

LETIZIA ROCCHI

*Love somebody,
and you'll love
yourself*



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TOGETHER

When the bell rang, the students, ready to rush out, gathered around the philosophy teacher. It had been the last lesson before the holidays. The moment was awaited. The expectations were high. Air, light, meetings, parties and fun at home and outside. In a word, carefreeness. 'Merry Christmas, happy holidays, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!' Wishes, of all kinds, were generously addressed to the teacher, as they had done to the others. One last goodbye in chorus, 'See

you in 2020!' Everyone cheerfully ran out of the classroom, flying down the stairs, shoving and patting as they jokingly taunted each other. The anticipation of the Christmas holidays made the students euphoric. Curzio, pulling his motor scooter out of the rack, was anxious to get home. He had one reason more than his classmates. His oral test had been great, and he couldn't wait to tell his father, who was always happy with his results, no matter where they came from. On the way home, helmet on his head, he thought, deaf to the noises of the messy traffic polluting the street, 'I just can't call him dad. For me, even though he has become one in all respects, he is still Gigi the Great, the Magnificent. Besides, he's fine with it. It's not what he wants. For him, it's important to act as a father and not to be called so...' Then, stopping to let an elderly

man cross, he considered rejoicing, 'We're fine... together.'

Waiting at the traffic lights, his impatience to get home grew, making the usual route seem longer. 'Come on!' he urged them, 'We have so many things to do. We should really enjoy these holidays. We deserve it!' As he made plans, he arrived to his destination. After placing the motor scooter under the small tree that with its extended foliage would shade the driveway in the summer afternoon hours, he made his way up the steps two by two into the house. Already from the entrance, one could see that several things had changed in the house. At first glance, one could immediately feel the presence of a young man. A certain dissoluteness, which was not there before. The boy, indifferent to the inviting smell of food, hurried into the kitchen with his rucksack over his shoul-

der: 'Dad!' he spontaneously called out to his father, leaving them both dumbfounded 'The philosophy teacher complimented me for the oral test, do you understand how cool that was?' 'No kidding? I didn't see you studying that much... even though you really like the subject! I'm really glad. That's nice!' he said, turning to him with a winking smile. 'It's a good omen for this fourth year of high school!' he affirmed, continuing to bustle about at the cooker; then he added, 'I expected that though! So I made you lasagne, which you love. Come on, let's eat.'

Even the position of the kitchen table had changed to leave room for a smaller one on one side, on which the tools of one of the hobbies to which Luigi devoted his spare time were neatly arranged. On a shelf, the pieces already made were drying before being cooked. Time passed serenely. Curzio

gleefully enjoyed the normality of a young man's life. He did not neglect his studies, and spent his free time playing some music with a group of friends and following a variety of interests that Gigi stimulated and nurtured by taking him, whenever possible, to exhibitions, shows and cultural events in different places within easy reach from Rome. The boy, while continuing to call his adoptive father Gigi, loved and respected him with the tenderness of a son who recognises the affection and sacrifice of a real father.

In the once-silent flat, the previously eclipsed vitality had taken over the rooms, releasing joy and energy. Luigi, now different in appearance and spirit, was projected into the future, planning his son's life. In the living-dining room, narrowed by the recent partition, Laura's paintings and only a few of her most beautiful photos completely

covered the empty space of the bookcase. The other photos, which had previously been more numerous, had migrated to Luigi's bedroom, and he was still unable to detach from them. Close to the wall, on the left side of the bookcase, there were two guitars in their cases, revealing the shared passion of the two of them. They both loved playing music and singing together, which kept memories alive. For Luigi, it was also a hobby dusted off to surprise Curzio, who was profiting from his father's experience to the benefit of the band, which was beginning to be a thing, and to have a decent economic income that was indispensable for travelling.

When his friends joined him at home to study together, Curzio welcomed them into his room made out of the division of the large room that had previously contained

the dining room and the dinette. The boy, at ease after the interlude with his uncle, finally felt at home. The feeling of alienation felt in Manlio's house no longer belonged to him. Recovering his sense of family, no longer feeling like an orphan, he could banish the memory of the past that he had, until then, yearned for. That loss, in a way, no longer had any reason to condition his life by making him an unhappy loser. For Luigi, the role of father, which had already become evident in the stretch of life happily shared with Laura, had been buried with her. But now that he had Curzio, it had resurfaced, in an unknown design of fate, making the years lighter, and giving his life the purpose it lacked.

