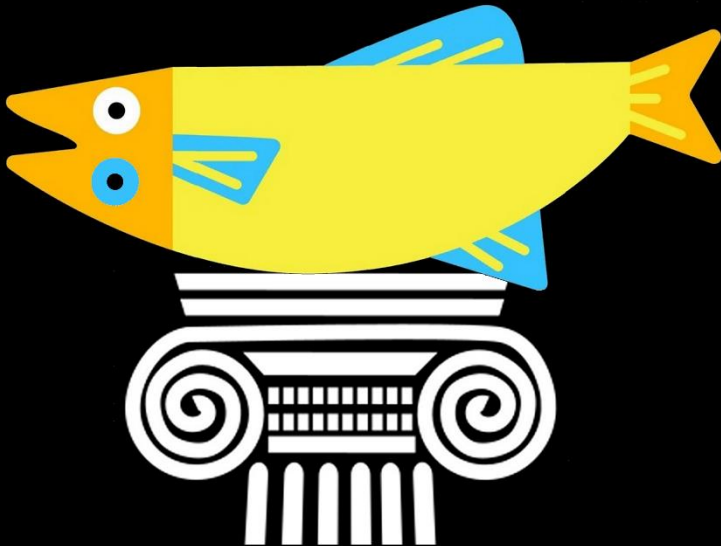


GERO MANNELLA

HOW (AND WHY) TO MAKE
YOUR LOVER'S HEAD
DISAPPEAR

humorous 70%
thriller 20%
acrylic 10%



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Chapter 1 – The Crime

Let's put it this way. It's night, about three o'clock, and a box for human beings stands silhouetted against its surroundings, wrapped in something intangible that could be called mist if we were in the countryside, or aerosol if we floated in the stratosphere. But more properly we'll call it smog - being an industrial suburb. At the foot of the box, which appears gray and square in the half-moon light, there are other scattered boxes for humans: small, metallic, and on wheels, finally still and silent at this hour.

From the big box, that you use to call condominium to evoke an ideal community, except for each other's stabbing for a parking space or a dripping wet sheet, at this time you can hear creaks and minor buzzings, a tacit revolt of building materials. And you can also spot cracks on the facade, crow's feet on the balconies' sides, hanging plasters ready for the great leap, as if they were bungee jumping.

The bravest in the end succeed, and the next day you can find them lounging in plastic poses on the bonnets of the metal boxes, surrounded by twin-colored barriers and insurance agents.

At this moment, however, the cracks on the big box may also have another origin. His name is Bozo. He's

informally called *cat burglar*. Pale, about thirty-five, in T-shirt and jeans, his hand with swollen veins is wielding a picklock. He has forced the security door, shaking the frame just enough and with the least damage. Lifting the brass knob, he found the right chink to slip inside and prick up his ears.

Silence: the perfect burglary. No one has heard noises, most especially those directly involved, the occupants of the apartment.

They're lying in the bedroom, as is customary at this hour, back-to-back, the woman in fetal position, the man with his arms crossed and stretched up over his head, like San Sebastian the martyr, but undrilled by arrows. The woman inhales silently. She has long brown hair, and appears opulent and curvy: a hottie, in the ordinary sense. The man is a bundle of nerves, unkempt beard and shaggy hair, regular features, and wavy lip by an intermittent snore. The front door nameplate, just lapped by some broken plaster, reads Ferendeles Horace - Durant Jessica. And for the registry office they are *Mr. and Mrs. Ferendeles*.

Bozo, it was said, after putting the picklock away and closing the door, throws a look around the environment, so dark at first as to be breathtaking, then barely in shadow, just enough to find shapes of furniture and the LED in standby of electronic devices, not howling, thank God.

He turns on the torch: at last, we can distinguish his expressions. He's tense, a few trickles of sweat, the

pulsating jugular, the cavernous orbits. He directs the cone of light on the walls and advances cautiously, flying over wallpaper and curtains, shelves, paintings and batik with unlikely colors. At first sight, we would call it minimalist modern furnishing with ethno-bastard inserts.

Our burglar, let's say, has other standards: his aesthetic pleasure reaches a climax with Caravaggio and the Renaissance painters. But unfortunately, museums' alarm systems are disheartening.

Anyway, the living room's impression of modesty, leads him to think the paintings are fakes. Better to focus on jewelry.

From the first drawer, he pulls out a pendant.

