



# COMA

ABOUT LUIGI MAZZA

FEDERICO BETTI

translated by Eva Melisa Mastroianni

Federico Betti

**Coma**

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There are various types of coma and the causes can be varied. Inducing a pharmacological coma in a patient serves to focus all of its vital energies on the part of the body that has to heal. That's what happens to Luigi Mazza when he is involved in a road accident on the Bologna ring road in one autumn day. From that moment on, many recurring images appear in his mind in oneiric and apparently incomprehensible form, but which will have a considerable weight in the future of the main character and of those around him. Doctors do a great job, Luigi Mazza wakes up from a coma and starts day after day to live his life, but his mind seems marked. Who is Luigi Mazza, but above all, who is guilty of that accident? Why does the man is in that physical and mental condition? There are various types of coma and the causes can be varied. Inducing a pharmacological coma in a patient serves to focus all of its vital energies on the part of the body that has to heal. That's what happens to Luigi Mazza when he is involved in a road accident on the Bologna ring road in one autumn day. From that moment on, many recurring images appear in his mind in oneiric and apparently incomprehensible form, but which will have a considerable weight in the future of the main character and of those around him. Doctors do a great job, Luigi Mazza wakes up from a coma and starts day after day to live his life, but his mind seems marked. Who is Luigi Mazza, but above all, who is guilty of that accident? Why does the man is in that physical and mental condition? His brother Mario, who is many years older, helps him: the two have always been incredibly close, but from that day on they seem to be much more. Even if Mario can not know what Luigi felt and what is feeling in the present. In the end detective Stefano Zamagni together with his men will have the task to shed light in this plot inside the plot with an unpredictable ending.

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About Luigi Mazza

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To All the Luigi Mazza and Giovanni Armerini out there

I

Silence and solitude ruled in that hospital room of Bologna's Ospedale Maggiore. The only noises that could be heard were the ones made by the bystander machines, that the doctors went to check at regular intervals during the day.

For five days the body of Luigi Mazza was lying motionless in a condition of medically induced coma, inducted by the team of expert anaesthetists after the serious car accident that caused him a concussion treatable, according to the doctors, only in that way.

When he arrived at the emergency room in an ambulance, rushed there with blazing sirens from the orbital road of the Emilian county seat, the man resulted in serious conditions and a red code was conferred to him; after a long wait all the possible examinations were made and he was hospitalized prognosis being reserved.

He lived alone: he never even had the intention of getting married, so the only relative that could be helpful to him was his brother, Mario, who, as soon as he received the news from the workers in the first aid, arrived promptly to make sure of Luigi's conditions, managing, though, to only glimpse him for a moment, while he was moved on a gurney to the room where he was now.

Without realizing anything, Luigi got a daily visit from his brother, who could be limited to only see him through a window pane. He stayed about one hour every day, staring at him in the vain hope of instilling in him the strength of healing, and often he would go away without saying a word even to the doctors.

When he consulted them, the head physician always told him that the man's conditions were stable and that he needed almost two weeks before getting out of the coma.

"We'll think about it, when he will be healed", he guaranteed.

On a regular basis, the doctors made Luigi undergo the exams to keep the situation monitored, trying to report the improvements to the brother.

"A servant told me that the coma was... inducted? Does it mean that you made him go in a comatose state?" asked Mario to a nurse, two days after the accident.

"Yes. It was decided to provoke a medically inducted coma to the patient.", answered the young man.

"Medically inducted?" echoed Mario.

"Exactly, medically inducted. Don't you know what that is?"

"No, explain it to me, please!" commanded Mario.

"When a patient is subject to such serious injuries, as it could be your brother's concussion, the doctors can decide to provoke a medically inducted coma, using therefore drugs. This way all the vital energies are addressed to the damage to be repaired" explained the nurse.

"Thank you for your explanation. May I speak directly to whom oversaw this, so that I could have a prediction of the improvement?" asked Mario.

"You should talk to the anaesthetists. Only they can provoke a medically inducted coma." rebut the man.

"And where can I find them?"

"You could speak to doctor Parri. But now I think that he's busy in an operation. He's usually more available during the morning."

"I see. So, I'll look for him tomorrow. Will I find him at noon?"

“Yes. Except for unforeseen circumstances, he goes on his lunch break at 1:30. Then at 3 the surgery starts, so I suggest you speak to him before lunch, so he will almost certainly have some time to dedicate to you.” finished the nurse.

“Thank you” said Mario Mazza right before dismissing and going out of the hospital.

When he was on the road it was almost five in the afternoon and the winter-like darkness was only interrupted by the light of the lampposts.

He went home to get some rest, knowing that, after a few hours, he had to be there again.

II

I’m driving, but I don’t know towards which destination. I don’t even know where I am. In a car. I cling to the steering wheel and in front of me there’s nothing. I don’t understand if it’s dark or light. Me, in front of a steering wheel, that I hold with a firm grasp. And that’s it. Where am I going? I don’t know... or can’t I remember? I can’t hear any noise around or coming from the outside. Provided that there’s something outside. Provided that “outside” actually exists.

I feel like being in an environment in which the void was artificially created. After all, sound doesn’t propagate in void, and that would also explain the reason why I can’t hear any noise around me. Am I in a box hermetically closed? Maybe I’m not in a car but in a I’m inside a driving simulator, as in fun fairs. Yes, maybe I’m at a fun fair, but I don’t know what I came here for. Me inside a simulator. I’m not driving a car. Why am I here? How did I get here? By car. Yes, I probably got here by car.

No, now that I think about it I can’t be in a simulator: I would hear at least some small noise, the gears moving, the piston going up and down.

So that means that I’m in the car. With void around me? Impossible! I must have been brought here somehow. I don’t even know where I am. I can’t figure it out, or I can’t remember. Where am I? And why? What brought me here? And where am I going? Provided that I’m going somewhere. Outside there’s nothing, or is it me that can’t see? I can’t see what’s beyond the steering wheel that I’m holding with my hands. Maybe it’s not a simulator, but there’s a black cloth in front of me, that’s hiding the outside view from me. I’m at a fun fair, not inside a simulator, but on a ride on which you apparently drive a car, or some other vehicle, and you feel like moving, but you’re actually in front of this black cloth and wait for something to happen. But what? And above all, do rides like this exist? I don’t know, or at least I don’t remember ever seeing them...

