La coscienza delle piante di Nikolai Prestia
(Marsilio editore)

ENGLISH SAMPLE
(by A.I.)

Pag. 10-17

Around me, the average age is low only for cemeteries.
I open my eyes. I've kept them wide open for most of the time, only now do I feel I have them under control. I can understand the images; they flow seamlessly, they don't rewind, they don't overlap. The Valium must have taken effect.
“Listen, can you call the nurse?" asks the woman lying on the bed next to my stretcher.
I ignore her, putting my left hand over my face to hide.
I don't want any interaction.
I want to disappear.

I notice that a man with a bandaged hand and I are the only ones lying on the ambulance stretchers.
"There are no more beds, please be patient."
Now I have regained control of all my senses; my chest no longer burns, I'm no longer afraid of dying. I won't become an idiot, unable to speak, unable to understand. My terror.
How did I get here?

I try to reconstruct time, to slow it down and rewind it. It's an inhuman effort; it's still too soon to fully recover.
"Open up, let me out. I'm eighty-four years old, please, open the door for me."
A thin, hoarse voice breaks the silence in this room that feels like a forgotten desert.
I look around, slowly moving my head left and right without leaving the comfort of the pillow. I can't do anything else.
There are about thirty of us in the yellow lot, in front of stations One, Two, and Three of the Gemelli emergency room.
The old people sleep, and those who are awake complain about the wet bed or the burning wounds.
"Are we an emergency room or a senior center?" a nurse asks sarcastically, unaware that I'm hearing her, her colleague reaching the station in front of my stretcher.
There he is, I recognize him. A face. I remember holding his hand until a few moments ago. He passes me by without stopping, doesn't even look at me; a man at the back of the room has priority. We are all equal to nurses and doctors: perhaps hospitals restore a sense of equality more than anything else, stripping us of our existential and social beliefs, making us feel like interchangeable numbers, prey to the commutative property: changing the order doesn't change the result. We are all sick, in need of care.
I force myself to at least think back to how I got to the hospital.

Total darkness for a few minutes. I focus on my right hand, opening and closing it, slowly at first, then repeating the movement more and more quickly. I'm regaining control of my body. A warmth begins to rise from my palm toward my wrist. This small spark of life makes me close my eyes, and my mind takes me back to a few hours ago.

I stare at my reflection in the mirror, then chaos arrives. I look at my eyes without seeing them. The buzzing of the biggest mosquito in the entire universe torments my ears and brain. I can't feel my arms, I can't understand what I'm seeing, time moves forward and backward. And I tremble. I'm afraid. I'm a vortex of dizziness. I scream: "I can't speak, I can't think, it's a stroke! I can't feel my mouth, I can't move my tongue properly." My desperation has no interlocutor, and the white walls of the apartment I've rented don't absorb the light, and the same goes for emotions, my entire existence in that moment is the echo of my oblivion. I find myself on the street, along a dark alley, and the buzzing finally fades. I have no control over my legs, I feel them trembling but I can't feel their weight. The asphalt is a boat at the mercy of the rough sea, nausea taunts my stomach. My chest burns, my right hand tries to push back the pain. Nothing doing. I scream again: "Help, help! I'm dying, someone call an ambulance." There's no one there, I glance at the phone; it says 9:29 PM. Moments of lucidity alternate with confusion. Light and darkness, dizziness and a precarious balance. I finally manage to call 911.
"I'm dying, come save me."

On the other end, the operator tries to cling to all her experience. "What's his name?"
"Marco."
"Do you remember his last name?"
"What the fuck, I'm dying, I'm not an idiot.
Prezzini."
"He's not dying, tell me when he was born."
"I don't remember."
"How old is he?"
"Thirty-three."
"Where is he?"
"It's Acquedotto Paolo Street. I don't remember the street number. I can't focus on anything."
"Don't worry, tell me what's nearby."
"How would I know! Oh yes, two bicycles and a pizza. No, no, a kebab shop. And a wine shop. Hurry!"
"The wine shop is Enoteca Mattioli?"
"Yes, yes. Enoteca Mattioli, yes. I'll be waiting under the sign. Come, please. I can't die today."
"You won't die, Marco. I'm sending an ambulance."
"Come, quickly." He hangs up.

My tongue is like chewing gum, the kind that stays stuck to a bench all summer: it's weightless, it's hard, and I can't feel it.
"Holy shiaet," I say, and I realize I can't pronounce the words properly.
Despair.
"Holy shitaet, I've besome stufid," I mumble.

