



## DARIO RISTORI

### Businessman - 40 years old

Your fortieth birthday just went by, and your life is a disaster. First of all, you're completely alone, and you can't seem to do anything to break out of your invisible prison: You've clearly never been taught to relate to other people, but that's nothing to be surprised about, since you spent your childhood in utter isolation.

Your father is the CEO of a big company, your mother a foreign reporter for the national news channel. You don't remember ever spending more than a couple of days a month with them and your housekeeper was too concerned with her chores to think you'd need to go out or see a friend. Although you only recently realised it, your father was more interested in spending time with his mistress, while your mother never really wanted to just be your mum: She was too afraid that putting you before her work would mean the death of her career. She never learnt to say no to anyone. Well, anyone but you.

The apartment you live in now is the one you inherited from your grandmother on your father's side. To be sentimental, she was the only real family you've ever had. Your parents lived in Rome and you couldn't visit her in Florence very often, but you were thankfully allowed to spend the summer at her place. After all, your parents already spent the rest of the year travelling, why bother taking a week off to vacation with you? So from June to August you lived in this building, with your Nana taking you out to the swimming

pool, to the beach, or to wander the countryside. But what you valued the most were the two kids you'd managed to make friends with: You used to play with Gioele and Vincenzo and you had a blast doing it, although you envied the normalcy of their families.

This, if anyone wonders (and you know a lot of people do) is the reason you've never left the block and you care so much about its maintenance. Not that you ever had a chance to explain it to anyone, since nobody ever says anything to your face.

Your grandmother died when you were sixteen. After that, your holidays in Florence ended and you lost contact with your friends. You later learnt that she had left you the two apartments in her property, so after earning your degree you moved here, longing for those carefree summers.

You never attend a council meeting without your attorney, Daddioli, a kid fresh out of law school: His fees aren't too high and he's suited for these mundane affairs. Someone trying to guess why you're so distrustful of your neighbours would come to the obvious conclusion that you draw pleasure from lording your superiority over the rest of the council. That's not it.

Truth is, they dislike arguing with you as much as you dislike arguing with them. A mediator that sees to your interests and allows you to speak as little as possible is just the thing you need.

You've managed to maintain cordial relationships with your childhood friends, the only ones you have even a shred of acquaintance with, but your interactions are so lukewarm and mundane! Vincenzo has changed a lot, he's neither the brash boy nor the outspoken young man you remember.

Marriage seems to have “watered him down”, somehow. But who made the right choice there? He changed to stay by the side of a beautiful, intelligent woman like Camilla, while you can’t improve anything about yourself, nor can you handle a one-night-stand with your secretary.

Maybe you’re asocial, frigid by nature, maybe there’s something wrong with you; the point is that, whenever someone tries to approach you, you begin putting up walls and you find yourself growing bitter and detached. Aloofness comes easy to you: Any other attitude costs you incredible effort, and in the end you never feel like other people are worth the pain. So you start seeing them like they’re not really there, like they’re just playing cards laid out on a table, things you move around in order to win your game of solitary.

This is how you made a name for yourself, by stopping before nothing and no one. With your business degree still in hand, you walked into Ne.Cos. (once known as Nerucci, a Florentine soap manufacturer with a long-lived tradition) and soon you entered Nerucci Sr.’s graces. When the company found itself in need of money you bought a few shares, only a minority at first, but then one thing led to another... You’ve always been good at this. When Nerucci died you found yourself the majority shareholder, thus overthrowing Nerucci Jr. as the company owner. He still hates your guts, by the way.

And to think you don’t even like this job! When you were a kid you kept saying: «I’ll never do anything even remotely close to what Father does!», and you dreamt of drawing comics with Gioele, or buying a house in the countryside with your very own vineyard. But you became worse than both your parents, making money without any intention of ever spending it.

There’s no rest left for you. Not now, not ever, seeing how things are going. You made a mistake somewhere, with one bad investment too many, and now you’re on the brink of bankruptcy. You haven’t told anyone: In this world, people who sink are eaten by sharks. And besides, who would ever be willing to lend you money?

Every damn morning you get up and hope for night to come soon, then you try to fall asleep as fast as you can. You rarely succeed. You sleep little and get little rest, in spite of the ever-increasing doses of antidepressants you depend on.

Your fortieth birthday was two weeks ago. That evening you uncorked a bottle of Brunello to drink alone, then you gulped down a handful of pills before you even realised what you were doing. You woke up in the ER. You don’t even know how you got there, you just know that Dr. Lanzi was there to meet you when you woke up. You had her release you in a hurry, then you left to go wallow in your shame at home. Was there ever a time when you felt okay? You can’t even remember anymore.

## During meetings

You speak as little as possible and let your lawyer take care of things, but you won't allow this place to decay any further. You often find yourself insisting on necessary expenses that your neighbours think they can delay indefinitely. You no longer have the money to afford them, but you have to keep pretending, or someone might grow suspicious.

## Relationships

*Luciano Avellini:* The building manager.

*Alice Gabbrielli:* You decided to sell the apartment on the first floor to repay your debts, and she's the current tenant. Alice begged you for more time, but you have none to spare: You need this sale to give your employees their last paycheck. You must admit the situation doesn't sit well with you, if only because your grandmother was a close friend to Alice's mother. Having Attilio send her an eviction notice felt just like hitting rock bottom.

*Vincenzo Salemi:* The friend you spent your summers with, together with Gioele. He was the reckless one, the kid who'd rather play football when the two of you insisted on video games. In high school, before your grandmother died and you stopped spending the summer in Florence, you remember his passion for political activism: class representative, first in line during protests, an instigator of sit-ins. A hot-headed one, he was. When you saw him again after all these years you found him changed, far too remissive for your liking.

*Camilla Lanzi:* She was the one on shift when you were brought into the ER and you don't know what she made of the whole thing, but she's a very intelligent woman and undoubtedly she's drawn her own conclusions. You begged her not to tell anyone: You don't think she would break confidentiality, but you cannot be sure. After all, you're not exactly well-loved by your neighbours. So you ended up supporting her during council meetings, to avoid every possible conflict.

*Gioele Zacchei:* Your once-best friend, the only person you saw something of yourself in. Now you've drifted apart and, since his political ideals haven't shifted one bit from the leftist views he held in university, you suspect he considers you an "evil capitalist". But a few nights ago he invited you over, just the two of you, to catch up. You accepted and the evening went surprisingly well. You almost felt as close to him as in high school. He fears that his wife is cheating on him.

*Gioele's wife (Rosa?):* He suspects she's cheating on him. She's from Sicily. Or maybe Sardinia?

*That girl from the second floor (Giulia? Gioia?):* A twenty-something party girl, everyone says she's a lesbian.

*Sarno's wife:* A Dominican, she's married and lives off the paycheck of an older Army officer.

*Dario Ristori:* (Your turn to speak)

*Attilio Daddioli:* He's your lawyer, working for the firm that oversees the interests of your company. You've never cared about his personal life, about what he wants or thinks. He's just one of your many meaningless work relationships.