We’re back to the start. I don’t know where I am. I have no clues that could help me figure it out. At least, I understand that I’m alone and there’s nobody else with me. Wait a moment... I am alone, but it also true that there are no passenger’s seats. It’s just me. In front of me I have the steering wheel and the black cloth, if it’s a cloth. I can’t even understand if there’s glass between the steering wheel and the cloth.

Am I moving, or am I still? Maybe I’m just apparently moving. Maybe I’m going nowhere, I’m still, sitting somewhere, with a steering wheel, a black cloth and nothing around me.

I’m not understanding anything, or anyway I have a lot of confusion in my mind.

If I’m in a car, are there windows? I look at my left: a second black cloth. I look at my right: a third black cloth. And behind me? Another black cloth.

I try to touch with one hand the cloth on my left, but I realize I’m not touching anything: my hand doesn’t find any opposition; it’s like it goes through the cloth, or it is the cloth, not to exist. Cloth or not, my hand is like swallowed by the darkness, and now I can only see my arm. So, I take it back “inside”, next to me, and I find my hand, still there, and not lost how it looked like.

Now I’m holding the steering wheel with both hands. I can’t really figure anything out. Actually, every minute that passes by, I am more confused.

Now I know that I’m driving something, I have a steering wheel in front of me, all around is dark, but there are no cloths. I realize that in this vehicle, if it is a vehicle, the gear shift was missing.

Chaos in my head was increasing.

I don't know where I'm going, but probably nowhere: I stay here, still, waiting for something to happen.

### III

Luigi Mazza's conditions were stable, with some slow improvement every day, and the doctors were confident. "The body will heal spontaneously", it was the answer that his brother was given every time he asked for information.

The day after the conversation with the nurse, Mario Mazza managed to speak to the anaesthetist that provoked the medically induced coma to his brother.

"Could you better explain to me what that is about?", he asked.

"I know that you already were told, in broad terms, what we did" started doctor Parri, "His brother arrived here with a concussion of a non-negligible extent. The medical team of the emergency room, after taking all the possible examinations, believed that the only way to treat this trauma was a medically induced coma. We administered some sedatives to your brother to induce him in a comatose state, considering that this way his body could 'focus' only on the injured part, the one that really needs treatment. We are monitoring all the improvements that your brother is doing, day by day, and I guarantee that they are evident. When we'll see the complete healing of the concussion, then we'll wake your brother up: he will stop the consumption of the sedatives and probably we will administer to him some stimulating drugs that will help the awakening"

"I see", said Mario Mazza after listening the doctor's explanation. "And how many are the odds that he will completely heal?", he asked.

"I'd say one hundred percent", answered optimistically the doctor.

"And that he will wake up from the coma?", replied Mario.

"Absolute. Personally, I never came upon problems with the awakening after a medically induced coma. We know which the doses are to give to the patients. Don't worry about this." Finished the doctor.

"Alright" whispered Mario in a sigh.

"Now I should go to lunch, I'm looking forward to a quite busy afternoon"

"Thank you, doctor"

"You're welcome" said the doctor, before taking leave and go towards his office.

Mario Mazza was relieved after hearing those words from doctor Parri: they were positive, optimistic and hopeful.

The time for visits to patients wasn't over yet, so he decided to stay a little bit more to check on his brother.

Going out of the hospital he felt his heart lighter: he was optimistic because he knew that Luigi would heal. In about two weeks, according to what the doctors said. Almost six day passed by, so it shouldn't take long.

He went home, in the cold that weighted down on him and a freezing cold wind that blew on him, then he prepared something to eat and fell asleep in front of the television while a western movie of the '70s was on air.

### IV

I'm driving, I don't know toward what destination. And I don't know where I am. I realize just now that no one is with me. I'm in the car, or at least it seems like that, but there are no passenger's seats. Around me it's all dark, homogeneous black. The darkness makes me feel insecure, because I don't know what to expect. Meanwhile I'm here, sitting in front of the steering wheel. I feel like being still, like in one of those American drive-ins where you watch a movie sitting in the car, but in this case, it seems like the film isn't projected anywhere. All around I only see the same pitch black.

Where am I? I've never been to America, so I'm not at a drive-in. So, where?

I don't understand. With my left hand I touch the black, but it's something tenuous, like the night's darkness. But this is something different, because at night there are some lights on, but not

here where I am now. So, where am I? What am I doing? I put my left hand back on the steering wheel, the only certain thing. I know there's a steering wheel in front of me, but I don't know anything else. If I had the chance to ask someone, it would be all easier; but there's no one with me, not even in the proximity. I'm alone. Sooner or later something will happen, something will change, or at least I hope, but now it all seems motionless. I feel like being in a dark room, locked for some reason waiting for a verdict: as if I had to wait that a judge promulgates his sentence for something I did, but I'm sure I didn't do anything illegal; I never committed a crime, I never made a robbery, I didn't kill anyone. At least that's what I know, provided that I didn't have an amnesia, something that made me completely lose my memory, so in real life I really am in a dark room doing nothing until someone will come, maybe a policeman, to bring me to my destiny.

No, it can't be. If it really was like that, how could I explain the steering wheel?

I don't know where I am. If someone could help me understand...

Now I have a migraine too, a pain that starts on the left side of the head and slowly extends up to the right side. It's not an intense pain, but it's incessant, constant. I feel it pulsating in my head, moving from one side to another, from left to right, from right to left and, sometimes, I'm aching everywhere. My head is not splitting, but it hurts. Maybe I could use a painkiller to deal with the pain, or maybe I just have to wait that it goes away on its own, just like it came. I think that the only option to choose is the second, since no one's here, no one I could ask where I am or why, no one that could somehow help me, giving me a painkiller for the headache, or letting me understand something of what's going on with me. I stay here, alone in front of a steering wheel, in the darkness, at the mercy of events.

