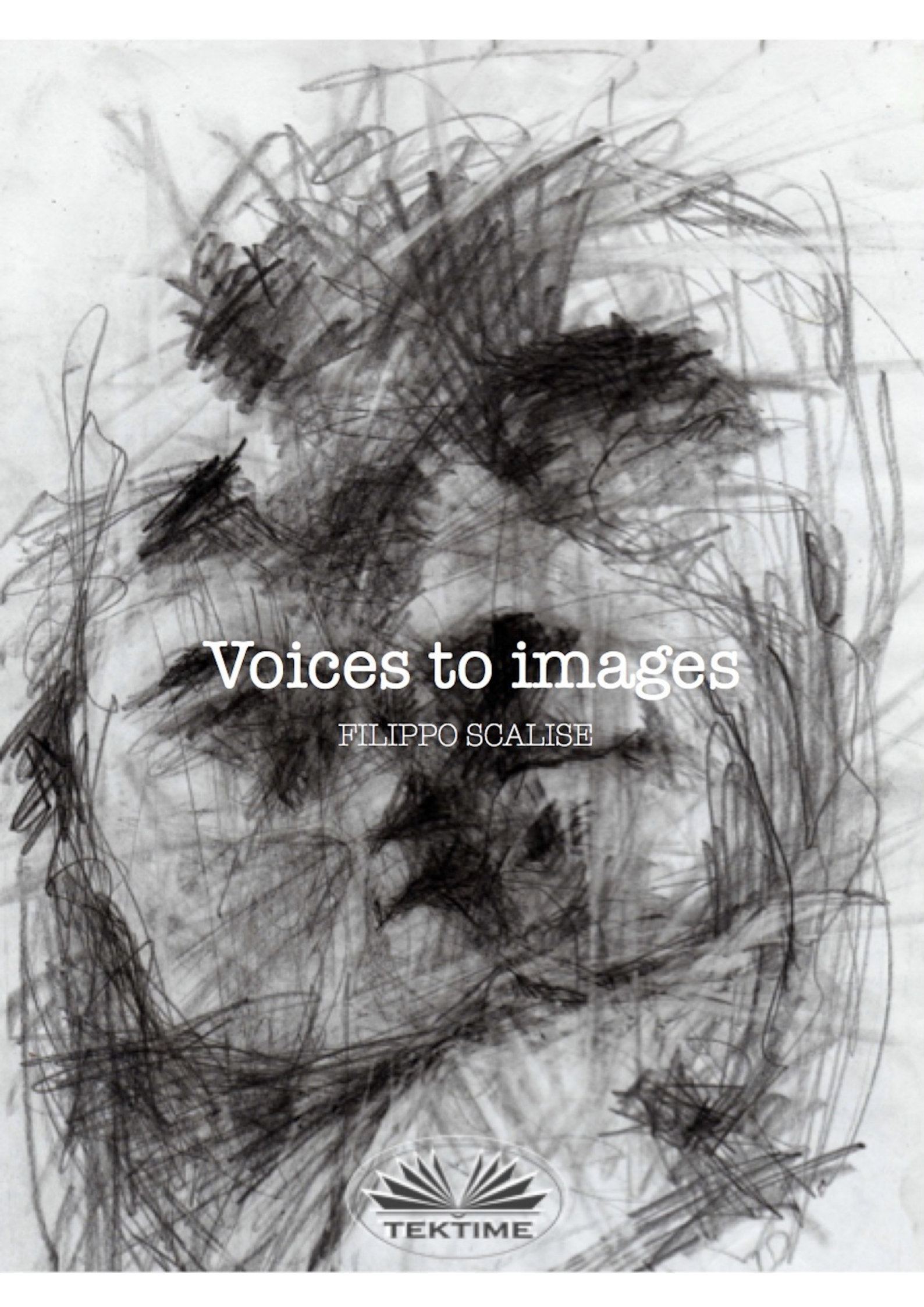


An abstract charcoal or pencil drawing of a human face, rendered with heavy, expressive, and somewhat chaotic strokes. The features are suggested rather than clearly defined, with a focus on texture and movement. The drawing is centered on the page, with the text overlaid.

Voices to images

FILIPPO SCALISE



Filippo Scalise

Voices To Images

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

Scalise F.

