

ROBERTA MEZZABARBA

Ties



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Аннотация

Ties, strings made up with screams (Apollinaire).

At the striking of midnight into the new millenium, a new threat comes from the darkness. A baby was rescued but now a young boy is in danger.

Three women are fighting. Nobody is safe. The year 1000 is no more. The year 2000 and Death. An engaging novel that blends thriller ,suspense and esotericism.

A novel about strong connections between past and present
New Year's Eve 1999.

Guglielmo has an apparently quiet life, without any shadows.

Gemma, his girlfriend, is the only girl he felt something well beyond physical attraction. Angelica, a loving and thoughtful mother.

Filiberto, a detached and insensitive father.

Finally Luana and Lucio, the two antagonists of the story, those who will try to destroy Guglielmo's life, to take him away from his loved ones in order to fulfil a wicked and crazy plan put it together by a sick and evil mind.

However, life entails choices as well. Will Guglielmo manage to untie the strings that are trapping him and get his life back?

The plot of this novel is articulated and dramatic; a novel that captures your attention so much that you will read it in one sitting because it is full of suspense that will keep your attention high.

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This is a work of fantasy. Names, characters, places and events are imaginary or used in a fictitious key and any reference to people, living or dead, to facts or to truly existing places is purely random

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Roberta Mezzabarba

Ties

Thriller novel

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To the movements of the soul
that give meaning to everything.

Preface

New Year's Eve 1979

The day was coming to an end. The cold winter lights were fading away in a peaceful and clear twilight. A woman was about to give birth, she was panting heavily through her pale lips. She was lying on creased bed sheets, she was dishevelled and overcome with fatigue. Another woman was waiting in fear, she was also expecting. Her screams echoed like moths flying maniacally around, trapped within the rough walls of that big room with high, dark ceilings. The only sunlight shining into that poky room, was peeping through the iron bars on a big glass window. From there, the skyline in the distance was stretching out as far as the fields in the dark, slashing the blue sky with its sharp blade. For one moment, the two women were doing the exact same thing: four eyes were looking in the same direction, four eyes were opened wide in amazement at the scene that lasted just for a few seconds, slightly distorted by the rough centuries-old glass.

At sunset, two bright spheres were facing each other : one was at the end of its journey , while the other one was just beginning it. At that sight, random thoughts came into the mind of the young woman lying on the bed: she could see great grief, questions as old as the universe, scars caused by hurt and melancholy, morbid desire for that encounter to happen again....

In the darkness a man with thin lips was smiling: his first flower was about to blossom. In a second, the sun disappeared from the sight of the two women. At that very moment they were given a sample of the poison that could have driven mankind to complete madness, with no return. Without any warning, the contractions came on again, just like the currents suddenly burst the banks of a river stopping its regular peaceful flow. She felt that she could hardly breathe with the pain and she was in great distress. Silene roared with the last pain and she was finally relieved from all that suffering. The cry of the baby filled the air, who had just survived the great test of childbirth. He was squirming around, still feeling terrified for having been pushed out of that safe and warm place that had sheltered and fed him up to that moment. Silene relaxed all the muscles in her body, exhausted. She was looking at her baby, his umbilical cord had not been cut yet and he was so tiny..

She knew he was a boy since the very moment she felt him in her womb. In a faint voice, she called him by the name that she had thought for him over those long months of her pregnancy... Guglielmo, this will be your name, my darling. She had carefully picked it among a thousand names because she wanted a name that could protect him (strange idea) and eventually she had chosen one that was not so common, probably a little old-fashioned. It means "strong-willed man who faces the great challenges of life with determination". She had experienced loneliness, alienation, grief, violence... and she wished her son,

conceived in violence, could have a different life. Deep in those thoughts, Silene felt a mild pain in her chest but did not take any notice of it. She thought that the happiness she was feeling was pressing hard against her breastbone, it was hard to hold it all. Her little baby and herself managed to survive childbirth, despite all the nightmares that had haunted her. Lately in her dreams she would see somebody dying and the onset of a period full of darkness and suffering.

At the top of that short-lived happiness, her heart stopped beating shortly after.