V

The examinations made on the seventh day showed a remarkable improvement: Luigi Mazza was responding well to the treatments and the healing in progress was making great strides.

He was thirty-five years old and his still young body was able to somehow get rid of the concussion that was caused by the car crash on the emilian county seat's orbital road.

Although the man was motionless in the same position, without realizing when, periodically, the sedatives were administered to him to keep the state of medically induced coma, nor realizing of possible visits, something was changing for the best inside him.

The doctors were satisfied and didn't hesitate to tell the patient's brother.

"Thank you so much for what you've been doing for him, really. If I knew who the guilty party in all of this was, I swear I'd tell him off. You can't reduce someone like this, on the edge between life and death!" said repeatedly Mario Mazza, talking to the healthcare team.

"He won't die, you can be sure", confirmed the head physician of Ospedale Maggiore, "He's healing, even if he will need some time"

There wasn't a day in which Mario Mazza wouldn't go visit his brother. He was sixty years old, twenty-five more, he was widower since when, ten years before, his wife died prematurely because of a sudden leukaemia. So, they both found themselves alone, one by choice and the other one by constraint, and their bond was always stronger and well-founded.

Although they never thought of living together, they met each other habitually every day anyways. Only in some cases of impossibility due to the events, could happen that in one week they wouldn't meet for seven days in a row.

They often had dinner together and, when they were both in agreement, they would also treat themselves with a dinner at a restaurant, choosing between several options that the city of Bologna and the near-by area offered to them.

They were both passionate about ethnical cuisine, to alternate with the traditional one or to pizza, often to try different flavours and traditions: from the more popular Chinese restaurant to the Indian or the Greek, up to the restaurants less popular by the masses, like the African restaurant or the Persian one, every occasion was good to vary and taste unusual dishes.

They agreed on many things, from the most important ones to the most trivial; they also had similar taste in music. Both Luigi and his brother liked almost every genre: one didn't listen to house music because, according to what he said, it made him sleepy; the other one almost hated popular music, considering it inconsequential. He said that there's music for every occasion and every kind of music generates different emotions depending on the genre; "The popular one doesn't leave anything inside of you", claimed the older brother.

Thinking about all these things, looking at Luigi lying there motionless, he got a lump in his throat and could barely hold back his tears.

"The time allowed for visits is over!" shouted a servant, waking him up from his thoughts.

"I'll go away immediately" answered Mario, walking towards the exit.

When he arrived on the road, the darkness of the night wrapped him like a dark mantle.

VI

I'm driving, I don't know where I am meant to go. Around me there's only darkness. And there's no one that could help me, no one that could make me understand something of what's going on with me, no one that could give me clues. How long have I been here? I lost track of time.

Sometimes I feel like being the main character of a freeze frame, then I realize I can somehow move. "Is there anybody?", I try to ask, without getting any answer. I have confirmation that I'm alone. Inside a car, or some other vehicle? I didn't understand that yet. Without other passengers, without other seats, without a gear shift. But with the steering wheel, that's always in front of me.

What's happening to me? I don't know, but I think that I don't know a lot of things. Maybe I'm here by chance. I recall experiments with the time machine, even if I always thought that it was the result of the imagination of someone that wanted to create stories for some book or movie, where they're catapulted in a far away world and time. What was that movie's name? I can't remember, maybe it will come to mind in a bit. Now, even if I make an effort, I can't get anything from my memory. I can't even understand how I feel, but it's a weird feeling.

There it is, my headache is back, my temples are pulsating, first on the right, then on the left, it's a stronger pain than the other time. "Do you have a painkiller, please?", but it was pointless because I know no one is going to answer. Anyway, I tried.

Now I'm thinking that I may be the victim of some candid-camera: they call you with an excuse, they place you here in the dark, in this kind of car, and they leave alone waiting. "It's a bad joke, you know?", I say speaking to the void in front of me. I almost screamed it, because this situation is starting to wear me out. How long have I been here? "Come on, come clean! I know you're hiding somewhere!"

I don't receive any answer, so I'm only left to wait.

The wait is exhausting, I never waited so long. Still I can't see anyone. It seems like they don't want to show up. They are scared, or they are just bastards and they are making me a prank that I'm not enjoying at all.

In traditional candid-cameras, if we can call them that way, everything is solved over the course of a few hours, or at least a day, but honestly, I feel like being in this place for a lot more time, but maybe I'm wrong. Deep down, I think that something happened to me, that made me become estranged; anyway, this is still a bad prank. You don't do these kinds of pranks, not even to your worst enemy.

I'm afraid of the dark, because to me it means uncertainty. Or, rather loss of certainty.

I'm afraid of the dark and someone is playing on this, taking advantage of my weakness.

I realize that he's a coward, since he has no intention to make me recognize him. Whoever he is, he understood that I would tell him off, so he is careful not to show his face.

"Is anybody there?", I try to ask, tearing up the absolute silence that reigns in here. Still no answers. "Do you have a painkiller? My head's hurting", but clearly there is no one willing to hear me out. "Where are you? Show yourselves."

No one comes out, no one is coming here to me.

What an ugly situation, I don't like it at all.

If at least I could notice any activity, I could try to understand who's the guilty party of all of this; but I can't see anyone.

Thinking about it, I realize that everything is been the same since I found myself in here.

Me, on a car seat, with a steering wheel in front of me and darkness all around. A darkness capable to swallow me.

It could be a nice scene for a horror movie.

I can already picture it. And maybe it would also be adequately promoted. "Ladies and gentlemen, please come along to the preview of the new horror movie. It will make your skin crawl! You aren't some scaredy cats, are you? It arrived to all the theaters. Come along, come along, come along..."

And I would be the main character. Lucky me! I would become famous, for heaven's sake, but I'd rather do it in some other way.

I'm wandering off a little bit, maybe to avoid thinking to what's happening to me, maybe to let come to mind some idea to understand how to get away from this situation. And, just for a change, I can't think of anything.

"Is anyone there?", I ask one more time, "I would need something to make this headache go away!"

Nothing and no one.

It's discouraging, as a result.

I have nothing left to do but to wait, wait for someone, wait for something to change.

