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of Enrico Palandri

**Boccalone (First Draft Manuscript)**

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### **Chapter 1: Every evening**

Every evening I leave my little house in the center of Bologna; I whistle a light and happy tune up to the beautiful May moon and follow everything happening around me with my eyes; a peaceful walk, between the side streets and the little piazzas, ending late without having met up with anyone, or with me having stopped often and talked with everyone;

The days pass by, and I know just how to while away the time.

To do that, I spend a bunch of hours together with my friends, I'm alone for others, and regardless I'm always doing well enough.

Now it's January, things're going much worse, and talking about May, beautiful, sweet-smelling May, makes me happy.

Anna wears white overalls and a red jacket, obviously not all the time, just every once in a while.

I fell in love with her eyes very quickly, almost immediately: if it ever happens to you all that you see someone with red, cold hands, with a refined, sharp voice, and you stay spellbound for a little watching how they carry themselves, who they speak to, how they're interested in some things and not in other things at all, that sort of person would manage to get under your skin in an instant, and it would be damn hard to forget them; what's more, you could be certain to never be able to forget them, I'm ready to make that bet with anyone!

And so May, beautiful as it was, left me happy and totally lost over Anna, who I watched moving from a distance, spying on her suitors, hoping to kiss her.

It happened that one evening we met each other, we talked, we kissed, I read her something from a book, she read the inside of my heart.

To retell everything would never, ever be possible:

I need to confess that I was secretly desiring a marriage: I'd desired it for who knows how long, but in these months leading up to spring this matter had become truly essential; I'd asked three girls to marry me this last month alone,

With Anna, I believed I could forget all the things happening in a given moment, I could forget I was even attached to the world at all, completely enraptured as I was in a dream that knew no boundaries.

Piazza San Domenico at one in the morning, a can of beer and a bit of a breeze: Anna borrowed my yellow sweater (with a print of Linus on it), we talked with a lot of confusion; when I embrace her, and she doesn't want to take her shirt off, I caress her small breasts, I skim over her hair, Anna kisses me, she has a beautiful mouth, beautiful hands; she has long, thin legs, smooth, too; I'm happy and I feel a little strange: at any rate, I'm really happy.

In the morning there's a beautiful May sun, maybe today it's already June, and we have a late breakfast: we buy some newspapers, we go out for a walk to the piazza, strolling slowly, and we end up at Anna's school; then we wind up at the radio station and there we say goodbye to each other: Anna'd written her phone number on a small piece of paper (but when? We'd been together this whole time! I thought to myself) and she gave it to me.

I kept thinking about her gorgeous legs, about the shy caresses, about the curious kisses; several cars pass me along the roadside, and everything around me looks happy!

After a couple days Anna left for the sea, with Clorinda Ale and Silvia, her three best friends; I accompanied her as far as her house, where they were waiting for her; we ate something all together, and while I looked at her I thought of the little branches that'd scratched at her face.

The most important thing, when everything is fragile, delicate, broken in almost every possible way, is that you don't talk about this sort of thing anymore. (January)

I'm really curious about women, about their lives, so when they tell me stories about their lives, I enjoy listening to them even if I don't know a single thing about anything they're saying.

I'm curious about Anna, curious to see her live, I want to be able to be near her, I'm already in love with her.

It still wasn't quite clear what exactly was happening; from how we spoke to each other, from the quick and detached way we said goodbye, it seemed to truly be an adventure.

Anna didn't speak at all for her part the first time we spent time together, she said absolutely nothing, she was terribly shy.

Gigi was in a great mood then and ribbed Anna a bit, breaking into her silences:

"One day, you'll realize I'm not a product of your imagination, or a fantasy, and you'll say something to me!"

With tact, at least, and without offending her.

At that point Anna and I were completely unknown to one another, and we only talked a little; I said a bunch of words, she none, we both talked only a little.

We often sat down in the back of the piazza, with Anna's friends, to while away the evening talking about happy things or also serious things; I was obsessed with a few poems at the time, and I repeated them constantly, whether I was alone or with someone else;

Clorinda made a big impression on me, she was dressed in a pretty unusual sort of way, with a black handkerchief bound around her head and neat, combed bangs over her eyes, her bangs were also black.