My chest is now an uncontrollable fire. Panic engulfs me, but I can't control it. I ignore it as a hypothesis. All I can think of is a stroke, or ischemia. I don't know what the difference is, but I feel like I'm about to die, or suffer from an irreparable illness.
"Heallow, I calleasd half an hour augo, how much the fuck are you waiting for?"
"Prezzini, we ended the call less than a minute ago. Try to hold on, you should hear the siren any minute."
"Pic Gaoad."
I can't even swear anymore.
Time forgets to exist. I feel like everything is a long wait, an interminable agony. The only thought that accompanies me is: I'm dying.
It starts to rain, but I don't curse because God has already punished me by distorting my words. I'm furious with him; right now I'm allowing him to exist only because I need to blame someone. I hear sirens blaring in the distance. Time has sobered up again, I feel like I've regained control.
Never true.
Why am I in the middle of the street?
The chaos turns sadistic again in an instant. The images of what's in front of me overlap. I walk, but I feel like I'm standing still. "Oh my God, I've gone crazy," I scream again. The frames are in disarray, and I'm a broken camera.
The void.

"Calm down, Prezzo-Prezz..." the nurse tries to say, stumbling over my last name. "Calm down, Mr. Marco, we're here with you."
"Nurse, a- ar- areee we in the anmbulaence?"
"Yes."
"Then why didn't I act like I was a fool?"
"He's very nervous."
"I woauld li- li- like to see her. "
I can't speak, my tongue is like that chewing gum stuck to the bench, and now it's as if it just fell off, and I feel like I've lost it forever.
"Doooc- dooocto-rss , I can't speak, for God's sake!"
"Calm down, he's nervous. Everything's under control."
The images alternate again. Darkness becomes light, smells become nothing. The blood pressure and pulse machine emit high-pitched sounds. It devastates me, ignoring my need for absolute silence.
"Prezzini, your heart rate is one hundred and ninety-one. You need to calm down," and this time he's right.
I say something, and then I nod.
"Send the amn- ambulance, I'm daae… I'm dying and we're stuck ."
When I say this, I realize I'm already in the emergency room, in front of the triage station.
I don't remember anything.
"Tell me your full name."
"Marco Prezzini."
"What do you do for a living?"
"Nothing in particular."
"What does that mean?"

"I don't know."
"Tell me where you live."
"Calabria."
"City?"
"Look at my document, I'm not cutting my lymph nodes."
"Okay, try to breathe." Darkness, again.
"Close your eyes and stay still, otherwise we can't do the ECG."
The panic returns.
"But I've kept them closed until now, I don't remember anything, help, help, I'm dying."
At times, my tongue returns.
A nurse takes my right arm. He hesitates.
"What the hell, was it me who had to practice?"
He can't find the vein. My mouth is dry again.
"Look, here's the ve-van... the vein."
I want to insult him, but he understands and is understanding.
"Done."
"What are you giving me?"
"Let's give him a diazepam drip," the doctor replies.
"You think it's a pan-pani-panigo attack? You were wrong, i'm dying."
"He's not dying, he's just agitated."
"Doctor, when did you get sick? I don't remember anything."
"I've always been here, this is a hospital. Close your eyes."

Pag.29-32

"The nurse told me this little list of what you shouted in the ambulance a little while ago, when I took your file."
"Yeah," I tell him, remaining frozen in my terror.
"Prezzini, we have some material here, huh?" he replies, in a friendly tone.
"Yeah."
"Have you ever been to therapy?"
"No, never."
"Do you think it's unnecessary?"
"I don't know, how could you know?"
"Legit question. Listen, is this your first panic attack?"
"No. I had one before, I think six years ago.
Give or take a year. Then just a lot of agitation and anxiety."
"You didn't have therapy then either?"
"No."
"Why?"
"How come?"
"How do I know? At the hospital they told me it was nothing, just a panic attack. I needed to relax more and take life more calmly."
"Typical," he draws quotes with his fingers, "of real doctors...
I don't blame her," he replies, trying to get a smile out of me. An unsuccessful attempt.