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FILIPPO SCALISE

VOICES TO IMAGES

Translated by Maria Burnett

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CHAPTER I

An impressive neo-Baroque palace in the Montjuic district of Barcelona. A mountain in the middle of the city. Hills covered with flowers, exotic trees and large cacti, right next to the luminous fountains of Gaieta Buigas.

From the very elegant and imposing entrance, graced by a small flowered garden, the large waiting room of Deis Frémont's notary office was accessed through a large staircase of cold gray-pink marble.

Crossing a long corridor, subdivided in sequence by three very modern crystal and steel doors, was an imposing meeting room with warm and lived ancient bookcases that filled the walls, seeming to be at odds with the remaining modern furniture pieces.

The body of an elegantly dressed man lay on his back, on a huge red and blue Persian carpet. A large amount of blood, partly clotted, soaked the carpet just behind the nape of the man.

His name was Alberto Meriva. In Barcelona he was well known, since, three years earlier, he had made headlines as the "photographer of the voices."

As many young people of his age, Alberto also led a monotonous and futile life of the small town of Torredembarra, on Costa Daurada.

Many small low houses in colored plaster piled up untidily along a narrow coastal road, which seemed to border the fine pink sand of the beach.

Hours and hours spent under the scorching summer sun, hoping to sell fresh drinks to thirsty tourists, with no desire to better himself.

At twenty-five, fed up with days that were always the same, Alberto accepted his uncle Lorente's invitation to join him in Barcelona to work at the country's Telephone Company. Neither the father nor the mother opposed that choice. Perhaps their son would have had the chance to do what they could no longer even dream of. A long embrace with the father sealed a pact of trust and love through physical contact. During the train journey from the station of Tarragona to Barcelona, Garraf Natural Park and the Hospitalet de Llobregat passed quickly before his eyes and, during those few hours of travel, he became convinced that he himself would change his own existence. Arrived at the station of Sant Estacio, he remained motionless, without speaking a word, for quite a while, mesmerized by the architectural beauties of this new city. He did not think of anything specifically, merely enjoying this new freedom while taking deep breaths.

He was quickly brought back to reality by the arrival of a large crowd of people that, like a flooding river, transported him directly to the underground train bound for the University. It was a very quick ride, less than ten minutes, to the Passeig de Gràcia. From there, he reached a small white door along the Carrer de Pau Claris.

His new home: a small, nicely furnished room adjoining Lorente's house had been offered to him by the Telephone Company along with his first real salary. He felt immediately safe and neatly arranged his few clothes inside the single large brown dresser that occupied almost completely the side wall of the room, then collapsed on the bed on which someone had nicely left a bottle of Porto. Many hours had passed, and Alberto had not yet spoken to anyone. Not a greeting or a request for information, nothing. He fell asleep without taking off his clothes.

Many small square lights alternated with worn gray keyboards on the wall of the customer service telephone switchboard. It was not a difficult job, but great patience and a great ability to listen to people was required; so many questions, so many complaints, so many requests, at times very basic.

He learned quickly. Alberto had always been a very smart young man, and, in a short time, he managed to learn how to communicate with customers, as well as to solve calmly all the problems that every day seemed to bring.

Alberto had never been a diligent student, but everyone knew him for his very special gift, which he had probably inherited from his mother: drawing.

He was really good! He was able to bring back to life images of daily life with such realism and precise details, that was called amicably "the photographer." This happened when a drawing of class 3 ^ A, completed by the end of the school year and published in the School Newspaper, was mistaken by everyone for a photograph.

Unfortunately, no one, Alberto, the teachers, or the relatives understood that natural gift could and should have been cultivated as a great opportunity, for a young man who otherwise had no future.

After drawing the hills of his village, crammed with rows of black grapes on a splendid red wine label produced by the great San Laurente winery, owned by Count Francisco Petrosa, he no longer drew.

He spent his time walking barefoot through the beaches of Torredembarra to sell cold drinks to tourists who, especially on weekends, crowded the beaches of Costa Daurada.

Now he was happy. He had a job, a salary, a room, and a new city.

Almost unaware of his new gift, on a very sunny Sunday, Alberto decided to take a walk starting from the Placa del Portal de la Pau. After a few steps, something caught his attention in the window of a small shop.

A bottle of San Laurente red wine from 1997 with "his" label.