She struck me immediately as being beautiful, she carried herself well, letting her phrases hang in a strange way, as if she was speaking only to those who could understand her, and to no one else.

I had the continual impression of just being an accident in Anna's life, in Ale and Silvia's lives; they had a way of speaking where how they chose the topic, and how they talked about it, let them exclude anyone easily, in any circumstance: like they could whisper into their ear, intriguingly, and although every word of the discussion could be distinctly understood, all the same you'd be able to understand none of the discussion itself, you wouldn't be able to understand what they were so amused about, because it also needs to be mentioned that they laugh continuously at these secrets sent and received in a banal discussion.

At times I can't happen to understand things for what they are, that I give them too much importance, or that I give too little to the signs of weariness, I don't understand that stories die, at least in the form that I was accustomed to recognizing them,

And so it happens that you feel "abandoned"; it's difficult to manage to glimpse the continuity, the transformation, and instead everything seems broken, "the broken heart," and reasoning is only a headlight which illuminates the pitiless, horrendous situation you're currently drowning in (damn it!); but I'll talk about this later on; for now I want to talk some more about May, about June, and about the marvelous months in which the love between Anna and me "climbed higher and higher", constantly discovering new and delicious things about ourselves and about each other.

## **Chapter 2: May and September**

*Oh May! What delirious naked asses!*

*Arthur Rimbaud, Parisian War Song*

May and September have always been my preferred months; I love the sun and the sky, the cats, the roofs, the pretty faces of people entertaining themselves on the steps of San Petronio or stretched out in the field of the Margherita gardens.

I'd love to talk about the days of this beautiful month one-by-one, but instead the retelling slides confused onto one particular afternoon in Piazza Maggiore, so now I'll try to talk about that:

We were building hot-air balloons with Giuliano, and then we were making them fly high up into the air, singing songs the whole time; an afternoon where I'd come into one of those strange moods, that I don't quite know how to describe, where you do a little bit of everything, jumping around like madmen do and shouting "Fly!! Fly!!" or "Burn!! Burn!!"; I was really really happy, in that state of overflowing love that's a part of spring.

It's impossible to calm yourself, or hold yourself back, and sex, the enormous sexual energy that has the power to make all of you completely and totally sleepless, you flee from the norms that normally present themselves (winter-time norms) to confront miseries and the fears of solitude; all the couples, the triads, the organized orgies become the police in the spring, and they allow for the imagining of a concreteness of desire in the spring where instead only an abstract schema exists that divides words and things into distinct zones to allow for the separate confronting of sex, intelligence, love, poop, children et cetera: soul and body, in short, or in other words "divide and conquer!"

The overflow, instead, is when the zones you understood yourselves to be in empty themselves out completely, the categories vanish into the aether, the state where you find yourselves speaking just to be able to confirm things and their contrary partners, and other things too that have nothing to do with any of that, the state where everything makes equal sense, which means to say more or less that nothing makes any sense at all.

When there's overflow, it always ends up with the embarrassment of whoever knows you all to be calm and wise otherwise;

You all get overflowed when you feel caught up in all of your relationships, in all of the attachments winter created, perhaps the attachments of spring function better, at least they didn't in my case;

Your dreams overflow you, dreams that pull you into unexplored zones where you no longer have to explain to yourselves what the *Doors* or the contrabass are doing in your subconscious.

But... there isn't much to be done about it, when you overflow you overflow, it doesn't make much sense to explain the significance, blah blah blah a life against ideology, blah blah blah the individual against the collective, blah blah and blah; I'm just describing some symptoms.

As I was saying, I was in a state like that when I got to the piazza that afternoon; the Calabrian was there with a handsome pair of blue jeans cut short above the knee (so many dark, black hairs to be seen!) and we sat with him near Daniele, the dear springtime Cupid, who was dressed most stylishly, like always, with a floral shirt, gaiters and a little waistcoat.

He had a plastic shopping bag nearby full of flowers, small ones, with a bit of stem; he was reading an old, yellowing book (the book hadn't seen the light of five in the afternoon very often!)

I didn't know Daniele, but I watched him often, him like I did several others. I took note of his style of clothing, the elegant nonchalance he exuded in his way of doing things; something very difficult and fraught, unstable, those things singled his face out for me out from among the other noble unknowns, to whom I lost a lot of time "checking them out".