Silene died bearing in her mind the image of her son Guglielmo. She had passed away without realising it, without feeling any concern for the end that was about to come her way and for her little baby... What happened during that strange night could be considered absurd by anyone, however later on it would be like a premonition recounted by old storytellers on stormy nights... *once upon a time, a young woman was taken the day that she would give birth to her baby...*

In the background, a man enjoyed every single groan of pain that Silene endured. He was now running away: he was quite sure that everything was going to fall into place.. if one of the two women died, it would not mattered much: he would just have to adjust his plans slightly.

The moon was high in the pitch black sky.

Lina, the woman who stayed back in the darkness, was in shock, terrified.

When she eventually came over to Silene, her fears materialized... she was dead and the moon was already high in the sky. It was just then that, for a quick moment, she pictured again the sun and the moon going along the skyline simultaneously. Their destinies crossed just for a few seconds ... She did not know, and neither did Silene, that what they saw was not just a simple coincidence. She was not too sure how to interpret what she had witnessed.

The sun went down, Silene had slipped into the darkness with a broken heart... all that was left were little Guglielmo and a large moon the colour of blood, up in the sky.

That thought brought her back to reality, she had a task to fulfil. The man had not probably expected Silene to die and at that point, she did not know exactly what to do with the baby.

She made a quick decision: she would never tell anyone what had happened. The baby would be raised by a normal family, which had nothing to do with that horrific night. After all, unless that man was crazy, he would never look for her again: the risk would be too high for him.

It was all over.

A shiver went down her kidneys and a sharp pain crept all over her belly.

Without thinking, she wrapped the sleeping baby around the nightgown Silene was wearing when she was kidnapped. She left those rough and creepy walls to go into the fresh air of the night. She left behind Silene's dead body, which was still warm. She

was determined to leave the baby at the first beautiful home she would come across on her way.

Destiny was fulfilled.

Part One

I am on my own then. Only
sweet bright lies
keep me company.
Sandro Penna

One

December 1999

A blend of smells filled the air of the gym, pungent smells of sweaty bodies pushing their physical activity to the limit.

Guglielmo was holding a shiny barbell, his fingers clenched it tightly, showing all the muscles flexed in his biceps, his skin was slightly tanned and glistening with sweat...

He loved the carefree afternoons that he could spend in that environment, where he could work off the worse side of his personality.

He could watch unnoticed those bodies all wrapped up in tight, brightly coloured sports gear.

He was avidly sizing up the bodies and souls of those girls in the backlight, he followed their movements, their facial expressions, their hair fluttering in the air. There were billions of them, like countless fragments of lives that he would never get to know.

Meanwhile, Claudio, one of his university classmates, was sitting on a bench beside him, the two of them would meet up often at the gym too.

«What are you doing? Always chasing girls, huh?»

As he was speaking, Claudio was making eye contact with a voluptuous girl who perfectly fitted her aquamarine leggings.

«Well, you are quite right! Despite the fact that I do not believe

in God, I must admit that there must be something good and merciful able to create such beautiful and perfect creatures...»

Claudio had a great interest in women.

As he was lifting the barbell over his head, Guglielmo was looking at a group of five girls who were all involved in a friendly chat, slightly moving their hands as they were speaking.

«You know, when I was a little boy, I really loved staying in the same room with my mother when she was having her friends over. I liked the way they would talk freely about men, forgetting that I was there, with no reserves, without any shame. They would say how predictable they were and how easy it was to fool them. I was really fascinated by those conversations. Every time I would swear to myself that, growing up, I would not become like one of those men they were talking about. It seemed fair to me not to disappoint women because they had allowed me to get to know them deep down. Over time I learned that a woman likes a man also for all the things that she can't understand about him, for their lack of communication. Men look at women drooling as if they were cakes displayed on the window of a bakery shop.»

«Guglielmo... are you telling me that you are so sentimental and philosophical that you just look at all these gorgeous women with a clinical eye, just to find out more about the female world?»

Claudio was trying hard to keep a straight face: it was quite hard for him, if not impossible, to have an interest in a woman that was not merely sexual. A thunderous laughter explained to

Guglielmo once again what Claudio's point of view was on the matter.