## VII

The days went by alike the ones to the others, with the doctors spreading confidence to Luigi's brother: "You can see the improvements", they said to him. "The patient is acting good. His body is reacting in a good way to the suffered trauma".

Mario was happy listening to these words, but after all he couldn't wait to be witness of his brother's awakening, to hug him again.

He wanted to see him like he remembered him before the accident: he was always happy, lively and, most of all, he walked with his own legs.

"He will need a little bit of rehabilitation: staying still for days in the same position, surely his muscles will lose strength. For a period of time he will have to do some exercise, to fully recover", one of the nurses explained to him.

"He will do whatever it takes to be back to normal", Mario Mazza confirmed, "He's a willing guy, so he surely won't have any problems to engage himself that way."

"He will follow an accurate program, that will bring him to gradual, but also total rehabilitation."

"Good, thank you for all that are you doing. We trust your experience."

"Now, if you don't mind, I would like a coffee", said the nurse.

"Don't worry. I'll come with you, I need one too" answered Mario.

They went in the corner where the vending machines were, at the end of the corridor.

There was one for hot drinks, one for iced drinks, one for salty and sweet snacks and one for stuffed sandwiches.

Mario put the money and selected a classic espresso, while the nurse, using a magnetic key given to the staff of the hospital, chose a chocolate cappuccino.

"Sometimes I feel a little spoiled", said the man.

"It's good to allow yourself to make an exception to the rule. We all should do it now and then"

They drank their beverage and then each of them went his own way. "Now I have to leave you", said the nurse, "I have a few things to do"

"Don't worry, I'll let you go. Thank you for your company."

Mario Mazza went towards his brother's room and stopped in the hallway, knowing that he couldn't go inside.

He was glad that his brother's conditions were getting better day by day, and that was enough to him now; once completely healed, he would have the chance to stay with him and make up for lost time.

One week to go and everything was going to be back to normal. Almost, at least.

He stayed until the end of visiting hours, then he got out and went home: another day passed by.

## VIII

I'm driving, I don't know where to. I found myself here alone, in the middle of a homogenous black of this room, with a steering wheel in front of me, my only certainty. That's all I could see, the steering wheel.

I don't understand what happened to the rest of the car. Because I am inside a car, right?

"Hey guys! I know that you are somewhere. Am I in a car? Can someone confirm it?"

No one is answering. Where is everyone gone?

They're hiding, that's the truth. They don't want to be seen. They're pranking me. A really bad prank.

I touch the darkness with a hand, but without feeling anything; I can't feel the air moving, I don't feel hot or cold...

I keep not understanding where I am, but I'm sure I'm alone. Who brought me here, left, or hid somewhere close.

"Come on, show up! I know you're here"

Nothing, I got no answer.

What place is this? A basement? It doesn't give me the idea of being a corridor. It rather seems like a closed space, a room.

At least that is my impression, it's what I can guess from the elements I have at hand. If I had some more information, maybe I could have more certainty on my situation. I don't even know if I'm in danger, I don't know what to expect in the immediate future. Deep down, I still don't know anything that could be helpful to understand.

How much time spent since I got here?

I realize that any of the questions I asked myself is having an answer; I don't like it, I'm a person that based on certainty every moment of his life, and losing them could, long-term speaking, bother me.

Is it possible that there's no one whom I could ask for help? Any kind of help...

I also gave headache, so I wouldn't mind taking a painkiller, but I don't know who I could ask it.

"Is there anyone?", I shouted, but as an answer I only get silence.

"I need something that makes this headache go away! Please, if someone is hiding there, it's time to come out!"

I can't see anything, the place seems empty, besides the car I'm in.

I already saw this scene somewhere: me, on my own, on this vehicle.

Darkness reigns all around, where is everybody?

Someone besides me exists in this World, or not?

Oh my God, in my head is making its way a quite worrying thought, or at least it is for me: what if, by any chance, I'm in another World? In a parallel world to the one where usually humans are?

Have I been kidnapped by the aliens?

I hope I will have an answer about all the question marks that are growing inside of me. And I hope I will have it soon, or I could take the risk of going crazy.

If there's some kind soul somewhere around that would know something more about the few things I know, I'd like that he would show up and explain the situation to me.

No one is showing up. No one come out, they're all cowards, sissies here because they know they're wrong and because they know that I could kick them for what they're doing to me.

“Show up, have the guts for your actions!”

Nothing changes. No one answers.

I have nothing to do but wait, but I hope that soon someone explains to me what's going on here, because soon I will lose my patience, and when I lose my patience... every man for himself.

IX

Every now and then, thinking about what he went through with his younger brother and seeing the current health conditions, Mario Mazza got tears in his eyes.

He looked after him since they were children and has always been next to him during the following years; they lived many happy moments.

They had similar characters, other reason that made them get on well, and they felt really good when they were together.

The image of a smiley, playful Luigi came to his mind and he remembered only a few sad moments, since his brother, like him, was positive and optimistic for nature.

Although the discrete age difference and the belonging, as a matter of fact, to two different generations, Luigi and Mario together were a good pair: they compensate one another and between them there was an almost indescribable understanding.

It was like they were best friends: the one considered himself the perfect half of the other, at least under certain points of view, and this situation became stronger and stronger as time passed by, especially after Mario was widowed.

Luigi felt in his debt for all that the older brother did for him: “some things you can't forget”, he told him the day his wife died, “I'll always be next to you, always”

And Luigi kept his promise.

Not even a day passed by without them seeing each other, or, for the worst, talking to each other on the phone, usually they always knew the other's appointments, when they felt the need they asked and gave each other advices.

It was a long time that they both were single and, even if they mutually agreed to live in different flats, they still felt together, the one next to the other.

Sometimes they had like the impression that, in the long term, they developed some sort of telepathy between them, and that developed it with time. They understood each other right away, it was like they transmitted their thoughts with a gaze, and often they didn't even have the need to talk to decide certain things.

I never thought that all of this could be broken in a few seconds, thought Mario while he found himself before his brother's body, lying motionless in a comatose status.

Luigi's conditions kept getting better day by day, or that at least was a good news, but seeing him always there, in the same position, put Mario in an uncomfortable situation: he felt a knot in his throat that would hardly be dissolved before his awakening.