He hurried into the wine shop and bought the bottle. A strange feeling got a hold of him. For a moment, dozens of portraits came back to his mind, landscapes "photographed" as a boy and the serenity that accompanied those moments of fertile fantasy. He experienced a great desire to try to draw again.

A little further on, past the stalls of the antique market, overflowing especially with old vinyl records and paintings of dubious beauty, he stopped to buy a large white drawing pad and a pack of ten black pencils. He slowly walked back through the short stretch of road that separated him from his neighborhood, turning that bottle of wine in his hands like an old relic, a piece of his adolescence, of his life.

Returning home, his soul pervaded by an unexpected frenzy, he reproduced that same label in about twenty minutes; perfect, identical, even better than the original.

The next morning, he took the sketch pad to the office and placed it casually on his anonymous desk next to the flashing lights of the switchboard.

CHAPTER II

Calls began unceasingly. Mr. Garrano still complained about the excessive cost of the out-of-town calls and demanded a special price, having been a customer for over twenty years. Mr. Guarrentes had decided to permanently terminate the relationship with the Telephone Company, that had delivered, without his knowledge, the telephone records to his ex-wife. Alberto listened and replied as he was doodling on the white sheet placed in front of him.

A phone call caught his attention.

It was Mrs. Ramirez who, after two weeks, complained her line still had not been activated in her new home in Plaza de Saint Jaime, near Barcelona City Hall.

Not even knowing why, as he listened to that woman's voice, he began to scribble a face on the white sheet. As the call continued, the face became more and more detailed but, as the call ended quickly, he was not able to complete the portrait. Alberto did not feel like finishing it with his imagination and abandoned it absently on his gray desk.

The next day, as soon as he arrived at his office, he called Mrs. Ramirez with the excuse of letting her know her line had been activated and also to convey to her the apologies of the Management for the misunderstanding occurred.

In the meantime, he continued the drawing, which quickly took shape before his eyes, beginning to look more and more like a photograph, because of the three-dimensionality that Alberto was able to produce with a pencil. The call ended, and the drawing was finished.

"Beautiful!" he said to himself. He was happy to have recaptured the old desire to draw and was happy to be able to express again this great and unique gift that filled him with a special and not easily explained energy.

The drawing of Mrs. Ramirez's face remained there, in a drawer, along with many other, partially incomplete faces that Alberto drew every day, as he was listening to the voices of the customers of the telephone company on the phone; young and old men, angry gentlemen, hysterical women and women with a very sensual voice. He had gathered about fifty in the drawer of his old gray metal desk. His feelings, which had developed during the prolonged listening of the voices, was linked to each drawing.

After about three months, a unique event changed his life.

The Telephone Company, every year, randomly pulled the name of a customer to offer him/her a year of free phone calls and that year, the winner was Mrs. Ramona Ramirez from Plaza Saint Jaime, in Barcelona.

That Mrs. Ramirez, the one in the first drawing, was just a coincidence thought Alberto, who was commissioned by the Management to contact her regarding the delivery of the prize she had won.

A sudden curiosity, mixed with a certain fear, convinced him to accompany the official in charge of the delivery of the prize, a certain Bernardo Benincasa, to the house of Mrs. Ramirez.

That morning, Plaza Saint Jaime, a very old square near the Palace of the Generalitat and Casa della Ciutat, a square with precise and elegant lines, was crowded with tourists and pigeons.

Crossing a long walkway, Alberto and Benincasa reached the door of Mrs. Ramirez's beautiful white house and rang the bell. A young blonde lady opened the door. Her face was pale, with very noble features. She asked them who they were. A face completely different from the one that Alberto had imagined in his drawing; but, again, why should they have looked the same?

The young woman invited them to enter and had them seated in a very large entrance, full of antique furniture and futurist paintings on the walls. After a few minutes, the young woman came back announcing the arrival of Mrs. Ramirez.

Alberto could not believe it. It was her!

It was the woman in his portrait, identical in every detail, even the mole on the right temple. He felt a hot flush, then a cold sweat and the room began to spin hard around him, until darkness overcame him.

Benincasa slapped him and woke him up. He was also woken up by the acrid scent that Mrs. Ramirez's housekeeper was making him smell. He immediately remembered everything!

His drawing perfectly represented that woman whom he had listened to more than once on the telephone, and who now looked at him surprised and worried. "His pressure must have dropped," Benincasa said embarrassedly, taking his leave from Mrs. Ramirez.