Without any major setbacks to cause any effort or fatigue, after Manlio moved to Scanno, in Abruzzo, and then to Campania,

all the bureaucratic paperwork, the meetings with judges and social workers, the inspections at his flat, the renovation work on it - given the age of the people involved and the uncle's consent - were unusually concluded in a short time. In this way Curzio, with his few personal belongings, had definitively gone to live with Gigi who, by now also legally, was his father. And the time it took to work out the new situation, out of impatience, had seemed to Luigi to be longer than it had actually been.

Luigi, filled with enthusiasm, would update Laura of the steps forward that quickly brought them closer to the fulfilment of their wish. At nightfall, when he found himself alone, in the sad silence that loomed over the house, he would turn to her, convinced that if he had embarked on the path of adoption it was because she had stood by

him, wishing him to be happy. One night, he had retrieved his old guitar from the attic, given the strings a proper tension before making them vibrate, and turned to her, in a broken voice, seeking her consent. 'Laura, love of my life, soon our son, the one providence has given us certainly thanks to your intervention, will settle here with me. You have given back to my existence the strength and courage to live with a purpose, a great purpose. No more painful regrets that made me wander the streets alone and aimlessly, singing poignantly, like Gianni Morandi, Lonely I walk through the city, among the crowds who do not know, who do not see my pain, looking for you, dreaming of you, whom I no longer have...I will devote myself to Curzio, so that he may have a more serene future, as you would have wished, even though I have missed his birth and

childhood. But I am left with the memory of how we dreamed it together.’ And then he had concluded, before giving in to the emotion gripping his heart, abandoning his guitar in a corner, ‘From tomorrow on, new repertoire!’ Then, he had gone to bed.

Prompted by his friends who wanted to go skate, Curzio, wishing to join them, although still inexperienced, informed Gigi that after eating with them, he would end the Sunday by watching a film with his friends. ‘Have a good day,’ Lugi replied, ‘say hello to the boys and tell them that, if they wanted, one of the next days, before Christmas, we could celebrate together with a good pizza, listening to your latest performances.’ When the boy went out, happily wringing his hands with pleasure, Luigi said to himself, ‘Yeah! Fantastic! This is the right opportunity, the one I’ve been waiting for to

get my work done. Wow! There's a lot to do. And time goes by so fast. Everything must be ready. It will be a nice surprise for Curzio. He needs it. I want this Christmas to be unique, unforgettable, something beautiful and exciting to remember that will evoke good memories in the future. We've both been missing something like that for a long time!' he pondered, as the memory of when he was a child tried to undermine his mood.

Firmly rejecting the image of his own childhood suffering, Luigi put on a big red-and-white checked kitchen apron, like the tablecloths of old inns, then he sat down at the work table. The infant Jesus figure, still to be completed, surfaced from the cloth that kept it moist. 'You are the only one still missing...' he addressed it, feeling impatient. Then, after pouring water into a steel pot, he returned to his seat. 'There is little time.

Come on!’ he urged himself. He grabbed his tools, and quickly finished modelling the most important figure of the nativity scene. He took a good look at it, touched and kissed it, then he carefully placed it on the shelf, hiding it among the others that were covered so as not to be seen by Curzio. ‘Luckily, he often goes out these days, busy as he is with his band, the Orchestra by Chance. The Nativity scene represents family, and God knows how much we both needed it, even if for different reasons,’ he considered, feeling his chest tighten. ‘But this is not the time for memories... It’s time to rejoice! Heart, don’t you dare!’ he uttered in an ominous tone.



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Things are getting better, even if not necessarily for you. However, all in all, you are still enjoying the sunshine and the fragrant air in your garden! Your daughter is showering you with attention and care. Are you happy, aren't you? Can you imagine how happy I am too? It is nice to get all that love.

Luigi, now retired and with nothing but old memories, goes to the cemetery every week to visit his beloved Laura. He still chats amiably with her and tells her about his days.

His life has not been easy, and his heart still fills with sadness thinking of all he has been through: poverty, material and human misery, the death of his little brother first, the disappearance of his mother immediately afterwards; a series of events that have left indelible marks on him when he was just a child, filling him with deep melancholy.

One day at the cemetery, Luigi meets Curzio, a boy who lost his parents in the Amatrice earthquake; he had to leave school and move in with his uncle, who cares little for him. The encounter between them does not seem like an accident, and will change both their lives.

Letizia Rocchi (Rome, 1927) is a self-taught sculptor and painter, and a teacher. She has always been active in the field of volunteering, and lives in Switzerland surrounded by her nearest and dearest and her dogs.

After *Cento grammi di pane nero* (One Hundred Grams of Black Bread) - a narration of the time of her youth, set in the turbulent times of World War - the author is now back, almost blind but indomitable in spirit, and contemplates how from a casual encounter, two lives can cross paths, nurture a relationship, and eventually merge together.