All the days passed by like that since the accident: they all were alike, like photocopies.

And even that day the night came without that Mario Mazza realized, so immersed in his thoughts he was.

When he was awakened from a servant's voice that invited him to leave the hospital because the time to visit the patients was over, the man walked towards the exit, went down the stairs and, with the coat well closed, he prepared to face the bad weather: outside it started to snow.

X

I'm driving, I don't know where to. I'm here alone, for a few days now, with a migraine that pulses in my temples at a variable intensity and no one that could help me let it go. Sometimes I feel like dazed, stunned by the pain.

I try not to think about it, but that is pointless because the headache persists anyway.

I'm still sitting on the only seat of this car, I see the steering wheel before me, but now I decide to take my hands off and stretch them along my hips: I could never drive with such a strong headache.

The darkness around me endures and from time to time I touch it lightly with my fingers, as to find a solution to all my problems.

Despite my attempts to understand where I am, I haven't understood anything yet and that is starting to get on my nerves: when I am missing assurance, it feels like I am suspended in air.

I can't see anyone here, I can't hear any noise around, maybe I am isolated from the rest of the world, rolled up in darkness, under a soundproofed glass bell.

Turning at my left, I feel like seeing a shadow, but it stays quite vague at my sight. That, though, gives me hope, I start to think that there's someone like me here, even though this "someone" wants to stay anonymous, he doesn't want to be recognized, maybe because he's scared of something.

I try to be careful to the possible movements, to try to see again that shadow, but I don't see anyone anymore.

Maybe there never was anyone there besides me, and the shadow that I saw was only in my head, it was result of my imagination.

Is this sort of isolation having some kind of negative effect over me? On my body, but also on my mind? Is it destroying me psychically, slowly wearing me out?

I hope not, in the meanwhile I see that shadow again, as it passes sneakily and hides somewhere, moving from time to time.

That's what's going on: someone is playing with me.

Yes, I'm starting to be sure, but that's a game that I don't like at all, you know? Where are they hidden? I can't see the shadow anymore.

Actually, I can, I'm seeing it, here next to me, so close.

I turn to my left and see something: the outline of a human figure, of a dark grey tone, that I can distinguish in the middle of the dark unvarying black thanks only to this light tone difference.

"A painkiller", I say, "I need a painkiller". But how can I think to get something, an answer of any kind, from a flimsy presence?

The human-alike pulled back after a few moments and I stay once again alone, trying, for a few moments, not to think of anything, hoping that in the meanwhile my headache goes away too.

A question arises: where am I now, time passes by or stays still? It feels like being out of the world, in a parallel world, or in a place, in a system, isolated from the rest thanks to an air bubble or a glass sphere. Where am I?

I have an annoying headache. Can someone help me? Give me something that makes it go away, or at least that it's able to alleviate it. If it stays like this, my temples will explode in a few hours.

I see that shadow again.

It is coming close to me again, arriving at my left.

He looks at me... so to speak. It's inconsistent, like a halo, without a face, but if he did have it, the gaze would have been in my direction, at least one meter far away.

"A painkiller", I say, "I need a painkiller. It hurts like hell!"

The weird presence goes away again; it seems almost like he comes here to me with the purpose of stay a few seconds staring at me and, right after, go away retracing his steps.

Who is he? Or should I say: what is it? I don't know, but I want to.

Many thoughts are born and evolve inside me, I'm racking my own brain, I'm in confusion, and I have to try to make clear many things: where am I and why, how long have I been here and how long do I have to stay still...

And yet: could I reduce time? If yes, how?

All these questions do nothing but make my migraine worse, so I close my eyes and try to relax, waiting for some change and for someone who can help me get out of here.

XI

Days went by and, although the doctors were optimistic and made Mario Mazza imply that his brother was going to completely recover in a few days, he was always brooding, and he would have been until he didn't see with his own eyes Luigi walking on his own and go back to his normal life.

Like everyday after the accident, once again memories came to mind, in which he got lost, sometimes smiling, sometimes barely holding back his tears.

Who knows if we could go back to have fun together, to have dinner in nice restaurants in the area of Bologna?

He was awakened by the voice of a nurse that was laughing down the hall and so he realized that he was sitting on that chair since an hour and half, in front of the room accommodating his brother, with the door shut and silence inside.

He got up to have a coffee at the vending machine then he walked back and forth until it was evening, as if he was confident that some doctor would have got to him with some good news; but clearly his brother's conditions were stationary because he didn't see anyone coming all afternoon, and when Mario Mazza got out of the hospital to get back home, outside it was snowing again.

Swearing and covering himself up as much as possible, he got on the bus to Bologna's town centre, where he decided to stop for the happy hour in a pub in Zamboni street.

## XII

I'm driving, I don't know where to. I'm in a car, with a steering wheel in front of me and nothing else.

In this car there are no passengers' seats, and all around it's dark.

I didn't understand the reason, but I'm sure that around here there's someone that has bad intentions towards me.

I haven't understood where I am: in a garage? Locked in a secret place?

And, mainly, I don't know why I am in this unknown place. I feel like I got here by chance, catapulted here, almost against my will.

Headache is coming back, stronger and persistent. What should I do?

"Where are you? Please, I need something to make this migraine go away."

No one is answering, everyone ran away, are they afraid of something maybe?

"Come on, get out of there!"

No way, the situation doesn't change.

I try to look at my right and at my left, to look behind me, in the case that I could notice a movement, but I don't see a thing.

This condition is starting to get on my nerves, I barely stand the darkness because I know that it could hide some trap, I can't stand being made fun of by someone, known or not that he could be, at this point I can't stand any of this. For a moment I see...

A shadow, the one that I saw the other time, it's coming back towards me.

It's next to be, I notice that he stops, I turn left and I found it in front of me, inconsistent and without its face's features.

"A painkiller. Do you have a painkiller for me?", I ask once again, realizing again, only after asking the question, that I can't insist on an answer. Not from a shadow.

If it had eyes, it would look at me.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

I know that there questions, like a lot more that could pop in my head, won't have any answer, but if I ask them it's because this way I could find certainty inside me.

