

CAMILLA LANZI

Critical care specialist - 35 years old

Your neighbours call you a stuck-up snob, and who knows, maybe they're right. But being a Lanzi hasn't always been easy. Your father has a noble lineage and the ownership of three hotels. You grew up in luxury, yet you've always wished things were different, in line with your beliefs.

Your parents raised you on a strict Catholic education and your mother never missed a charity event. But the only thing you retained of that endless parade of formalities was the faith behind them. You can't stand the way your parents look down on the poor people asking for alms, then drop ten euro in the offer box when they're certain everyone's watching.

To you, being a good Christian means first of all doing something good for the world. You began as a volunteer entertaining children in the hospital, then you went on to ambulance support, then you decided to become a doctor. You got your degree as fast as you could and your career was brilliant, although interrupted by numerous Red Cross trips abroad, to Congo and Burkina Faso. When the time came to choose your field, you insisted on working in close contact with the emergency room: You thought you had just the right disposition to accept the unacceptable.

Now you work in the intensive care unit of Careggi Hospital's ER, the main medical structure in Florence: You've seen many people die, and many young ones at that, but you've also saved many lives. It's your calling. You work as many shifts as you can, on Saturdays and Sundays, on Easter and Christmas. You come home exhausted, but this is the life you want.

You met Vincenzo four years ago, and what immediately struck you were his wits and his total lack of arrogance. He's the most brilliant man you have ever met, but he feels superior to no one. He understands your moods and your dedication to your work, unbearable to every other man you've tried to date, and he always knows how to handle you.

Your trials began three years ago, when you married him. Your choice of husband was intolerable to your family: a lower-class man, both of his parents involved with the Communist Party. You were always careful not to mention Vincenzo's own politically charged youth around your parents, as well as his militant atheism. And even so, you had to fight for your family to accept the financial abyss that separated you. But on the other hand, you know he stepped far out of his comfort zone for your sake, beginning with a church wedding complete with an extravagant reception, and moving on with mandatory attendance to countless family dinner parties, christenings and galas.

You moved here as newlyweds, to the apartment Vincenzo inherited after the death of his father. This meant keeping your parents from buying you a house and your husband from feeling indebted for the rest of his life, but it wasn't easy for you to adjust. You'd never had to argue over the best colour to paint a fence or a stairwell cleaning schedule, nor had you ever needed earplugs to sleep because the girl upstairs stomps about in high heels and the rumbling of your neighbour's washer keeps interrupting quiet hours.

At least you've found an ally: Ria is an outsider as well, just married and transferred from Santo Domingo, away from a difficult life. Her naiveté made you feel more like an older sister than a friend, but you liked taking care of her. Past tense, because lately things have changed. Ever since Ria gave birth to Luca, while you and Vincenzo are apparently unable to conceive a child.

He has been diagnosed with a fertility issue and you keep trying in vain. You're nervous: At thirty-five and counting, you're afraid that you will have to give up your dreams of motherhood. And Vincenzo's apparent indifference to your plight drives you mad, which makes you more nervous, more miserable, more fixated on work, more distant from yourself and from him.

You need a little feminine empathy... And what does Ria do? Nothing but blabber about her son! She spares no detail on all the diapers she has to change, on all the tantrums the kid throws, on every single instant of her life as a mother. How can she not see how much she's hurting you? You realised you were about to explode, so you began avoiding her. Excuse after excuse, you have

as little to do with her as you possibly can.

You feel lonely, with a husband who's suffering for you, but never with you; a family you can't tell will never have a grandson, if you don't want them to blame the man they never wanted you to marry in the first place; and colleagues who think you a rock, invulnerable and unscathed.

Nothing could be less true: For instance, a recent hospitalisation gave you much to think about. You were nearing the end of your shift, when your neighbour Dario Ristori was brought in. Besides having an absurdly high blood-alcohol level, he had ingested enough sertraline (an antidepressant) that his survival felt almost like a miracle. When he regained consciousness, you didn't dare ask any questions, and he immediately demanded absolute secrecy.

During meetings

Rules are meant to be followed, so you will not stand and watch as Alice makes a mess of the courtyard with all those cats, and Giada stomps about in high heels when she gets home in the middle of the night just to wake you up, and Rosa turns the washer on during quiet hours. Half the time you come home completely exhausted, and all you're asking for is some silence!

Maybe you are a bit too finicky, you have no problem admitting it, but you certainly didn't expect to find your car keyed in revenge. You still want to believe that the culprit was some passing vandal, because the alternative feels inconceivable when you're all supposed to be sensible adults. Still, you wrote to the building manager to propose the installation of a surveillance system.

Relationships

Luciano Avellini: The building manager. He's in his thirties, and he always tries to please everyone, which means he never takes a firm stance on anything.

Alice Gabbrielli: She takes care of a feline colony in the building and she thinks beasts are more important than people. You think her an immature girl, putting her priorities in all the wrong places.

Vincenzo Salemi: A forty-year-old architect and interior designer. You've been married to him for three years now. He has a past of deep political engagement in left-wing organisations, but he put all that behind him. Your parents despise him and have more than once tried to get you to leave him, but you never said a word about it.

Camilla Lanzi: (Your turn to speak)

Gioele Zacchei: A surly, reclusive forty-year-old illustrator.

Rosa Mistretta: Gioele's wife, a sensible Sicilian travel agent.

Giada Fadda: Rude and inconsiderate, she apparently doesn't know how to take her shoes off when she comes home late at night, people come in and out of her apartment at all times of day and she never has a respectful word for anyone, not even her elders. You can't stand the fact that she won't miss a single chance to re-

mind the world how proud she is to be a lesbian. She talks about sexuality as if it was a public matter and not an intimate relationship between two people who love each other. You have nothing against homosexuals, but you hate all forms of ostentation and excess.

Ria Santos: She's kind of childish in spite of her twenty-five years, and sometimes she can be a bit naive. You took her in like a younger sister and stayed close to her during her husband's long work trips: He's a career soldier. But now, her obliviousness is turning against you. She's so unaware of other people's feelings that she never noticed how harrowing it is for you to listen to her constantly talk about her child. Being around her was becoming a torture, so you're avoiding her.

Dario Ristori: You have no idea why a successful, charming, confident man such as him would try to kill himself. You're not even sure he was fully aware of the consequences of his actions. You're bound by confidentiality, but you think your husband should have the right to know: They were childhood friends and you feel deep guilt over keeping him in the dark about Dario's drug abuse and possible suicidal tendencies.

Attilio Daddioli: He's Dario Ristori's attorney, but you aren't clear about their relationship outside of work.