Young Alberto immediately recovered from the passing sickness and apologized over and over again to the woman who, having assured herself of the young man's health state, took her leave after a few minutes.

But how was it possible? How had he managed to imagine that woman's face, just listening to her voice?

Alberto had managed to transform the feelings conveyed by that woman's voice into a real image.

He first thought of all the other portraits he had drawn while listening to the telephone calls of the customers of the Telephone Company; they were in the top drawer of his cold desk in his gray office in Barcelona.

When he went to work the next day, he felt anguish, mixed with curiosity. He wanted to immediately open that drawer to check one by one the faces whose voice he had heard and transferred to paper.

He wanted to do it and did indeed do it.

He asked the Central Office to join Mr. Benincasa for a week, replacing a colleague who had had a bad car accident. Waiting to start this unusual test, something odd started to grow within him. He felt a life force he had never felt before. His relationships with others were positively affected.

He had never made friends in Barcelona and often spent holidays alone watching television or taking long walks along the waterfront. He began to frequent a group of colleagues from the Telephone Company, who invited him, a few evenings later, to a dinner in a beautiful restaurant in Barcelona, to celebrate the birthday of Rodrigo Mendez, the sales manager of the Commercial Division.

Rodrigo Mendez was a very charming man, who had been leading for some years a very expensive life and had surrounded himself with a series of people, more or less friendly, who took advantage of that opportunity to visit places and mix with people of a higher social status.

Rodrigo was not married, but he had many women and all his colleagues envied his refined and bold manners that made him always be at the center of attention.

Rumors had it that he was at the time having a relationship with a very rich Frenchwoman, the daughter of an arms dealer. Her name was Justine Bertelli and that evening she was there, in the middle of the room of the splendid restaurant Chez Michel.

A sophisticated setting with a few round tables for six people; steel and glass dominated the decor of the room, warmed by huge dark carpets, which delimited private areas between the various groups of tables. He sat down next to Mr. Benincasa and Mrs. Paula Perez, advertising agent for the Espana Press Agency.

It was a beautiful evening; he had a great time listening to Benincasa's dirty stories and watching the undecided reactions of beautiful Paula to the most daring jokes. She was a beautiful brunette woman with very long beautiful legs, that she unintentionally showed through the decisive slit of her black satin skirt. She beat her feet rhythmically and nervously on the floor and kept watching her cell phone, waiting for a phone call that never arrived that evening.

He exchanged a few words with her. He was not used to talking to women and, above all, beautiful women made him really uncomfortable, so Alberto devoted his attention, mainly, to Mr.

Benincasa's ridiculous jokes and the fragrant fish dishes he tasted along with several glasses of fresh wine.

At the end of the evening he walked back home, walking for over half an hour on the warm waterfront, invigorated even more than before by the puzzle of the faces he had imagined and then drawn. He would know tomorrow.

He lingered at least twenty minutes longer than usual that morning, attempting several times to tie the only decent tie he had. He arrived promptly at Benincasa's office, carrying a blue folder, containing the drawings of the four people they were supposed to meet that morning. It was an extraordinary experience. Fear was replaced by a sort of power vibe that pervaded his mind and soul.

He had in essence succeeded in photographing the voices of those people; he had managed to represent them on paper, with a perfection and a realism that left him stunned and proud like he had never been before.

He wanted to tell everyone but stopped. No one would believe him. It was too easy to draw a beautiful photographic portrait and say that he had imagined it by listening to only a few words of the subject on the phone. At noon, that day, so special to him, he decided not to have lunch. He left Mr. Benincasa and hurried to the Parc Guell gardens.

He wanted to be alone and ponder on what to do. He sat on a sunny bench, far from the voices of a group of men, who were discussing governmental fiscal matters. His attention fell on a newspaper abandoned on the bench. It was the third page of *El Pais*, dedicated to yet another assassination in Barcelona. It was the sixth young man who had been stabbed in the back. In all cases reported by the newspaper, they were all young men of a high social status who, after death, had their skull shaved and the tip of their tongue cut off, in a macabre ritual that had already been repeated six times.

At the office, they had talked about this distractedly. The investigators had failed to find anything useful that could relate those atrocious deaths to each other, nor did they have any clues or evidence that could be traced back to a serial murderer, with the exception of his telephone claims.

That detail caught his attention. The murderer had always claimed his crimes with a recorded message, sent, perhaps as a challenge to the police offices, twenty-four hours after the murders. A shiver ran down his back.