The shadow goes quickly back on his steps, leaving me alone with many unanswered questions, then it comes back.

"May I know who you are?", I say, almost screaming. I feel like being on the limit of hysteria; I have to calm down, relax, otherwise I won't solve a thing, I will never get out of here.

I stay for a few minutes in company of this inconsistent figure, that goes away again:

I try to follow it with my gaze to see where it goes, but I can't see it anymore, it's like it dematerialized instantly.

Maybe it's all in my head, figment of my imagination, nothing is real and true.

But, if it really is like this, my mind is playing tricks on me. So: reality or simulation? Am I dreaming or am I awake?

I try to stop thinking: maybe it would help me calm down and come to sense.

I close my eyes and wait.

### XIII

Mario Mazza was quivering from a few days: he knew that soon enough his brother was going to be brought out of the medically induced coma.

The doctors confirmed it: "In two days, most likely. The cranial injury is almost completely healed: his brother did really good, he reacted perfectly."

He was happy: he could finally start to think about an "after"; they would have gotten back to their normal life.

He almost couldn't believe it: at the beginning he was really hopeful for Luigi but, down deep, he thought that he wouldn't have made it.

The news was a cure-all, that changed in a better way also his mood: they have been dark days and now he had his smile back.

He thought about the happy moments together and, unlike a week before, now he started to believe that they could have fun together again like before, go back to have dinner in those restaurants that they really enjoyed testing, go to the movies, or even simply go in a pub in the town centre for a beer.

If things really went as predicted, just as at this point it seemed to be, he had to thank from the bottom of his heart the medical staff of the hospital for how much they did and they were still doing.

At the beginning he was quite pessimistic, but by now he was almost sure to be able to let some ghosts go away: his brother was going to make it.

The next day, when he got to the hospital, he was very different from the usual: the smile reappeared on his face, thing that missed from a while; he was finally happy, and also started joking with the nurses: after a few days, now he was close to them and knew what to say or do with them, so that they smiled without getting mad.

The evening arrived in a flash and, when they told him that he couldn't stay there anymore that day, he went out to go home, this time with his heart lightweight.

### XIV

I'm driving, I don't know where to, but I'm driving.

I'm in a weird car, with the steering wheel in front of me, without the passengers' seats, and around me it's all empty and dark.

I can't figure out where I am.

I have a terrible headache that pulses inside my temples and it creates a strong pain, that grows from minute to minute.

I'm not alone: I see a shadow that comes close to me, so I plucked up my courage and I ask everything, assailing it of questions.

When it gets next to me, the shadow appears like something... I don't know how to define it... so, it seems a halo. It doesn't have a face, I can only see the well-defined profile, as if it was the outlined protagonist of a comic book in black and white.

"Who are you?", I ask, but this figure doesn't answer. And I believe it, it doesn't even have the mouth to do it.

The human figure is turned to me, as if it's watching me, but he can't see me being without eyes.

It looks like an extra in a horror movie, where I am the main character. However, I realize that I am not scared, but I feel uncomfortable: I feel exiled in this car, without the chance to get out of it and, even if I wanted to, maybe I wouldn't manage to go anywhere.

Maybe, the only way to get out of this deadlock situation, or at least the most reasonable, would be to kill myself; I've been here for a while, I don't even know how long, and I haven't had any clue at my disposal to clarify my mind. This makes me take a huge risk: the risk of going crazy.

I've always been a calm and relaxed person, that almost loses his mind if he's out of certainty, of a reference point.

I'm groping in the dark, and not only in a metaphorical way.

The shadow is still there, still, beside me. It moves an arm, or whatever it is, as if he was waving at me. "Are you there?", he seems to ask; I wave back, but it's like neither of us saw the other one. I still can't understand.

I move an arm to try to touch the shadow. I can't do anything of what I want to, and it's like unattainable.

Nothing to do, maybe it is not the moment yet for some developments.

So, what should I do? Wait a little bit longer? Who will choose when things are going to change?

The shadow pulls back, goes back where it came from, and I stay still, sitting without any chance to know what is really happening, so I decide to close my eyes: at least like this I manage to rest my mind, maybe.

Xv

When Luigi Mazza woke up, his eyes opened really slow to get used to light again.

To make him wake up the doctors gave him a dose of a stimulant that turned out to be optimal.

"Hello, mister Mazza", one of the nurses greeted him, "are you feeling well?"

Luigi took a while before answering. "I have a bit of a headache. Could you give me a painkiller, please?"

"Don't worry. You only have to rest, for now"

The man kept staring at the snow-white ceiling and didn't say anything, almost waiting the words of his speaker. "Today you shouldn't move from here, at least until this evening. If you want, you could go for a little walk later, before going to sleep."

"I'm not tired, I just have this headache."

"I feel you"

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"Your brother didn't arrive yet today; I don't know about anyone else that came to visit you in these days" explained the nurse.

"Mm... I don't know them either, I guess", was Luigi Mazza's answer, I only know that there was someone else, because I saw him"

"You think so? I think not, but maybe I could be wrong."

There was a moment of silence that emphasized the perplexed face of the man while watching the nurse, that finished saying: "In the meanwhile, get some rest, you need it. You must be rather weak."

Luigi Mazza kept looking at the man with the white coat without saying anything, even when he went out of the room.

What happened to me? Where am I? Where is everyone?

XVI

That afternoon, Mario Mazza arrived at the Maggiore Hospital to be with his brother and, towards the evening, Luigi heard his brother saying: "Do you remember anything about the accident?"

The question floored him, not knowing what the topic of the conversation was.

"Accident?", asked Luigi back, "What accident?"

“You’re here because you were involved in an accident on Bologna’s orbital road, up on exit 7. Don’t you remember?”

Luigi looked at him with the typical expression of someone who hears something for the first time.

“No, I don’t remember anything about this accident. When did it happen?”

His brother looked at him a little bit worried.

“Are you sure? Not even vaguely?”, he asked.

“Mm... no, I’m sorry”, answered Luigi.

“I see. I’ll try to talk about it with the doctors that are following you... now you have to rest, you already walked much, let’s get back to your room: you need to lay down.”