"But if a few years ago they had advised you to seek counseling, would you have listened?"
I shake my head; it seems like an inappropriate question.
"Why?"
"And what do I know? Maybe at the time I wanted to do it myself. I didn't want to leave her and..." I stop speaking.
"I didn't want to let her go?" Still delicately, he completes the sentence for me.
I nod, now I'm a child, disappointed because his card trick has been discovered. I look at my hands: they're shaking.
"You didn't want to let go of who?" he tries to ask.
"It's not easy, I can't do it. I can't do it. Please don't do this to me."
"No, no, don't worry. You shouldn't talk to me about things you don't want to." He gets up, grabs a bottle of water, and fills a glass, setting it in front of me. "Drink, relax. You're not being tested here. Let's chat, dig a little deeper, and then you can leave here."
I drink the water, tremble, and get my sweatshirt wet. I don't react, I'm scared. Scared of everything. I look around, but the walls are white; everything is so impersonal. The bookshelf isn't enough to give the room a sense of warmth. I have no escape; this time I have to face the past. Face myself.
"Oh, my colleagues in the emergency room told me you also mentioned Dr. Giambasso, is that true?"
"I was panicking; I must have said a lot..." Once again, I remain vague. I really am a coward.

"I mean..." he rests his elbows on the desk, holding my gaze, "I mean: do you know him?"
"Yes."
"Great, I know him too. We always play tennis on Tuesday nights."
"Does he win?"

“What does it matter? I’m having fun.”
“Yeah.” Still with the indefinite answers.
The doctor gets up and puts on his lab coat. “Prezzini. I’m going to be away for a few moments. Do an exercise...
how shall I put it, a mental exercise. A refresher.”
“A what?”
“Think about what’s bothering you. You have something bothering you, I assume.”
“Yes, university.”
He sits back down. “University? Do you have a degree?”
“Yes, in law.”
“Excuse me?”
“Law. I graduated from Siena, almost four years ago.”
“Good. Bad choice?”
“The worst.” I smile, looking toward the window.
“Did you miss the exam?”
“Yeah, why ask?”
“Well. First you call the faculty, misspelling the name, then you tell me you graduated four years ago and you’re thirty-two. And then he tells me it was a bad choice. I assumed...”

“You assumed correctly.” I bring the fingers of my left hand to my mouth, starting to bite the cuticles.
Silence reigns supreme: it's the psychologist's engine, he knows how to do it. I don't.
“I... I wanted to kill myself, a few years ago.” I've never admitted it out loud, not so explicitly. The sound of every single word takes hold of every inch of my skin, tugging at it, scratching it, burning it. I clench my fists: they're nothing more than the reflection of the ones I've just endured emotionally.
“I understand, I'm sorry. Do you want to talk about it?” he replies promptly. He doesn't know I'm hating him, that there's a strangled scream inside me.
I understand, I'm sorry? What kind of answer is that? I open the closet with all my skeletons for you and you piss in it? I want to scream at him.
"I don't know. I've never told anyone about it," I reply, almost resentfully. "And then there's my graduation day involved..."
"I imagine your parents know everything, right?"
"Enough."

Pag.58-64

It was mid-October, and all the senior year classes had begun.
I couldn't take notes; I was always distracted by something. I stood there, observing my colleagues'

faces. I scrutinized their gazes, their expressions, the way they nodded their heads. I wondered: is it possible that they all have clear ideas about their future, yet are satisfied with the present?
A new feeling began to creep into me, one I never thought I could feel: dissatisfaction. I began to observe every detail of the faculty building, located two hundred meters from Porta Tufi. I had never noticed the cobwebs in the corners between the load-bearing walls and the ceilings. Instead of taking notes, I spent my time observing the scribbles on the tables, the various dedications; I compared the penises and breasts drawn by others in the boredom of some lectures. The kind barmaids at the faculty bar, on the ground floor, seemed aged and lacking in enthusiasm. Even the professors had come under my scrutiny: their jackets in dull, dull colors, their watches almost always with leather straps, worn by time. Their hair, lips, and eyes exerted a sense of authority from behind the desk. I began to observe life, everything around me. It was as if my eyes had suddenly decided to investigate every single detail. I felt a nausea at superficiality; I needed to delve deeply into everything. Whether it was an object or a glance, it didn't matter. Now the details were the focus of my attention, as if I could glimpse new truths within them. I was distracted, I studied less intensely.