Would he have been able to draw the face of the murderer by listening to the few but atrocious words he had spoken in his message?

That night, he was very shaken up. All Alberto could think of was a whirlwind of faces, which turned into each other in an endless pinwheel; then he appeared, the man still without a face, the serial murderer. A cup of hot verbena lulled him to sleep, but only in the early hours of the morning.

CHAPTER III

He decided to get straight to the point. He could not afford to be laughed at or mistaken for a crazy man but, at the same time, he had to try. He asked for an urgent meeting with Kemen Garreca, the Chief of Police.

He was received the same afternoon at two pm. After going through an identity check at the entrance of the Police building, he was accompanied through a narrow corridor, with numerous very dark and bare office doors. The last door on the right led to a hallway, furnished with old prints and a dusty blue fabric sofa. He was invited to sit down, and the Chief was informed of his arrival. After only five minutes, the Chief came to meet him and greeted him coldly, giving him a once over from head to foot.

He was eager to listen as that case was becoming his nightmare, and anyone who could provide him with useful information to solve that case was welcome. Alberto introduced himself and after some preambles about his work, he came to the point. "Chief, he exclaimed, I think I can help you identify the serial killer if I could hear the recorded message." And from there he started talking about the faces he had imagined and drawn during the hours of telephone calls at the Company, meetings with people, and the surprising matching details. He opened a folder and showed the Chief his drawings.

The policeman was very skeptical. Quite a few crazy people had shown up those days at the police headquarters, to report that they had seen the serial killer, that they had dreamed about it, or even blamed themselves for those horrible crimes. This time, something told him he had to try. He had to give that young man at least the chance to do the drawing and then, to follow up. It wouldn't have cost him much in terms of lost time and waste of taxpayers' money. He accompanied young Alberto to the basement through a wide staircase, which started about halfway along the long corridor. He slipped his identification card into a reader, and a sharp metallic click opened the armored door that led to the Police Forensic Department.

He had Alberto sit in a small room with a desk and two upholstered dark chairs.

"Major Fernando Messi, said Garreca, is the Head of the Forensic Police for this District." The two shook hands, and the Major placed a digital reader with headphones on the desk.

"There you go, he said, these are the phone calls made by the alleged murderer." Alberto placed his earphones tight on his ears and the Major started the recording. It did not last more than three or four minutes. Alberto was upset, he could hear the voice well, but it was disguised with a digital voice filter, which made it sound like that of a laryngectomy patient. "Impossible, he said, impossible, it's not his real voice, I didn't think "

He stood up quickly, very embarrassed; he didn't know what to say and he regretted having gone there, why in the world, he said to himself.

Captain Garreca explained to Alberto that camouflaging the voice was a common technique, which could perhaps be partly dealt with through computer filtering techniques. The attention of the investigators had concentrated above all on the content of the phone calls and not on the timbre of the voice, as there was no chance to reply.

Major Messi thanked Alberto and promised him they would meet again after a few days.

In those days spent working absent-mindedly, Alberto couldn't think of anything else but that guttural voice he had listened to for those few minutes in the Police offices. As much as he tried to remember it, he could not even imagine how to begin to draw the unconvincing face of the killer. Perhaps he overestimated himself, perhaps he had dared too much, and now he was afraid.

That evening, he received a phone call. It was his father, whom he had not talked to for over six months. The tired voice of his elderly father filled him with nostalgia and made him think of his home in Torredembarra and his friends. He thought of the sunny beaches, the blue sea and the long

days spent doing nothing, racing with Zeb, the white Labrador, who had been with him throughout his youth, and the love snatched away from an American tourist.

He received an unexpected invitation to the marriage of his cousin Pedro, who wanted him as his best man. "I will be there, Alberto told his father, it will be a great joy for me to hug my friends again."

He did not need to go to the police station, because that morning at eight o'clock, a dark car picked him up at the house and took him just outside the city.

It was a Provincial Police district. A new building of glass and concrete that did not fit well with the remaining architecture of the poor outskirts of the city. He quickly reached the sixth floor, where Major Fernando Messi was waiting for him, in a room completely covered by a layer of insulating material and a huge wall, on which the images coming from the city's television cameras alternated with geographic satellite maps.

