



## GIOELE ZACCHEI

Illustrator - 39 years old

You were, are, and always will be a dreamer. And your wife is probably right when she says that you're immature and that she has to look after two babies instead of a husband and a child.

Ever since you were a kid, you dreamt of drawing: It was your passion, your talent. You were never a popular boy, but rather the nerd of the class, the one who failed physical education, the chubby four-eyes, the one who played Dungeons & Dragons, read books a thousand pages long and spent his afternoon playing video games. But when you picked up a pencil to sketch a teacher's caricature, nobody could help watching in awe.

Dario was the only kid who shared your interests, but he was only around during the summer, when he stayed at his grandmother's apartment on the top floor, the one he now owns. You spent wonderful afternoons together, coming up with funny comic strips, playing board games and watching movies. Every year you waited on your balcony to see his mother's expensive car drive up the road, and only then could you say summer had truly begun.

As for the rest of the year, you played with Vincenzo; although you always felt a bit uneasy around him, seeing how popular, brash, athletic and outgoing he was. Your bond only deepened when you got into the same high school. He introduced you to the people who "mattered" and thanks to him you became director of the school newspaper. Vincenzo was deeply involved

with student politics and walking in his footsteps helped you shape your own ideological baggage. It's through that circle of friends that you began to publish your strips on small local papers, and in time you managed to make a name for yourself. Now you publish a monthly comic on a blog you also fill with articles on politics and actuality, all on top of your job as an illustrator for Astra Editions, a publishing label mainly dealing in young adult fantasy.

You met Rosa ten years ago, during Lucca Comics & Games, Italy's largest convention: You had just authored the cover of a successful fantasy saga and she had come to have a copy signed. Of course she was a fan of the writer, not of the illustrator; at twenty-nine you may no longer have been the chubby kid you once were, but you were still awfully awkward and she was much too beautiful for you. Luckily your coworkers had noticed the way you kept exchanging glances, and they found a way to invite her and her friends out for dinner. You remember your dismay when you learnt over a fateful slice of pizza that Rosa had come all the way from Sicily, and that she would go back home after the convention. Yet something had bloomed between you on that night: You exchanged hundreds of emails for a whole year, and in the summer you finally went to see her. You got together and she decided to come look for a job in Florence. She said she'd already taken the idea of moving into account, with the way the market was turning in Palermo. She got pregnant shortly after and you married in a hurry, so that her overprotective, traditionalist parents wouldn't die of heartbreak. Your financial situation was

desperate: She had no job and you only had occasional work, no home and a baby coming. Your parents came to the rescue, and as an unexpected wedding gift they got themselves a smaller house in the suburbs to leave their apartment to you.

It's been eight years since then and things aren't much better: Rosa found a part-time job in a travel agency, but supporting a daughter is no easy task and you struggle to get to the end of the month. Plus, the other residents do nothing but call for expensive renovations: The main culprit is Dario, who has always had money in abundance and now makes even more; then there's that megalomaniac, Sarno, who- like a good little military dog! - gets paid millions with people's taxes to just travel around all the time; and the unbearable, snobbish bigot Vincenzo chose as a wife... And him too, constantly sucking up to her in spite of all the beliefs you used to share!

Your beliefs: You and Vincenzo fought long and hard for left-wing student unions. In the beginning you simply followed his lead, but then that world and those ideals became your own, even after you lost sight of each other. You don't care if today "communism" sounds like such an anachronistic term, you feel "communist" in the purest meaning of the word. You believe all people to be equal, you believe that a democratic country should not allow for such enormous economic disparity,

you believe in the gratuity of services, in strikes and in trade unions. You don't like the current turn of politics: You hate meritocracy, entrepreneurship, and the idea that the only ones worthy of staying afloat are the shrewd (and the arseholes). But what you loathe the most is how the pettiness of the middle class has infiltrated the minds of every outsider: You abhor gyms and malls and multiplexes and all other temples of consumerism. Once you even got into an argument with Rosa because she wanted to vacation in a tourist resort, one of those absurd places where morons with plastic smiles are paid to entertain you and convince you that the world is such a beautiful place.

The world is anything but beautiful: It needs more than a little shake. These things really drive you insane. Yet ideals are not your main worry today. Your wife has become elusive, her words filled with a contempt and a feeling of resentment you can't begin to understand. You were stunned when Rosa asked you to watch the child while she went out with her friends. She'd never liked bars, or late nights at that: You have a hard enough time getting her to go to the movies!

On the one hand you keep telling yourself that she's not that kind of woman, but on the other hand you know she's incredibly attractive and it wouldn't be weird for someone to court her.

Could Rosa really be having an affair?

## During meetings

You're a loner and you dislike company: You avoid council meetings whenever you can and let Rosa go alone, because arguing about trivialities gets on your nerves fast. When you do participate, you tend to bring every matter to its ideological extreme, talking about politics and high principles: You're a man of ideas, with little patience for mundane concerns.

## Relationships

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

*Alice Gabbrielli:* Barely in her thirties, she takes care of a cat colony in the building.

*Vincenzo Salemi:* You grew up together, until you enrolled in different universities. Three years ago he came back to live here, but you don't recognise him anymore. The young idealist who sparked your interest in politics has turned into a man who dolls himself up to see his in-laws for dinner, or for this second cousin's christening or that friend's child's first communion. He even married in church, after all those years railing against the system and claiming that he would never, ever have his child baptised! Incoherence drives you insane, you see it as a betrayal of your ideals, and you made sure to tell him so.

*Camilla Lanzi:* Vincenzo's loathsome wife, your ordinary snobbish girl, never a hair out of place, formal, conservative and bigoted. Your friend lost his mind after marrying her.

*Gioele Zacchei:* (Your turn to speak)

*Rosa Mistretta:* You have been together for ten years now, and you have always been close in spite of your financial troubles. But time has begun to drive a wedge between you. You love each other and your daughter, but you live in separate worlds. You have different interests, or rather, you no longer understand what interests her. Now she has started dressing up and going out alone. You're beginning to grow suspicious.

*Giada Fadda:* A twenty-five-year-old who moved to Florence from Sardinia. She's openly lesbian and a LGBT rights activist. Some bigots like Camilla find her vulgar.

*Ria Santos:* A Dominican who lives off her husband's military paycheck.

*Dario Ristori:* He hit it big and now he comes to council meetings with an attorney to obsess over the idea of "valorising the building" through expensive renovations you and Rosa can't afford. He's changed a lot since your childhood: Sometimes you find him unbearable. Yet you're certain Dario isn't what he likes to show. You see him suffering and so you want to understand what happened to him. One night, when Rosa was out, you invited him to your place. You spent the evening catching up and you discovered him to be a surprisingly good listener: You ended up venting to him and even confessed your fears and suspicions about Rosa's affair.

*Attilio Daddioli:* He's Dario's attorney. He works for an important firm, but he's young and still learning the trade.