“Alright”, Luigi nodded, “maybe I’ll read something”

“No, I’d rather read for you. Let’s go to your room now, then I’ll go get a magazine from the newsstand.”

They did so and, when they went back, Mario Mazza was holding under his arm a copy of a monthly travel magazine.

“I know that you’ll like this”, he started, leafing through the pages, “Let’s see if there’s something nice here”

After a moment of silence, Mario Mazza started talking again, while his hospitalized brother was listening interested. “Wow... the Caribbean, Europe, Canada... wonderful places, really... here a nice article about the Norwegian fiords. What do you think? Would you like to go this summer?”

“You know that I love to travel... I would go anywhere there’s something to see. Sooner or later I will see the fiords too” answered Luigi.

“The fiord is a sea hug that insinuate on the coast for many kilometres”, explained Mario reading, “the most famous are in the north Europe, in Norway, but there are some interesting ones elsewhere too. There also are cruises on the Norwegian fiords: one week or even more, going from Bergen to North Cape. They must be beautiful landscapes.”

“I think so too. Is there written the price of other cruises?”

“No”, answered Mario, “but there are a few web sites where to find other information”

“I could be really interested. Look them up when you have time.”

“Sure, I’ll certainly do it then I’ll let you know”

“Well, perfect”

“Now why don’t you try to sleep a little bit?”

“I’m not tired”

“Try, maybe you’ll fall asleep, take a nap and after you’ll feel better. When I arrived, a nurse told me you had a slight headache. Maybe sleeping it will go away”

“Okay, I’ll try”

While Luigi closed his eyes, the brother put the magazine on the bedside table, he took a piece of paper, and wrote on it RELAX AND REST, I’LL BE BACK IN A BIT and went out of the room to get a coffee and have a chat with the doctors.

## XVII

I’m driving, or at least I think so. I’ve stopped, in the darkness, my head hurts.

I’m sure I’m not a drive-in. I feel like I’m waiting for someone or something.

I have my hands on the steering wheel and next to me there’s no one.

I’ve stopped, yes, but not because of a red light; there aren’t any traffic lights in front of me, there aren’t anywhere. It’s just me standing in this position, am I waiting?

I don’t know, I don’t get it. One thing only is certain, and it’s the headache that pulses in my temples.

I see a shadow coming close from behind. I realize it because it has a lighter tone of the black around me so I manage to distinguish it, but not to recognize it.

A stranger? Or who else?

I have to ask him who he is, and maybe I could ask him if he has a painkiller to give me.

It comes next to me, so I take the courage to say something.

“Do we know each other? Who are you?”

The ethereal figure is stretched forward, but it doesn't answer.

“Do you have a painkiller for my migraine?”, I ask without any answer.

A moment.

Now I understand why it doesn't answer: it doesn't have a mouth, it can't talk.

I move my left hand to see if it reacts somehow, but the only thing I get is its departure, I don't know if it's my fault or for some other reason.

I have the ambiguous impression that someone is kidding with me, making fun of me.

Why?

It's a behaviour that I don't like absolutely, and I keep not understanding.

I don't understand a lot of things.

I stay here, still, waiting for changes. Waiting for a clarifying light.

xviii

Mario Mazza went out of the room leaving his brother resting and, after a coffee, he went to speak with the nurses, hoping that the doctors were free too.

He managed to make an appointment with doctor Parri for the day after at noon and, when the time came, he asked the anaesthetist some questions.

“First of all I thank you for giving me some of your time”, started the man.

“Don't worry”, said the other one.

“Here, you see, I wanted to ask you a few things. I've been able to talk to my brother, to stay a little bit with him; but I was surprised when he told me he couldn't remember any accident that involved him.”

Doctor Parri stayed a few moments without saying a word, then he answered: “I see. You know, it can happen, even though it's rare, that a patient loses temporarily his memory, maybe restricted to a certain event, after a cranial trauma like the one which your brother was subject to. When it happens, usually the memories come back in a short time, either gradually or all at once.”

“Okay. So, according to you, in a few days everything will be back to normal.”

“Yes, I believe it will be like that”

“And do you provide any kind of rehabilitation?”

“Your brother should do exercise, gymnastics and, in time, starting to walk more and more until getting back like before the accident.”

“Oh, okay”

“Anyway, we will explain you everything better in the next days” said doctor Parri.

“Thank you then”

“It's my job”

Mario Mazza thanked again the anaesthetist for the information he gave him, so he went back to his brother's room.

He was gone for about half an hour and Luigi was still sleeping; deciding not to disturb him, he thought to just sit in silence, waiting for him to wake up.

XIX

When Luigi Mazza opened his eyes again it was around seven in the evening.

“You slept enough”, started the brother, “It's seven p.m.”

“Mm... I thought I couldn't”

“Dinner!”, yelled an attendant, bursting into the room with a tray. On it, there was a dish of broth, one with

Soft cheese and an apple cooked in the oven.

“This is for you, enjoy your meal”, he said.

After a few minutes, Luigi Mazza started to eat.

“When you finish, I’ll go home if you don’t mind. I’m quite tired”, said Mario.

“Sure, don’t worry. It’s fair enough that you rest too: you’re doing so much for me and I want to thank you for that.”

“You’re my brother, so it’s my duty.”

After about half an hour, Mario went home.

“I will make it on my own too”, Luigi reassured him.

When the brother was out of the room, the man decided to take a walk in the corridor, stopping by a coffee table with two armchairs and some newspapers. He leafed through the first one near, just to spend some time before laying down again.

He didn’t find any interesting news, so he closed the newspaper and went all the way back to his room through the corridor, he laid in bed and, after about ten minutes he went in the dream world.

XX

I’m driving, I don’t know where I’m going, but I’m still, like in a traffic jam; it’s so dark that I can’t understand a thing: I don’t know where I am, I don’t even know why I’m here... (where’s Here?)

... and, first of all, I can’t see anyone else nearby; with a finger I touch the air around me, I feel it cold.

I see something fleeing running next to me, fast, then after about thirty seconds everything goes back to how it used to be.