"You reading anything good?" I said.

"The *Aminta*, by Tasso."

"Tasso?"

"Yeah!"

"Why the hell would you read things like that?"

I'm almost always really stupid when I try to "make conversation," involuntarily, or to put it better, automatically stupid, I say foolish things without even cutting myself off, sometimes; and I'm always painfully aware of my thin turns of phrase, and I suffer over those like I suffer over almost everything else that happens when I converse "calmly".

I was grateful to Daniele for his quiet and courteous responses, without malice; but even in the face of his evident pleasantness I didn't cease my fear of him; he could still burst out laughing at any given moment with a "what the fuck does it even matter to you, you big, fat smelly ape, get the fuck outta here!" or what's worse, to find a different painful comparison from among the animal kingdom, one more precisely patterned after the shape of my mouth; instead Daniele is refined, magnanimous, he probably had no reason to be nervous, something that on the other hand I'm never without, and responded promptly to the string of stupid questions I was asking him; at a certain point in our semiserious conversation about literature, I saw that he'd stopped, he'd stopped everything (his head, his words and his breath), he looked at me with a grin and with these few signs he broke off the banal conversation and I was truly quite happy about that, he looked at me (I'm waiting for a truly shocking revelation to spill from his lips!) and he asked me:

“Are you interested in love?”

I was so incredibly moved, I'd wanted to ask that question, that was precisely the thing I needed to talk about (it's precisely the thing I still do need to talk about)

“Look, buddy, that girl sitting over there talking to the other one with the robust rear, every single time I see her I don't understand anything anymore; I don't understand anything about what's happening to me, I don't understand anything of what she's saying to me, I'm completely absorbed in just looking at her, she's just so beautiful, I think I've already seen her somewhere before, but I don't know where...” I don't exactly say these things, I'm pretty sure I just barely stammered out a “yeah, lots” in response to Daniele's question, which launched him into a passionate lecture about the verses I was looking at in his antique book. I followed my train of thought and listened to all of his pretty words.

Anna was sitting not too far away from us, with Diana, and she had on her white overalls

One of those splendid moments that happens every so often in life: the seasonal breeze and bright light, good people all around me, Daniele reading poetry, stretched out very comfortably along the steps, and a heart going “tump tump” really strongly, in my throat!

Daniele gave me a flower, which I put in the buttonhole of my jacket, then I resumed my position of placing my elbows behind my back on the steps, a position I call “beautifully stretched out along the steps of San Petronio”, and I found myself to be long, long moreso than tall, by way of my legs.

After things had been this way for a bit, Isabella and Betta came along, and they stopped to chat with us; Betta's really nice, I like her a lot, I didn't take part in the small conversation she was having, I preferred to keep silent and act like one of those tall, silent types who's seen it all, hoping that Betta might be curious about me.

And so I was immersed in a shock of feelings, surrounded by beautiful people, all of whom I liked, thinking that I wasn't even displeasing to myself and that everything was, fortunately, going pretty well; then Daniele gave a flower to Isabella and Betta, too, searching for the pretty ones among his shopping bag, and so I took the opportunity to shake myself out of my lounging, intercepting the flower destined for Betta and telling her that I was gifting it to her with a special phrase

With a certain amount of embarrassment and with an expression that was trying to be both sly and gallant I said to her:

“This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath, may prove a beauteous flower when next we meet”

I gave her the flower and stayed as natural as I could, even if after all that stupidity it was really really difficult for me to do.

I'd been discovered! I'd revealed my love!

In love, as in almost everything else, the best courses of action are the ones I don't take; there's no need to force it or to fight against it, simply a need to let the world go its own way and follow behind it, something that you see a good example of in a film that comes into my mind a lot, “Annie Hall”, by Woody Allen; they say almost nothing, and everything goes in one direction. That's how it happens!

Betta was standing just so, with a great laugh she couldn't quite manage to hold back, a little bit pleased with herself, and I was hoping that she'd keep looking at me like that, accomplices in whiling away the time, embarrassed, wanting to get out of there but also wanting to hang around, to laugh but also to listen to what was said next, and now we were all laughing together, and this was what followed.

It only lasted for a little, though, because Isabella immediately added on:

“He says that to everyone, Betta, don’t listen to him!”

