



DISCANTI, PAURILLI e SORTILEMBI



Tick tick tick. It has happened to all of us at least once to be alone at home and to hear a persistent ticking. Even though there is no faucet leaking. Even though there are no clocks in the house. Tick tick tick.

This story begins with an insistent, almost impetuous, maybe even "harsh" tick.

Beatrice, Edoardo and Matilda were alone at home that night and that impertinent ticking changed their lives forever. From here on we will call them Beba, Edo and Mati, (31 years in total, respectively 14, 13 and 4, 31 as the night of Halloween, in fact). Those who feel that they are weak of heart, easily susceptible, impressionable, so to speak, should not continue reading this story. Because the apparent sweetness and the promise of fun adventure stops at the nicknames used for the young gang.

This is not a fairy tale. There is no fairy, no cute mice, and not even a sign of beautiful colored unicorns.

Tick tick tick. The three siblings had not noticed the noise that seemed to cross the walls, under the striped wallpaper of the living room that had been the subject of discussion for days and days, when Mati had decided to express her artistic abilities on the walls of the house with a beautiful red marker that she had taken from Edo, while Edo was playing foosball with Beba. They didn't notice the sound until Mom and Dad left them at home, on Halloween evening, to go to the masquerade party organized by their fitness group. Mom and Dad, dressed as Marge and Homer Simpson. This detail alone could cause goose-bumps, right? Why do adults decide at a certain point to act like children again? Beba asked herself that question while she was helping mom fix her blue wig. The effect of wanting to act like a child again without succeeding was rather grotesque. Of course Edo couldn't understand it, either. He had fun helping dad putting the pillow under his shirt, perfectly simulating Homer J.'s generous belly. Yet, at the same time, in three different rooms, while the three siblings were engaged in various activities (which in Mati's case always had to do with "artistic freedom"), something resonated inside their head. Some kind of sinister scratching. Can you imagine what a black ant sounds like when it enters your ear and makes its way in with its tiny legs? Take a deep breath and try. The three stopped puffing, laughing and drawing all at the same time, for a tiny fraction of time, with their hearts motionless and without pulse, to better decipher the noise and the feeling of doom that followed.

If only they had trusted that horrible feeling. They would have told Mom and Dad to stay, not to go. They would have told them they were willing to spend the holidays at Aunt Gertrude's all together, if they only gave up going to the party.

I know what you're thinking: it's just a noise, after all and everything is going to be fine. What writer would ever have the courage to have something happen to sweet Matilda? But unfortunately, I'm not a writer. I'm just a messenger, a witness to an incredible story. I'm warning you for the last time: it may be the right time to stop reading and enjoy one of your evening hobbies instead. Make a nice apple pie. Call a friend and go out for a drink. A good game of tennis is probably what you need. Forget about ever finding this story. Play a music box and relax with a good comic book or a romance book with a happy ending.

No? You have courage, I admire you. All that's left for me to do is to proceed, then.

The siblings said nothing. With almost automatic gestures, to deny what they had felt deep inside, they continued in their activities. When mom and dad went out the door, looking at them in the eyes, intensely and uniquely, the way parents do to imprint the faces of their children in their mind and store such memory for the time that will separate them until they return home, that little ant in the ears of the three siblings became almost itchy for how insistent it was, but Beba, Edo and Mati only raised their hand in an old Indian greeting. After that moment, the thud of the entrance door closing was followed by the squeaking of the door from Dad's Fiat 500 and the sound of the tires over the asphalt as the car traveled along the path of the cottage located in Viale dei Ciliegi n. 90. It was silence. No, not really. Tick. Tick. Tick. The heads of the three siblings turned suddenly as in a synchronized swimming exercise, and for an instant, a dry burst of air escaped from their lungs. They could no longer hide it from each other, they had heard it clearly. Tick Tick Tick. It sounded like a clock, but very far away and certainly more eerie than the tick tock of a clock. It was just Ticks, no Tocks. And it was a subtle, but disturbing difference. Yes, because in common clocks, the tick sounds like an insect bite. It is definitely annoying. It is the tock that saves the situation, the tock is the promise that despite the passage of time, everything will be fine. It is the tock that reassures us that it is not the touch of a spider, nor the bite of a wasp, but only a common clock.

Imagine now a clock that only ticks. Tick, tick, tick.

Do not be ashamed, if you are experiencing goose bumps, it means you are sane.

Beba looked at Edo, Matilda looked at both siblings, looking for a reassuring look that unfortunately she could not find.

