns, yet should a mouse run in front of the horse, the rider will lose control and fall to the ground. Why are we so certain of our power if it can be taken away by such a small animal? If things go bad, it is not because of our skill as riders: it is because of the courage of the horse, and the power of the mouse.'

The postman of the village was a lonely man, with no ambition, whose passion was finding love letters and delivering them. He recognised them without opening them, as he could recognise the lover's stamp immediately. He had seen all kinds of love letters: elegant, fake, written on the back of flyers and on pieces of toilet paper, written on the torn pages of a novel, or even paper that had been wrapped around bread, covered in flour. Letters that make any man a poet, and keep people up at night. Letters that say the same thing over and over just in a different way each time, all written with care as though a bad love letter could be more dangerous than a worst enemy. Love letters that opened new doors...

Three and a half hours before Colajizzu's fall, the postman had emptied his bag full of mail to organise his letters as usual. In front of him were letters expressing human emotions: unfulfilled dreams, desires, retracted promises, statements, insults, memories, nostalgia, hope, words written in solitude, that through him were able to reach their destinations, and he was proud to be the final phase in fulfilling their destiny.

That morning, when he had almost finished sorting the post, he came across an unusual letter. It was a thick envelope, sealed with red wax in the form of an S. He had never seen letters like it, and was overcome by curiosity, so he placed it in his pocket, put on his cap and began his usual route.

When he started out as a postman, he had no idea that a job without particular skill or vocation would bring him so close to the secrets of men, and so he tried to do it in the best way he could. To be a postman, it was not enough to have good legs and firm shoulders. You had to be able to guess the content of letters and get to know the characters of the people, and then find a balance: deliver the letter, linger, leave, smile, continue... He had every detail figured out. If, for example, he had to deliver a love letter to someone who wasn't home, he would slip the letter into the door slot at the top, clearly visible, and still in reach for any person. If, however, it was a sad letter, a letter of farewell or a death announcement, he would set them apart, and slip it under the door, in hope that the recipient, would step on it when entering the house, leaving a footprint on the envelope, preparing them for despair.

Girifalco, the postman, thought of himself as a representative messengers who date back as far as Hermes, deorum nuntium, the son of God, messenger and giver of goods, someone who wore beautiful sandals and travelled like a seagull over the sea, carried by the wind. So the postman walked through the streets of his daily route, and among the 'good mornings' and greetings, he thought about the moon.

It was 7th April 1969, and he had read in the newspaper that the Americans were going to be arriving. He looked up at the sky wondering if one day postmen would travel into the sky to deliver post up there too.

Giovannuzzu knew nothing about space travel. He was confined to a wheelchair due to polio, and he spent his life sitting on a balcony, watching men from above. Forced to sit for life, he had chosen to live on the first floor of a building so he was able to still look at the world from a relatively normal perspective, filling the void of his dull existence with the lives of others: the quarrels, the betrayals, the passions, the faces and gestures were his past, present, future. For him the world was all that he could look at.

'Did you hear Giovannuzzu, we're travelling to the moon?'

The postman would go around telling everyone about the imminent journey. But instead

of running into the pastor, he met Carruba, who always had a toothpick between his teeth, who was putting up posters of Christian Democracy and had picked a fight with him. The calm was over: Girifalco, seemed like a ghost half the time, and would only come to life in the case of an earthquake, or an election. Thank God the earthquakes didn't just come every four years.

Therefore he decided to enjoy one of his last calm mornings. He wondered back thinking of the moon, and when he crossed the last stretch of Via Petrarca, he decided that there was no need to travel up there to see it. It was enough to walk around there at nine o'clock, when Carmela buonodorosa (pleasantly perfumed) hung out her laundry on the balcony with no underwear on which would leave him short of breath as she leant over to reach the ropes.