I swore that I loved only her, to have never told that phrase to anyone else before; now Betta was acting indignant, and maybe she was ever so slightly disappointed: we said that was how I congratulated myself that what I’d said might actually be true; and so it was joking all over again, even the disappointment, Betta tossed the flower on the ground and said:

“Your lordship is too young for this, Sir, take back your gift and try not to make this mistake again, it does you no honor”

I was naturally mortified, and after a shy attempt to once more contradict the base insinuations of Isabella, I slunk back into my secret and mysterious silence.

I need to manage to break the chains grammatically bound to the first person and to the past tenses; that way it seems like the story of an old man, who looks at his past from the point of synthesis, rearranging his memories only so he can have control over them

It’s a story that’s still very superficial, in which desperation can’t find itself a place: moods and syntactical constructions of movement serve me well, which show confusion from confusion’s point of view, and I need to abandon this overwhelming and arrogant subject which determines all the situations in which it finds itself; maybe everything should be rewritten in the present tense, like a diary? Or do I just need to let everything drop like Anna says? Whatever it might be, we’ll take note of this little doubt, too.

Rereading in pieces works quite well, it intrigues, it reads quick and is understandable; I think it’s useful to avoid decisions, to find holes in the order of the discourse and from those points get rid of its sense, to get rid of the construction of the phrase; the language has weak points in its taste, like repetition for example, in which musicality and sense diverge until they find themselves on two antithetical fronts; do we have to carry the discourse to that point in order to forget its sense? Kafka, the Marx Brothers

In this way the sense doesn’t get lost but rather finds a far less weighty position, it becomes played like an element in the discourse, not like its analyst; saying something is like choosing between a “that” and a “which”; it isn’t “But what is it you want to say?”

The girl with the overalls is always sitting in front of me, there, but... is she looking at me?! Eh, I’m not moving my eyes away, I can look where I want, can’t I? ... She’s certainly quite beautiful, she has blue eyes, really blue eyes... now I ask the Calabrian if he thinks she’s looking at me. Fuck, do I really not have anyone behind me?! No one’s there, which means she’s really looking at me, what amazing cheek! She doesn’t need to be shy... now I’ll go over there and give her a gift of the flower Daniele gave to me, and I’ll also say that verse from “Romeo and Juliet” to her “This bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath, may prove a beauteous flower when next we meet”. I’m sure that if Betta got wind of it she’d never say hello to me again! But then it didn’t feel right, Isabella was right after all, making a habit of saying that line to too many girls meant that in the end, none of them believed you! But what should I do? What can I do about the fact that I like a lot of girls? Maybe the best thing to do is wait for it to pass, I’ll go hang out with some of my friends and talk to them about other things, this nail fixed into my head will pass me by, or I’ll go get my fix of politics: a bit of a military regimen and my stomachache will come back to me!

No, that’s no good, I’ll have to think up something else to do.

The joke is that that’s just fine by me; not everything, obviously, there’s always some doubt lurking around, but this story of the ladies, the fact that I have no desire for significant others or for marriages that’re more or less underground, at any rate, it doesn’t seem like a bad idea to me at all. The snag is then that everyone who has a girlfriend, and everyone who has a boyfriend starts to treat you like you might have some sort of illness, like you won’t be able to cure yourself of it in any way, and maybe they’re right; it’s true that they treat you like an unpaired sock!

I need to stay calm, very calm, and do nothing, because I know how it ends otherwise, it ends badly, considering how I've been feeling up to now it'll finish badly, better to be on good behavior: and then what do I say to her? "Hi, my name's Enrico, what's yours?" The worst... I could also ask for her name from one of her classmates! No, I need to think of something sensational, an overwhelming entrance that would leave her stunned, something really refined, and stunning.

Then it so happened that there were two fascists sitting in front of us, and the Calabrian got up, and Gasparazzo and other comrades, and me with them, and we said that they couldn't stay in our piazza, and I felt like the sort of person who does this sort of thing regularly, and we made them beat it. Viva the sheriff, and his posse!

We sat back down again, and I continued to think about what I needed to do to make myself known to my sweetheart, but I didn't do anything, and that happened over and over; then overalls girl left, and after a little bit I left too, and I don't remember how I was feeling.