What do we do now? They wondered without saying a word. Tick, tick, tick. There it is again! In a flash they understood where it came from: their mom's office. The forbidden room. The room that Matilda could not personalize, not even if she had the talent of Picasso. The room that Beba had entered only once, taken by the emphasis of the new, shiny computer that mom had been given by her company. She had ended up grounded in her room for two days. The prohibited office that Edoardo wanted to fill with piles of Watchmen comics and when mom replied with an unyielding NO, Edoardo had responded by giving her the silent treatment. For a good 10 minutes.

Tick tick tick. The decisiveness of the sound called them to ignore the rules. They ran without hesitation into the office, almost passing through the French doors. The room was not completely dark. The light entered in from the hallway.

At this point you are already saying, "turn on the lights, quickly, kids!" This phrase resonates within each of us whenever we fear that in the shadow something terrible, unknown, and indefinite is hidden. Believe me, turning on the lights would not have changed anything. Nothing was hidden in the shadows, if not a sensation of deep unease mixed with curiosity impossible to ignore.

Tick tick tick. They took two, three, four steps in the direction of the sound that seemed increasingly less creepy and more defined. Tick tick tick. They were now in front of the source.

Hanging on the wall across from the door, near the corner of the study, in front of a shelf where mom kept an orderly mess of documents, there was a painting.

Mom loved antique markets and brought the entire family, the third Sunday of the month, to the city market where they browsed hundreds of stalls and sellers that probably had emptied out the attics of entire neighborhoods. At the end even dad had learned to love the outing and all in all, walking, eating out and earning a few new toys was something everyone enjoyed.

The painting was definitely one of Mom's latest purchases.

How strange. This fact did not make the three siblings feel any better.

They were in front of the painting when Edo immediately noticed a faint light in the tiny window of the small cabin in the middle of the painting. Out of instinct, they all held hands, without looking at each other, with their hearts full of angst and short of breath. Tick tick tick. Suddenly, they all jumped back in fear. "I'm scared," said Matilda. As if in a trance, no one replied to her. Maybe because, they knew they could say nothing other than, "you are right to be scared".

Curiosity killed the cat. Isn't that the saying? Well, none of them were killed, if that can relax you. Beba leaned her face closer to hear better, or maybe to see something between the oil paint brushes on the canvas, so dark and glossy. Instinctively, and without leaving the grip of her siblings, her hand rose like a perfect crane pulling behind her arm that opposed her weight, as if to say to the hand "no thanks, I don't want to". She touched the painting and a lighting struck.

The smell of turpentine never bothered me very much. Many co-workers, people who have my same job, need to use a mask to work, but I do not. I never felt dizzy, the acrid smell of the solvent never bothered me. Yet, it has been a few days that when I work I feel a vague sensation of nausea.

About a year ago, in November, I purchased a strange painting. On its own, at first glance, the painting was rather common, almost insignificant. A forest, a wood cabin, a dark night. Anonymous. Yet, I don't know why, I could not resist it and had to bring it home with me.

By the way, I am an art restorer. The majority of the time I spend it restoring paintings. I left the painting abandoned in a corner for several months, then one day, without true motive, I felt the need to look at it, maybe fix a few corners where the color had faded.

I sat down on at my desk and I grabbed my magnifying glass, a usual habit of mine. However, nothing of what I saw proved to be "usual".

Looking over the painting and the small house, the window lit up with a faint light. In surprise, I flung myself back, and nearly tumbled to the ground with my Thonet chair that had cost me a fortune.

Holding my breath I had the recklessness of approaching it again and used the most powerful magnifying glass I had in the house.

The window appeared before me with clarity, showing not only the texture of the wooden window frame, but also the translucent faces of a girl, a boy, and the top half of a child's head.

It took me many days to completely understand the truth. It has been 9 months that every night the three children, respectively 14, 13 and 4 years old tell me a portion of their story by writing it on the foggy window glass. I learned, with effort, to read the words backwards.

Like this I discovered the terrible story of Beatrice, Edoardo and Matilda who have been trapped in the painting since last Halloween.

Today is October 31st, 2018. It has been a week I hear the Tic tic tic coming from the painting.

The siblings say that it was like this that they ended up in the painting. Tonight I will try to pull them out.

I have tied around my waist a rope that is attached to one of the supporting beams of my house. I leave this story on my desk. If I do not return, if the rope breaks, you will know what has happened.

At times we must believe in the impossible, no?

At least for one night a year.



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