It would almost seem that I’m stuck in the car somewhere and other people are overtaking me. Why?

I have a huge headache and I would need something to make it go away or at least to ease it a little bit, but I don’t know where I could find it, who to ask.

One moment...

I see someone getting closer.

In the distance it looks like a shadow, but slowly it will all be clearer.

It seems without substance when it’s in front of me, but I can distinguish a detail: it’s a skinny person, probably around sixty pounds and less tall than one meter and eighty.

When he bows towards me he moves a hand as to say: “Hey, I’m here. What are you doing sitting there?”

I can’t react in any way. I stay still watching this person in the shape of a shadow that kept making some hand signals to me.

He closes the hand in a fist and moves it close to me, as if I was really in a car and he (now I have decided that he’s a man, I don’t know why) was trying to knock on the car window.

“I have a headache”, I say, “could you give me a painkiller? Or look for it somewhere?”

He doesn’t answer.

Instead, he goes away, leaving me all alone in the darkness.

Who was he? What he wanted from me? Was he looking for something? What was going on?

With all these questions swirling in my aching mind I stay here waiting for some answers.

xxi

The rehabilitation that Luigi had to do expected some gymnastics exercises studied specifically to rehabilitate his body to the every day life, after being motionless in a pharmacological coma for two weeks.

He started in the hospital, in a specially-made gym, then he continued in a specialized centre after he was dismissed.

“Finally out of this place”, started his brother Mario the morning that the doctors gave him the authorization to leave the hospital, “are you happy?”, he asked, thinking about the decision they took just before: they would have live together for a certain period, until Luigi’s full recovery.

“Sure, it means that I’m way better.”

“The head physician left me a paper where it’s specified your rehabilitation program. He said that you’ve healed, reacting well at everything.”

“And what about my memory problem?”

“He says that, even though this lack results a quite unusual phenomenon, your memory will come back soon”

“Good”

“Unluckily I can’t help you remember: when I knew about the accident, you were already urgently brought to the emergency room and, honestly, I didn’t worry too much of the dynamics. I was too worried about your health conditions.” Explained Mario.

“I see.” Replied Luigi.

“Maybe in the next few days I’ll go to the traffic police to have detailed information.” Proposed the brother.

“Okay.”

Soon I will know who did this to me...

Arrive at home in Arno street, in Bologna’s suburbs, Mario suggested to his brother to relax on the couch in the living room, while he would have made something for lunch.

They ate something simple, pasta with tomato sauce and a beef steak, then they got back to the conversation that they left unfinished before.

“I checked the prices of some cruises on the Norwegian fiords”, started Mario, “They cost a little more than a thousand euros each but, considering the location, I think that it would be worth it. We can afford them once in a while, can’t we?”

“Well, I’d say we can”, nodded Luigi, “I’d really like to, and besides it’s a really long time we didn’t go on a holiday like this together.”

“So, this year will be the good one. We’ll book as soon as possible. I’ve seen that there’s a travel agency not far from here. I’ll go.” Said Mario, excited.

“Good” nodded Luigi.

“Now, if you feel tired, rest. Otherwise, you could watch the one p.m. news with me”

“I’ll rest after the news”, decided Luigi.

And so he did.

xxii

I’m driving, I don’t know where to, but I’m driving.

In this moment, I’m stuck here, and I realize that I’m not alone: it seems that there are other vehicles behind me, maybe a couple.

It’s dark and I have a bad headache that almost obfuscates my sights; it pulses so much in my temples that I need to close my eyes hoping that it could help to make its intensity decrease.

This attempt doesn’t have the hoped conclusion: the headache stays as it was, so strong to make me lose my orientation; I can’t understand anything, I don’t know where I am, nor I can remember the reason.

I see a few vehicles passing in front of me, as if they were overstepping an obstacle, then a shadow comes close.

Finally someone who might help me, I’m sick, it’s like a truck passed over me.

The shadow is next to me, on the other side of the window.

It’s of a quite dark grey tone, but that you can distinguish in the total black around me; I can’t really see who it is, but I can more or less understand his dimensions and that the hypothetical eyes are two small shiny lights (maybe it’s a sign that indicate that they are of a light shade?)

“Excuse me, do you have a painkiller?”, I ask, “I want this awful headache to go away.”

The shadow gesticulates with his hands, moving them to the right and to the left, he stares at me for a while with the two lights that he has in place of his eyes, then, without answering to me,

he goes away leaving me alone and without any chance to take away from me the dizziness due to the headache.

I feel powerless in this situation, with the headache that never goes away and, instead, it seems to increase, giving up more and more. I don't react, I look like an unarmed fighter.

What can I do?

Far away, behind me, I see some small fires, maybe six or seven, like candles. What do they mean? I don't even have the energy to make up hypothesis.

Other vehicles pass by me, walking pace, I see them without being able to distinguish them, they appear to me like masses of metal sheets and light. Why?

This scene goes on like this for a while, I spend the time distractedly watching all that's happening around me and realising that I'm bystander grown apart, shot down by the strong migraine.

xxiii

The morning after, Luigi showed up at the gym that was suggested by the doctors to start the long rehabilitation procedure.

"Come, mister Mazza", a twenty-five years old girl greeted him, "I'll introduce you the person that will follow you all the time."

They started walking towards a specifically furnished room, where a guy in his tracksuit was organizing the gymnastic equipment.

"Here, he's Massimo," said the girl, "I introduce you mister Luigi Mazza."

The two greeted and, after a few moments, they were alone in the gym and the rehabilitation sessions started.

xxiv

Mario Mazza found the phone number of the traffic police that was the nearest possible to the house and, after getting informed about office hours, he went there in person to ask for some information about the accident that got his brother involved.

He was received by a lady in her fifty that, as soon as she saw him coming in, she put the sandwich she was eating down and said: "Hello, can I help you?"

"I hope so", he replied, "I'm looking for some information"

"Tell me"

"Maybe you could help me. About two or three weeks ago, on Bologna's orbital road took place a car accident. I would like to know more about it."

"Mm... are you a journalist?"

Mario smiled and said: "No, don't worry. It's just that my brother was involved in that accident."

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