When he was young, Carmela had lived in the house opposite his, and he had been in love with her ever since. Her tanned skin, her see-through dresses, her lace underwear hung over on the washing line, that he would stand under when they were drying. Over the years Carmela had been his desire, his happiness and all the women of the world rolled into one. This was why he didn't need to go to the moon to feel alive. All he had to do was go to 23 via Petrarca, climb up the nineteen steps and find her naked in bed.

At home, in the afternoon, he took the letters from his bag and began his daily ritual of opening them, reading them, copying them out and then returning them to their place. It was like a child's game and he would always leave the best until last, as he did that day with the letter with the seal. He looked at the letter, turning it over several times. It was addressed to Mary Migliazza, from the zone Vasia 12, Girifalco (CZ). He was surprised that the handwriting was very similar to his. Maria Migliazza, was the second daughter of a family of five sisters and two brothers. She was the daughter of Peppino the doctor and the lady Rosinuzza. She was not a beautiful woman, but that wasn't her fault.

She had been unlucky, what with her sister running away with Vincenzo Campese at Wintertür, leaving the weight of the family on her shoulders, but she also came down with an illness in her blood that made her skin pale and delicate. One only needed to blow on her skin and a bruise would form. She had never received a letter and this old envelope, as a result, had intrigued the postman greatly.

It was too hard to read the stamp. He held it up to the light but the envelope was too thick. He tried open the seal with his hands, and with a knife but was completely unsuccessful. He decided to break it, and as he did it made the sound of a twig snapping in half. He opened the envelope and began to read.

Dear Teresa,

You might be wondering where you've seen this handwriting before, searching through your memories to place it.

Teresa, your name still sends shivers down my spine. Teresa, the name in my prayers that I always whispered but now I shout. Teresa, the name on my lips like a promise of forever.

He felt as though he had gone back in time, to his brief period in Switzerland, with someone else's letter in his hand. He could not believe that someone else would have such similar handwriting as his, and that three men could write in such a similar way. There was no address and he couldn't work out what this Teresa had to do with Maria Migliazza. He was caught up in the mystery.

First he had to get a similar piece of paper, and some wax to seal the letter. He copied out the letter with a pencil onto some paper, folded it and left.

Zacccone Francesco, a famous dialect poet, owned the only printing shop in the village. The shop was closed, but Zacccone, a lovely and kind man was inside. The postman knocked on the door and the poet came to open it immediately with his ink stained hands. He was happy as he had won an award for his poem 'Lu Vovulaciu' the day before and pride still shone across his face.

'My good man! Come in! Come in!' He said closing the door behind the postman and leading him into the back of the shop. 'I was just working on some cards for a baptism. To what do I owe the honour?'

'I needed some writing paper.'

Zacccone went over to a table covered in boxes. 'Come and have a look over here. This new order arrived just the other day.'

They spoke about politics and poetry and after a while of searching, the postman found some paper that might work.

'I would need about twenty sheets.'

'... take as much as you need. It was an order for the lawyer Tolone.'

The postman counted twenty sheets of paper and twenty envelopes. 'You don't by any chance sell sealing wax do you?'

Zacccone wasn't a man who asked many questions, so he simply left his desk and went over to a cupboard. 'I have red or black.' He said.

'I'll take some of the red please.'

'Take it all, I don't need it.'

He picked up the bag and asked, 'do I owe you anything?'

'You're kidding right. Get out of here, go on.'

The postman moved to the door. 'Oh, one more thing. You wouldn't happen to have a stamp like this?' He held up the letter with the 'S' stamp.

Zacccone looked closely at the letter. 'It's a nice stamp for sure. Looks like something you'd seen on a funeral poster.'

The postman thanked him and left after asking him about his new poetry. He had found the right paper and the wax. Now all he needed was the stamp. His first thought was to go and have it made at Catanzaro's but when he got to the shop he ran into Filumena Cicoria who was returning from the farms with a bundle of foods piled on her head. He thought that he might not need to get the bus into the main city and could perhaps just go to Riganiaddu the next day.