I prepared to go down to Calabria during the Christmas period without having given a partial in December. In reality, I had failed. For the first time, my university

record had been tarnished. Yet I had studied following the usual method: first a quick reading of the textbook, and a second, slower one, taking care to underline the most important concepts; then a third reading of each individual chapter, followed by a first repetition; and finally a repetition of all the chapters with the book open, and a final one with the book closed.
In the evening, before going to sleep, I repeated the key words to myself, trying to commit the related concepts to memory. I studied with the same method as always, but it was as if my mind were wandering while I was reading and repeating the paragraphs. I didn't give that failure much weight, but somehow a feeling of incompleteness took hold of me: I tried to hide it from myself, but in reality I felt inadequate. A kind of guilt, stemming from the most heinous of crimes, of which no one was aware; only my conscience reminded me, with the words "university," "future," "exam," "degree."
I distract myself, my body craving nicotine.
No, no, you don't understand. First you get to the bottom of things, and then the cigarette.
I have to break the rhythm of memories, to face the pain. I need a caress, something sweet, a kind face.
Grandpa, Grandpa... Do you remember? You talked about it with him that Christmas...
My grandfather Riccardo is the best person in the world, I love him. I always think of him, the cigarettes he smoked at dawn on the porch, and his aftershave: until a few years ago, during chestnut season, he would go out on the third Sunday of November and go to the grove

near his house. I thought they were all pine trees, which was true,
except that Riccardo had also planted a chestnut tree there. He went there every year, since he was thirty-four: he would climb the tree trunk until he clung to the first branch, which he thought was the strongest, and begin to move up and down, making the branch tremble with the vibrations generated by the movement of his body. With his eyes cast downward, he carefully spotted the first chestnut that touched the ground, wrapped in its prickly shell. Then he would climb down, pick it up, and gather some moss and three pine branches. He would return home, open a dark glass jar, and place inside it what he had gathered in the woods. He would then fill the container with alcohol and mint and close it again. He would wrap everything in a piece of wool and place it in a wine barrel he had converted into a cabinet, where he also hid the grappa from his grandmother's gaze, at least while she was alive. Four months later, he would filter and pour the resulting liquid into another bottle, which in turn would be covered with a strip of hide given to him by his grandfather—I can't say which animal—securing it with string and then dipping it into a pot hanging over the fireplace. Ten hours later, he would obtain his perfumed lotion. It wasn't a strong fragrance, but on his oily skin, on his clean-shaven face, it gave off an incredible smell.
Only at the dawn of his eighties did back pain and the ailments of old age prevent him from continuing to produce his perfume.

My grandfather Riccardo, two days before Christmas, asked me: "What's wrong? You feel strange."
He was the only one who noticed my discomfort when faced with the usual questions from family members about academic matters, to which I had otherwise responded enthusiastically.
"I don't know, I think everything's okay, Grandpa. I failed a partial. But don't worry."
Only to him had I told the burden I was carrying.

He offered me a cigarette, and we smoked together on his porch. He wore a blue robe over his red pajamas, and on his feet were heavy socks hidden up to the toes by his gray slippers. He was very bruised and already had diabetes.

Everyone in the family, but my father more than the others, oppressed me with one phrase: "Graduate in time for Grandpa, you know he really cares." I had never noticed the weight of those words, until my grandfather himself revealed it to me during those holidays.
"Don't worry, I'm holding on."
"What are you saying, Grandpa?"
"That when you graduate, you graduate. I'll be there, even if I die. I'll take a day off from hell and come give you a hug."
"But stop it, you'll live another hundred years!"
"So you have another hundred years to graduate calmly. And to fail."

"Fail?" I objected, fidgeting, unable to control the blush that began to spread like fire across my face.
"Yes. You said you failed, right?"
"I didn't fail, it was just a partial." I was annoyed, as if he had insulted me.
"Uh oh! Don't worry, little prince. Failing or failing a partial is the same thing. It's not a big deal, in fact, it's better this way."
"What do you mean?"
"Well, you can't be infallible: to be invincible, you have to fail first. You understand that, right?"
"Mmm... no, failing is something for failures."
"All bullshit, come on. Damn... You see? By dint of being good in high school, and even in college, you've convinced yourself of this nonsense. On the contrary, failure is necessary, and sometimes it's even right."
"And even if that were the case, why doesn't anyone normalize failure?"
"And how do I know. I'm just telling you that when I left for war, no one told us it was possible to die, or be wounded. We left convinced we could win, and that was it. For me, war was a boom, prrr, tatatà, and the white flag raised by the enemies. The wounds! The wounds in my knee and shoulder—those allowed me to survive, to take life seriously, to be more careful than I should have been. Seeing my comrades die, finding myself in the trenches at night with ten less familiar faces... All this horror made me realize I wasn't immortal, and so I clung to life. Do you understand?"
"Yes, I think so, Grandpa. I'm sorry."