«You are always the same: you would do anything to become a gynaecologist, just to... I like everything about women: what they think, and most of all I do not like to disappoint them, I like to give them what they want off me».

Guglielmo was a promising young man. He was tall, his hair was black and a little wavy, his complexion was slightly tanned, his legs were long and slender but he had a lean body, not skinny. His fingers were slender and had big and smooth nails resembling hulled almonds. There was one time when a gypsy read his hand and was fascinated by this particular feature that he had. She told him that people who have such big nails have engaged in great battles with life and against death.

Guglielmo did not think much of the tales told by a woman who was used to make up stories to make a living. He could not recount any struggle carried out for his survival. Before leaving, that gypsy made a statement that he could still remember clearly: «Nobody remembers such grief; it just flows in your bloodstream, otherwise everybody would go mental or would be doomed...»

Two

Angelica was a good-natured woman.

Her temperament reflected her appearance. She was slender, almost frail, her hands were delicate, her tiny rosy nails were perfect like little rose petals. She saw the world with her sky blue eyes and a pure heart.

It was often difficult to put an age on her. At times she looked like a young and helpless fawn that was taking her first unsteady steps, but she also looked like a tall column of an ancient temple, overbearing, steady, a silent witness to events occurred over thousands of years.

Her husband Filiberto and herself lived in a magnificent house overflowing with stucco decorations, paintings done with dark colours, heavy curtains that hung in loose folds, ornaments that could have told themselves the history of almost all their ancestors.

They were leading a quiet life, almost too perfect.

Angelica loved her husband. He was not very demonstrative but he tried to please her in every possible way. Filiberto showed his love for his wife on various occasions but there was one instance when she really appreciated what he did, and that was going back twenty years.

It was a dark night and the moon was incredibly big. A pregnant woman knocked at their door, she looked frightened.

She was holding a ragged bundle; you could hear the cries of a baby coming from it.

«Take care of this baby, please... his mother... can't... she left him... she is dead. I don't have the strength to knock at another door. I am going to have my baby soon... Please, look after him, his only fault is to have been brought into this world... somebody will surely be very grateful to you. His name is Guglielmo. Please, promise me one thing.... never tell anyone about what has happened tonight... never.»

None of Angelica's pregnancies could ever reach full term: it seemed that her body could not bear the burden of a new life. That strange visit, on that strange night was for her a divine message embedded in the sky.

After the arrival of baby Guglielmo, Angelica realised that the time had come for her to stop trying for a baby. She was physically and mentally exhausted... Surely, she thought, Guglielmo was a reward, a bonus, a treat to relieve her from the painful awareness of being unable to have children.

Angelica took the little bundle from the arms of that stranger, without saying a word, unaware of what had gone on nine months back, nor that very night. The stranger went off in the night, plodding along because of the weight of the new life that she was carrying. Before disappearing completely from their sight, a strong contraction came on and got her to fall to the ground. She was looking for the door which was still open. In the dim light you could see the woman wearing a long beige nightgown with

the baby in her arms, still wrapped around the rags he was born in, and of the man with his dark and thick moustache who was standing beside her, with a suspicious expression on his face.

Angelica pleaded with her husband to take the woman to the hospital. The man helped her up from the ground and coldly escorted her to the car to drive her to the hospital and leave her there. Filiberto had picked up something not quite right off that woman who had showed up at their door with the baby. Her wife had looked at him with such a pleading look that he could not deny her the happiness to raise a child.

From that night on, they did not hear anything about that woman. Abiding by the woman's instructions, they told everybody that they had adopted the baby, thanks to very influential acquaintances.

Filiberto was a high ranked army officer. He was reserved, always sticking to the rules, to every rule of this world, wearing an English moustache that separated his thin lips from his pointy nose. His relationship with his son had been, since the beginning, a very quiet one.

He wished he had a recruit to train, this was probably because he knew no other way to interact with people. Guglielmo on the contrary had an outstanding personality, at times he was a little insubordinate but could not keep his vital energy inside a military uniform which would have forced him to an endless sequence of '*yes sir*'.

There was no disagreements.