Carmen, the Major's assistant, was a beautiful dark-haired girl, very thin, with very sweet features and fleshy red lips. She brought him a cup of coffee and explained that he would soon hear the cleaned-up version of the killer's phone calls; he was simply mesmerized.

For a long time, his interest in women had been practically non-existent and he had limited himself to some boring evening outings with a colleague from the Telephone Company. But his thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the voice of the Major, who introduced him to the filtered version of the phone calls: "Listen to it and get inspired; let's see if you wasted our time unnecessarily." Alberto put on his large and soft black headphones and, after absently meeting beautiful Carmen's gaze, he motioned for the recording to start.

Compared to the first version, now the voice was clear and clean, and immediately some images began to fill his mind. He interrupted the cleaned up recording and confidently opened his sketch pad.

The recording started again, and, at the same time, his hand began to move quickly on the sheet, starting to trace the features of a human face.

The people in the room approached curiously the long desk where Alberto was drawing. Someone made obvious jokes about Alberto being likely crazy, and someone else whispered that perhaps time would have been better spent doing something more productive.

As he kept drawing on the paper with decisive strokes, a man's face started rapidly appearing on the large white sheet of Alberto's block. A small bald head with few white hairs left on the temples and on the nape, two small close-set eyes, partly hidden by thick curled lashes and a small nose with a rounded tip.

Every time the recording ended, Alberto stopped for a moment and then, with an automatic gesture, restarted the recording and continued with his work. Thin lips appeared and a small, regular chin that finished the oval of the face.

An anonymous face had taken shape on that sheet, and Alberto appeared very confused, despite not having had any hesitation during the completion of his work.

It had been about an hour since he had entered that room, which now seemed empty without the dozens of people who had crowded it that afternoon. He placed the drawing of the face of the alleged serial murderer in the hands of Major Messi, who thanked him and smiled at him.

Alberto quickly excused himself from all those people, but he couldn't help gazing at Carmen's bright big green eyes. Carmen bashfully, smiled back at him.

Alberto spent a quiet night in his small white house in Barcelona.

The noises of the cars, which gradually receded as the night progressed, made him slowly sink into a very serene sleep.

CHAPTER IV

The next morning, things suddenly changed. While shaving, the local radio announced that, that same night, a young man had been killed near the Santa Eulalia Cathedral and that the murder modus operandi was similar to that of the serial killer.

The razor fell into the sink and Alberto remained motionless for a minute, thinking back to the previous evening and to the face of the man he had imagined and drawn.

Would they have been able to identify him with his portrait? When would this carnage end? And why did he feel doubtful? How could a seemingly common and non-aggressive man play the role of a serial killer?

Those questions he could not answer right at that time. After a few minutes, after shaving, he was already getting dressed to leave the house.

"It is a fact, said Professor Beniamino Pricca, it is easy for some individuals to lead a double life; tireless workers and fathers of families can hide a second existence, in which they become cruel executors of chilling rites. A little like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, do you understand Alberto !? "

He was one of his few friends in Barcelona and that very morning Alberto invited him to breakfast, as he wanted to hear the opinion of an expert, who could help him understand more.

So, it was absolutely possible that the little man was the killer, as Professor Pricca, a retired professor of criminology, had explained to him.

He returned to the office with the sole certainty of having interpreted that voice well, of having grasped the nuances that had clearly reconstructed in his mind the killer's well-defined traits, then drawn on paper by his automatic and well-controlled gestures. It was not up to him to ask himself now who that man really was and what kind of life he could live with absolutely no identity.

His thought was distracted by three simultaneous direct calls to his office, so he had to concentrate on those real situations he had to solve.

After that day, after the drawing of the alleged killer, Alberto began to devour the newspapers and television news, while waiting for the news of the arrest of the serial killer.

But the murderer seemed to have disappeared. Up to that moment, between one murder and the other, there were barely two weeks but this time, for over a month, there had been no news about him, and the media's attention had also proportionately diminished.

That afternoon, Alberto randomly decided to walk the long road of the Park to return home and, as if by magic, suddenly before his eyes, beautiful Carmen came into view, sitting on a park bench, intent on playing with her small puppy.

They immediately recognized each other, and he hoped to be at his very best at that moment.

He straightened the collar of his jacket and, with a quick gesture of his right hand, pulled back his black hair.