"Well, it's all a memory now, and luckily I don't even remember it that well."
"Why do you think we don't talk about failures?" I tried to get back on track, hoping to find some light.
"How do I know? I think... I think because failing is normal, just like dying. And maybe everyone's forgetting normality..." he replied, staring at the sky. "Farts!"
"What?" I asked, surprised.
"Farts are normal, physiological, right?"
"Um... yes, Grandpa."
"Everyone does them, and yet they're ashamed. And those who do them in public, because they might just let it slip, get scolded. Normality, perhaps, scares everyone." I didn't know what to say.
"I'm glad you failed, so you see the other side of the coin, and you try harder. You learn to take a beating, believe me..." my grandfather continued.
It was nice to hear him speak, with his elegant Italian. After the war, he had taught in elementary school.
It's probably thanks to him that I speak little dialect, and quite good Italian, almost without any accent. And it was even nicer to watch him walk on the porch. He held a cigarette in one hand, a Marlboro Red, while he fiddled with the lighter in the other. We always talked about politics, and occasionally soccer. "Ah, Ciccio Cozza won't be around here again," he said, referring to a former number ten for Reggina Calcio.
"I always tell your father to let you breathe. I see him only asking about university. And when you're not around, if he hears someone just graduated, he'll go

nuts: 'When is he going to bring us that damned piece of paper?'"
I told Grandpa not to worry, that Dad had always been like that anyway.
"Oh no, no, no! I can see you're weird. What if you don't graduate on time? Will you let the wait drag you down? No, you have to take your time, if you think it's necessary. The degree is yours, but here it seems to me like it's becoming someone else's business: it's as if parents today sent their children to study to get the degree they couldn't get themselves. If you feel tired, stop. If they fail you, try again. Don't be afraid of judgment and pressure; no one in my family has ever graduated, so only you can know what you need or what it means to be a university student, with its rhythms and unexpected events, and its difficulties. I'm the oldest of all in the family; I fought in the Second World War, I lost friends, brothers, and your grandmother. I learned Italian in the trenches, reading books. I walked all across Italy from Austria to get home. Your father opened a restaurant, something he never imagined he could do, with a lot of sacrifice, and thanks to my help. Life is everything, except what we plan. Actually, listen to me: don't plan a damn thing."
He was calm, worried about me. He was the one who taught me to smoke cigarettes. "Not all grandparents are wise, sooner or later you'd start on your own, I bet. So it's better if you do it with me."
The holidays weren't peaceful with my parents: I'd started snapping at my father. "You see, this is your last

year, I can't support you anymore for your good life," he stressed me out.
Once I replied angrily: "What good life? I studied seriously, I haven't fallen behind on a single subject, I have a very high average, and you're pissing me off about the 'good life'? How many times have I seen the Palio? Not even once, because I'll be coming down here in June."
On that occasion, I realized for the first time that at the root of my academic brilliance was a kind of pressure exerted by my father and my fear of disappointing him, of not being good enough. Not just in his eyes, but in the eyes of the entire world. Despite the certainty that it was not his intention to instill in me insecurities.

Pag.82-86

In September, after finishing my second year of being a student outside of the prescribed time, I decided to lie irreparably.
It wasn't a choice, because I wasn't capable of choosing. I had no alternatives, not with that emotional burden on my shoulders.
"Dad, I took my last two subjects today."
"What are you talking about?" he replied, his tone brimming with pride.
"Yes, I passed both. A stroke of luck. Actually, two," I said, my voice full of feigned enthusiasm.

"That's wonderful! You're free!"
Hearing that answer, I tried with all my might not to burst into tears.
"Yes, Dad... The thesis remains."
"The thesis remains. Am I wrong to say that the bulk of it is now done?"
"No, Dad. You're not wrong. I have to do some bibliographic research; I already know who to ask."
"Who?"
"Professor Pagliantini, Civil Law."
"Very good. Keep me updated. I'm so happy for you. You know I don't care about graduation now? Knowing that a huge weight has been lifted from you is the most beautiful thing for me, the only thing that matters!
"Yeah, I feel so light..."
Inadequacy, pressure, fear of disappointing, or the simple desire not to appear incompetent: all these things drove me to lie. I resented being behind in my studies; I was tired of seeing myself as a failure through the eyes of others. I could have worked harder, sure. But there's a point beyond which, once you reach it, it's impossible to even follow a logical thought. I couldn't open my books, much less study. In that lie, I placed my hope of stumbling upon another stroke of luck, like I had with the last three subjects I'd taken, but it never came. Not only that: in the lie, in the parallel version of my life, two weeks later I also told my father that I would graduate in September of the following year.
"Pagliantini will be my advisor."
"So he accepted my thesis?" My father was delighted.