They never had a face to face confrontation, however it was evident that Guglielmo and his father were not very close. His hatred for army life and all its formalities would certainly have disappointed his father's expectations, who was accustomed not to be contradicted, never.

Three

Preparations to say farewell to the second millennium were in full swing. At every corner there was talk about parties, celebrations, big dinners, big fancy dress parties. It was like a Halloween party postponed to the end of the millennium to dispel bad luck, put aside all the troubles occurred in the 20th century, and start a new chapter of your life not with the certainty to have a better one, but at least trying to.

Guglielmo was taking an active part in the preparations and did some studying in all the excitement. He was doing a research about the fears of the people back in the Middle Age. At first when he was assigned that research paper by his Medieval History professor, he thought that it was a strange topic. Once he started working on it, though, he realised that it could be an interesting topic. However what made it more interesting was the fact that there were not so many books that would mention the emotions of the people back in the year 1000.

The librarian working at the University Library saw him hanging from the unsafe ladders digging through the top shelves routing out dusty books that had not been touched in so many years. He saw him bringing them down on the table and browsing through them, frantically looking for something that would help him shed some light on that thick mystery. Quite often all his work would be vain because so many books did not even mention

the year 1000; they just displayed some short meaningless information going back a few years before or after the birth of our Saviour.

Guglielmo was experiencing life on two different levels during that period. From one hand he was more natural for him to be similar to young people of his age who were busy organising dances, music, big parties to celebrate the year which was about to end, thus burying what was left of the year 1999. From the other hand, he felt completely isolated from the rest, too busy digging among the ruins of ten centuries searching for a clue, a lead, a feeble light that would help him discover what had frightened people back in the first millennium.

He kept these feelings within himself but he would often wonder why his friends and himself, living in the second millennium, did not have any fear for the new year which was about to begin. It was probably irresponsibility that would alleviate every kind of fear, he thought, or too much knowledge was making them unaware of such impending danger?

He did not talk to anyone about his theories, but he would treasure them within himself.

He had a girlfriend named Gemma. They had been going steady for a few months now.

Before going out with her, he had never tested his monogamy. He had even gone out with four girls simultaneously. The amazing thing was that he always managed to keep on top of things, without hurting any of the girls.

Quite impressive.

Since he met Gemma, he felt that she alone could fill the void that all the other girls would cause him. She was so different from the girls he had met so far. She was not an easy girl, she did not like dark places, she had a wild head of blonde curly hair. They would often sit on the park benches, on cool days in December and Guglielmo was always fascinated by her golden hair, as if his eyes were captured by a shimmering piece of jewellery.

It was early morning on the last Tuesday of the year and Guglielmo was already at the library. He got up that morning and was sure that he was going to find something interesting. He took a tiny volume from the last shelf full of ancient-looking books. It had thin pages which had turned yellow over time and was quite different from the other ones. Guglielmo opened the book and buried himself in those pages:

The image of the year 1000, which is still vivid in modern times, shows people gripped by paralysing fear that the world was about to end [...] in people's minds the millennial set of events have not lost at all their charm to this day [...] the Dark Ages, a dark era, subjugated, where gothic superstitious beliefs played an important part [...] the first description of the year 1000 terrors appears with the new humanism, which is a reaction to the contempt that the young Western culture had for the dark and barbarous centuries it was coming out of, it rejected them to look beyond barbarity, and place antiquity as its model [...] among all that darkness, the year 1000, unlike the Renaissance, displayed an image of death

and inane prostration!

He got it!

He found a little something that would help him carry on with his task. He rested the palm of both hands on the open pages of that book and took a deep breath, stretched his spine against the back of that hard chair and threw his head back. Had he not found any information that day, he would have asked his Medieval History professor for an appointment to tell him that he could not go ahead with his research paper.

He went back reading and realised once again how little information was available about that period. During those days of fear, if there was any, that the world was about to end, everyone was too busy selling souls and other goods so they could not describe people's emotions. Once that frightening time was gone, probably most of them thought that it was out of place to talk about a threat that posterity would have considered unreal. To make things worse, Guglielmo knew only so well that none of the scholars back then would have wondered about the mental condition of the people. Only exceptional or unusual events would have been taken into consideration, whatever was breaking up the regular flow of things.