Carmen's eyes shone along with her smile in her sweet simplicity. It was like a punch in the stomach. Alberto managed to keep control of his emotions and invited her to continue the walk with him towards the Caffè Marsella at Carrer de Sant Pau. It was a pleasant and very long conversation, during which Alberto could not, even for a moment, detach his gaze from the woman's beautiful face. He learned that, after the completion of his drawing at the Police Department, hundreds of images had been reproduced with the face of the alleged killer, images that were now available to all police districts in the country. Carmen admitted that she was impressed by his skill and above all by his courage to make that decision without fear. At the end of the conversation, the two parted with a sweet kiss on the cheek and a strong handshake, which was a foreboding of what was to come.

After this meeting, finally, that night, Alberto rested peacefully. His sleep had been disturbed by nightmares for days and by the blurred images of the serial killer, superimposed on those of all the faces he had drawn during those long months at the Telephone Company.

The next day he used the trivial excuse to go to the Police Department to ask for news on the investigation to Major Messi, with the sole goal of meeting Carmen.

The Major received him coldly and gave him only a few minutes to him, making him understand that, despite the dissemination of the photographs of his portrait, there had been no new developments in the darned investigation, which was making him become the sneer of the city.

This time it was Carmen's turn to invite him to the police bar for a quick aperitif before lunch. An incredible intimacy had already been established between the two, who, in just half an hour, managed to figure out that they were beginning to long for each other. This time, they left with the promise of a date for the evening of the following Saturday.

The three days that separated Alberto from that date seemed to last forever. It was the first time that he was probably falling in love.

At the very moment he was imagining his love encounter with Carmen, he was shaken up by the news. The evening news made an extraordinary connection, precisely with his city, with the discovery of the bodies of two young men, killed with the macabre ritual of the other murders.

They had been dead for a few weeks, but only now, by chance, had the bodies been found: one in the municipal dump, probably thrown into a rubbish bin, and another under the bridge of the Port Vell dock.

No claim this time, no phone calls, but the same *modus operandi*. They had been killed in two different circumstances and at different times, probably ten days apart. This updated the moves of the killer, who, therefore, had never stopped killing.

Alberto wanted to ask Major Messi why there were no claims right at that time, but after the last frigid meeting, he preferred to keep that question to himself.

His mind began to think improbable police scenarios at first plausible, then extremely imaginative, in which he appeared as the hero who captured the villain on a dark rainy night and was rewarded by beautiful Carmen's long kiss. The ringing of his phone brought him back to reality. Major Messi wanted to see him immediately.

A dark police car with a blue flashing light picked him up in front of the house and took him directly to the central Police Department. In that short period of time spent in silence inside the car, he began to wonder if he would really be up to the task of facing such a complicated situation, or if it would have been better to just let it go and return to his anonymous simplicity.

The Major's request was accurate: a new message, this time recorded on a tape, had been delivered to the newspaper *El Pais* and he was asked to listen to it, to check at least if it was the same person he had thought of, as an initial electronic analysis interpreted it as different from the previous one.

He put on the large headphones and listened to the crude and arrogant words of the serial killer, who claimed the killing of those two men in about two minutes and challenged the police to find him.

The voice was distinctly different. He politely asked for a blank sheet of paper and, this time, he began nervously to draw a face. He appeared very decisive and his features became hard, as a great rage was building up in Alberto while, with unprecedented precision, he created the face of that person with his pencil. He too was amazed by the speed with which he finished the design of that oval face.

It was very clear; the features were shown with three-dimensional precision, and all the features of that face were highlighted, in a completely different fashion from the previous drawing.

It was a drawing of a younger man with very short black hair and thin arched lashes, a gaunt face, and eyes rimmed by deep circles with a look between madness and despair.

He turned to the Major asking him to confirm the reliability of the registration. The Major verified that the message stated precise details relating to the murders, details that could have been known only to the person who had committed them.

But then why, Alberto thought, is there a second voice and a second face?

No one, with the exception of the Police Investigation Department, was aware of the experiment of his ongoing drawings, so no one could have had an interest in confusing the investigations to protect the serial killer, with the exception of a possible accomplice. However, this hypothesis had already been discarded, as serial killers never act in association with other people.

Murderous madness always came from long-lasting isolation, which led these diverted subjects to hate the surrounding world. Even the hypothesis that there were two murderers was not supported by the psychological profiles of this kind of criminals.