"Yes. I think I'll be able to graduate in September of next year."
"Great, go celebrate!"
I don't know why, but I convinced myself that by continuing to lie, I would make my first lie truer, thus becoming more credible. I increased my debt to the truth to make the first lie truer. From that day on, I began lying to everyone I spoke to, mostly boys and girls I met over a beer: they all knew I was almost there. Sometimes I got lost in my lies, I wasn't paying attention to the words I spoke, I told some people that all I needed was my thesis, and to others just an exam, with the thesis already written.
It was the beginning of the vortex. And every lie was a burden to my soul: what I feared most was being discovered and being called a liar. Perhaps it was an unconscious mechanism, but my mind, when I lied, identified with that reality: it was all real, at least as long as I brought that lie to life with words. And I was brilliant at making those speeches; everything was clear to me: first my thesis, and then the competitive exam for the law school. I no longer had control over anything. Friendly relationships and pseudo-affectionate ones lasted two weeks. I fled when I was overwhelmed by my own words: I tried to understand if it was possible to tell someone the truth, but when the other person sensed inconsistencies, they ended up judging me: if they didn't disappear, I did.
I was reduced to drinking alone, more and more frequently, on Saturday nights. My roommate had

realized something was wrong with me: he'd tried asking me questions, but I felt uncomfortable, and I was evasive. How could I tell a worker who worked his ass off to make a living that I was scraping by on my father's money? How could I make him understand that I wasn't spoiled, but just struggling? And besides, he was the only person I spoke to anymore. I would lose that outlet too if I disappointed him.
My father called me often, sending me money every week. "Enjoy it, don't cook in the evening, go out, relax. Go eat a nice pizza. You must be tired after a day spent reading and writing."
I attacked him with my manners: his sweetness offended me, because it reminded me of what a liar I was. I didn't answer my grandfather's calls: a cowardly way to feel less guilty, just so he'd never be directly implicated in my lies. A way out to find a small comfort, albeit hypocritical. At least this way I won't lie to everyone, I told myself.

That third year of being a dropout that I'd just begun, with all those lies, was terrible.
I cried every day.
I woke up, smoked cigarettes, forced myself to study, and promised myself good intentions every morning. "I'll start at nine," I'd say, but at 9:01 I'd postpone: "I'll start at nine-fifteen," and I'd move the clock forward fifteen minutes at a time. I postponed, hoping for a flash of inspiration. The imminent future, during those days, was

oxygen to me, a silent and bloody hope, which promptly vanished without me even opening the textbooks. Other mornings I'd open the book, move to the window, and smoke. After the last drag, I'd cry, try to pull myself up, breathe, and say to myself: "Yes, damn it, you can do this." But as soon as I sat back in my chair, my whole life seemed to fall apart, and so, driven by a survival instinct, I took refuge in the parallel world of lies. There I felt at ease: I imagined graduation day, and as I did so, my eyes filled with happy tears. I saw my father happy; he hugged me after the proclamation, after the professors on the committee shook my hand, and I left the classroom accompanied by the thunderous applause of friends and colleagues, who had returned to Siena to celebrate me. In my imagination, no one had ever known about my lies. In town, my father walked the streets proud of his son, who had graduated in law. "Not a bachelor's degree," he said with pride and innocence. But then I returned to reality: I stared at the wall, remaining motionless in silent weeping, my hands never stopping shaking. Every day like this, like a man in despair. The worst thing was the conflicting feelings I felt as I passed from the world of lies to the real one. Suddenly, when I realized I'd lied and was deceiving myself, I felt my blood boil in my veins, and a knife plunged into my chest: it was the weight of the truth I couldn't bear. A terrible sensation: to release the physical and emotional anguish I felt, I needed to alienate myself with my lies.

A vicious cycle, that was the only way—for which there was no cure—I could find relief.