The wild world, nature almost uncontaminated, men were not so numerous, only equipped with basic tools, struggling with their bare hands against nature powers and earth powers, incapable of controlling them, getting scarce nourishment from them with difficulty, hit by bad weather conditions, lashed periodically by

famine and illnesses, constantly tormented by starvation [...] an extremely hierarchical society, a large number of serfs, peasants living in extremely poor conditions, utterly subdued to the power of a few families which branch out in more or less illustrious families, which strong kinship ties keep firmly around just one family .

He wanted to find some information, some stories about those people who were distressed by the hardship of their daily lives and by the fear of the end of the world that was looming over them like a dark shadow.

He was so absorbed in his book that he did not even hear any sound but he flinched when he saw a shadow on virtually all the pages of that book. Guglielmo was annoyed and looked up expecting to find the librarian standing in front of him wondering if he had found something for his work.

His face went from annoyed to surprised when he saw Gemma instead, with her arms crossed on her chest and with a half smile on her lovely face.

They stared into each other's eyes for a few seconds, motionless, as if they were on the stage of a theatre.

Gemma was wearing a sage green twinset: her beautiful eyes were the same beautiful colour that morning; and they were persistently looking at Guglielmo, peering at every single detail, every gesture, trying to pierce through her appearance in search of some thought that had escaped from her control.

She was a clever girl.

She took a seat beside Guglielmo and placed her hand on his hand. He could still feel the thin pages of that book underneath it. Finding that book gave him some hope to get to know what emotions, worries and frustrations upset the people back in the year 1000.

«I feared you had been gobbled up by a fire-breathing dragon!» she laughed heartily. «I dropped over to your house, and your mother told me that she did not even hear you leave this morning. I thought that you surely had a sudden brainwave while you were sleeping for your research paper. Is there a better place than a library for Guglielmo to get rid of all his morning energy?»

Gemma was getting dangerously closer to Guglielmo. She was well aware of this, she had known that boy for a while now. She was taking a chance standing so close to him... probably it was what she wanted, a bit of flirting first thing in the morning, among the shelves of a library...

She was changing.

Gemma was aware of the change that was slowly turning her from the stage of chrysalis into that of a beautiful butterfly.

She was starting to have strange thoughts, desires that she had never felt before.

Everything was happening because of Guglielmo.

He saw her leaning over towards him from where she was standing with a sensual movement. For a moment they stared into each other's eyes, their faces were just a few inches apart, close

enough to feel each other's warm breath. Gemma closed her eyes, she tilted her head slightly, her nose gently touched Guglielmo's, and a few moments after their lips joined.

It was the same story every time.

It was as if they were taken by magic. Guglielmo's mind was going off in a moment of ecstasy when he could hear sensuous whispers, and could travel to places where only his imagination could take him.

«Did you find anything on these people living at the turn of the last century, frightened by the end of the world?»

«Yes, I actually did find something, Gemma but not as much as I was expecting though; anyway it is a start. There is too much mystery around these events and I am not convinced. Maybe there's more to it than what has been written, after dozens, hundreds of years,...something that nobody was supposed to know. I wonder whether I could find something out...»

Guglielmo was gazing blankly into the distance as if he was the only living soul who could see things through a hole in the atmosphere that no one else could.

«Your mother told me that last night you had another argument with your father, she was a bit upset over it, and I can't blame her... could you not at least try to...»

Come on Gemma, you know perfectly well how things are between us. It's not up to me. Last night I was in the sitting room browsing through some books that I had taken from the library. He came over and told me that I should not waste so

much time with books, life is something completely different... as if he really knew... Gemma I don't want him to make me into a professional soldier, the same as his ancestors, following the inviolable family tradition. I love my family but I do not want it to be like a loop around my neck, I do not want to feel suffocated by them, no matter what I do, I do not want them to make decisions on my behalf. Surely my parents brought me into this world, they raised me, they made me into who I am now but I do not want them to go over my head and make decisions for my future. Can you understand what I am saying?»