Although Alberto was confused, he was still sure of his feelings and his drawings and therefore, at that moment, his attention was focused only on providing credibility to his talent as interpreter of that arrogant voice that still echoed in his brain.

All the recording tapes held by the investigators were again sent to the Forensic Police for re-evaluation, and all were dismissed.

CHAPTER V

Carmen accompanied him to the main exit of the building and he finally had the courage to kiss her, following his instinct and a desire that he had felt stirring for days.

The kiss was followed by a strong, but brief hug, then she slipped away from the prying eyes of her colleagues.

Before returning home that evening, Alberto walked down a narrow side street, which led him to Professor Pricca's old villa. His old friend was happy to chat with him.

Alberto asked him about the two voices and the two faces, in the hope of receiving a little help to free himself from what was becoming a truly complex matter.

Pricca confirmed that it was unlikely that there could be two killers, since a serial killer always acts alone and always claims his murders alone; so, either the first or the second voice had to have been forged or had been the result of the crazy mind of a mythomaniac.

However, Alberto could not explain the rich details regarding the two murders, present both in the first and in the second telephone message. The Professor could not answer his question.

Perhaps a mythomaniac thirsty for news had gotten ideas from the statements of the police and television commentators and had built a version so plausible as to mislead everyone. Alberto has a sip of cold milk and dropped on his still unmade bed with a thud. He then fell deeply asleep and slept for a really long time.

When something is not clear in the mind of a man, especially a highly intelligent man as Alberto, it is unlikely that it could be filed away simply as a fact. He was absolutely certain, the two voices belonged to two totally different people.

But who could have had an interest in tampering with the investigations and why? While his mind was absorbed in these thoughts, his phone rang, and Carmen's name and number appeared on the display. She wanted to meet him that very same evening to be able to continue unfinished matters. Her voice was sweet and her laughter sketchy, with very long pauses.

His heart began to pound frantically, and a small number of frozen beads of sweat gathered on his forehead. Would he have lived up to beautiful Carmen's expectations, for whom he had longed for so much during those stressful days?

The evening was very entertaining, and Alberto was unable to look away from the beautiful face of the young woman, who rhythmically moistened her lips, making poor Alberto consciously go crazy. Strangely enough, that evening there was also talk of the two recordings, and Carmen repeatedly asked Alberto what he thought of the matter, as if to seek confirmation of her thoughts or suppositions.

They barely finished dinner, and soon afterwards, they found themselves gently embracing on Alberto's made bed. Alberto, sure of himself, had straightened up the bed in the afternoon.

It is incredible how sometimes the strangest events lead one to perform imponderable acts that trigger potentially creative or destructive encounters in a man's life.

If Alberto hadn't thought of using his skill both as a psychic and an artist to help the police, now he wouldn't be in the arms of that beautiful and very sweet woman.

This time, the victim was a well-known person in the city. Antonio Morales had been the mayor of the city for over ten years and now, having retired from politics, he devoted himself only to welfare and social works. He had been murdered with the same *modus operandi*, while he was getting home from the movies. He was the eleventh victim.

The crime scene, as usual, always tidied up by the murderer, did not provide any useful clues to the investigation. The killer certainly did not intend to leave traces for the investigators, who, for weeks now, had been feeling the mistrust of their fellow citizens.

The central government intervened by sending a small counter-terrorism Army team, already used several times in cases of difficult-to-solve investigations in a non-military context.

It was led by a fifty-year-old officer, known for his not-so-orthodox manners in conducting investigations, and by eight long-standing non-commissioned officers.

It was certainly not easy to agree with the local police, but Major Messi had to give in to higher orders and hand over the murder files to Colonel Ramon Tajo, who eagerly began to study them.

Eleven people had been killed, one exactly ten days after the other, in a frightfully precise sequence.

They had all been killed at night and all had been stabbed in the back.

Eleven men age between 40 and 55, with no apparent link between them. The back of their neck had been shaved and the tip of their tongue had been cut. No evidence of these acts had been found at the scene of the crime.

Colonel Ramon Tajo first organized night patrols, consisting of policemen and soldiers, in order to guard the most hazardous areas in the city. The search for the serial killer focused on all the mentally unfit individuals known to the city police, but, again, the search was unsuccessful.

The trooper did not want to know anything about the history of the drawings, which he said was the result of the imagination of a person in search of easy fame. Thus, the relationship with Alberto ended immediately.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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