Gemma was looking at him with a tender and sympathetic smile. She felt so sorry that he was so upset about that, but she felt she could not help him because she knew that family matters have to be kept within the family itself.

After that thought had crossed her mind, without saying a word, she got back to reality and looked at her watch. It was 10:45am, his lecture in History of the Civilizations was starting in just 15 minutes. She got up from the chair and put her black backpack on her shoulders.

«Guli, I am off, damn, if I don't hurry up, I am going to be late for my lecture. I will talk to you tonight».

She gave a hasty kiss on Guglielmo's forehead, then she disappeared among those shelves full of books, almost swallowed by all that paper.

Four

Guglielmo kept on reading that tiny book. After a good search, he also managed to retrieve the cover, which gave out the title and the author of the book. Those pages were already providing him with some answers to quite a few questions. It was written by some guy called Mr Duby, and was entitled “The year 1000”.

He borrowed that tiny book from the library, under the inquisitive eye of the librarian, in order to take it home and read what was left in peace and quiet.

It was late at night and he was lying on his bed, his book resting on his chest, he was greedily taking in all the words written on those thin pages, looking for some new information.

[...] of the feudal period, there is just one chronicle left which depicts the year 1000 as a tragic year: the one written by Sigerbert of Gembloux. There were in those days many prodigies, a horrific earthquake, a comet with a blazing tail; the bright and intense light brightened up even the inside of the houses, and in the sky, that seemed to cleave, it traced the image of a snake [...] Many people thought it was the anticipation of the last day.

[...] in the Annals of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire an important announcement about the year 1003, pointed out an unusual flooding, a mirage, the birth of a monster who was drowned by the parents; but the place of the thousandth year of the incarnation is empty.

Further ahead in the book, he came across a reference, just a few lines, which drew his attention. Saint Abbon, abbot of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire Abbey left a record of one of his memories from his youth:

[...] about the end of the world, I hear someone preaching in a church in Paris about the Antichrist coming at the end of the year 1000 and that the final judgement would come shortly after.

While reading those words, his mind wondered off to a previous event that happened going back a few years.

In 1997 comet Hale-Bopp could be seen at the same time of the spring equinox. Something strange happened while she was shining in the sky: roughly thirty cult members of a religious sect from southern California, computer experts, committed mass suicide in the belief that they would have hitched a ride on an alien's spaceship travelling in the wake of a passing comet, and be whisked to the "next level". In a footage that they made while committing suicide, they felt they were the chosen ones, lucky people who were being freed from weaknesses and meanness related to the human condition.

During the same year a number of disastrous events had hit poor souls all over the world: earthquakes, strong winds, torrential rain, tornadoes. It seemed that history repeated itself.

He had just photocopied some pages from another book written by Jules Michelet about the oppressed waiting for the end of the world to free them from sufferings tormenting them:

The prisoner was waiting in the black fortified tower, in

the sepulchral cell; the serf was waiting on his furrow, in the shade of the despised tower; the monk was waiting, among the abstinences inflicted by cloistered life, solitary inner turmoil, among temptations and falls, remorse and strange visions, despicable devil's decoy who was cruelly goofing around him, and pulling his cover at night time, was gaily saying into his ear "You are doomed!" All of them wished to put an end to their dreadful living condition, it did not matter at what price. However, it should be quite charming to see the moment when the trumpet would blast into the tyrants' ear. Then, from the fortified tower, from the cloister and from the furrow, a terrible laughter would burst amid the sobbing.

In order to demystify mass suicide, scholars in the 90s engaged themselves to convince people that the spot in the tail of the comet was just a star and that the cult members had been brainwashed with all the lies told by their leader. However, the press kept on publishing articles with sensational and allusive headlines.

Was the end of the world really so close?

Would the terrors of a new medieval period spread all over mankind in a few years' time?

Guglielmo's mind was racing. He was matching theories, comparing events, combining events. He thought that at the dawn of the year 2000 it would have been much easier to spread panic and turn it into an obsessive psychosis.

After all, in 999AD, a persuasive voice, a public square or a

pulpit in a church and a big crowd, hadn't all this been enough to spread the universal belief that the world was about to end?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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