Has it a value or is it mere junk?

The doubt corrodes his aplomb as a professional burglar, and his forehead wrinkles. To clear up the doubt he has his usual method: bite the metal with the premolar. He does so with discretion, having smoothed the trinket, applying growing pressure with a grimace.

Sadly, without even giving him time to deceive himself, the bauble breaks as if it was a hazelnut.

Disappointed, he spits out the remains and goes on.

Rummaging in another drawer, he finds a ring with stones. He bites with equal caution, but it shatters immediately. This time the fragments leaves his oral cavity with a mumble from the esophagus, typical of a carnivorous reptile of the Cretaceous period.

This looks a bad start, he realizes.

In these cases, you've to breathe deeply and take on a zen attitude.

On the table in front of the couch, he sees a sandwich. Detachment and dignity, he reminds himself.

But he's hungry. He sniffs it, brings it to the mouth, sniffs it again and finally bites it vehemently.

But it's a fatal gluttony, for that thing turns out so hard and stale that a molar collapses. He sacrifices tooth and blood to the cause, and hisses a vehement "Fuuuck!", the first exclamation we perceive clearly. Then he mimes a punch to the jamb of a door, slams the snack on the ground and crushes it with his heel. So sad and uncomfortable seems sometimes the life of a professional burglar.

In the same box for humans, while flying outside the flat on the back of a horsefly, we arrive at a loft not far away, from where we hear moans in baritone and soprano. Soft lights are melted together with modern furniture Ikea style in a uniform ocher.

The naked bodies of Daria and Walter hook up and rub each other on her bed with brief moments of inertia. The girl is exuberant and voracious, pretty and sinuous in the right measure. The boy, handsome and well-shaped like a pole-vaulter, is currently exhausted and is prone neither to the jumps nor to the use of the pole. Daria is above him and pushes her breasts into his mouth.

"Mmm..."

"Hey, you're suffocating me! Can you hear me?!"

“Mmm...”

“Daria, enough! Let me breathe for a second! Air, air!
I need some air!”

Walter extracts a breast from his mouth and starts fanning himself.

“What’s up? Don’t you love me anymore?”

“No, of course I do! The fact is that...”

“What?”

“...when I was a baby, I was nearly killed by one of them...”

“It’s called tit”, says the woman between annoyance and astonishment.

“Tit.”

“Killed? What do you mean?”

He starts staring blankly into space, the pose of one who is scraping mnemonic sediments.

“Suffocated by the milk?”

“No, I tied it round my neck. I wanted to hang myself...”

Daria retracts, as a presbyopic that want to stare at a mite.

“Seriously”, he continues, “I suffered from depression.”

“Come on! So young?”

“It’s hereditary. We’re all depressive maniacs in my family.”

She studies him while he exhibits the Saint Bernard dog’s languid eye.

“Uh? Your dad, the eminent surgeon?”

“So what? Depression doesn’t respect social position!”

No doubt, she thinks. But, evoking the image of a gallows and the harshness of a slipknot, something does not convince her.

“I know. Just a question... what kind of breast did your mother have?”

He breathes in deeply and accentuates the poignant expression, for the memory.

“They were long, baguette shaped, with some tattoos.”

“What kind?”

“Nipples. Probably to sidetrack me.”

Daria sighs, turns away from the mite and puts on a dressing gown. The ideal horsefly, bored by the suspended copulation, is about to take off. It takes a last ride around the light cone on the ceiling and then buzzes away from the window.

Daria reaches Walter with two drinks.

“Wanna drink to get over the shock?”

“Thank you. After I gotta go.”

“You’re leaving?”

“Tomorrow I’ve got a surgery trial. If I don’t rest, I’ll fall asleep with the scalpel in my hand.”

She opens her eye wide with a teenager’s emphasis.

“Come on, don’t say you’ll really cut!”

“I am specializing in pathology. Do you think it’s so strange?”

Daria shakes her head.

“Brrr, it gives me the creeps! Just the idea of all that blood... I’d faint instantly”.

“Nothing more exciting.”

“Sicko!”

“You can’t understand, the human body is a universe to discover. If only I could have my very own cadaver...”

“Stop! Enough!”

Walter raises his hand in the air as if he’s cutting with an immaterial scalpel. To someone else, he could look like a man possessed by Toscanini, the orchestra director.

“How disgusting! Do you mean if I dropped down dead right now you would slice me open to explore from the inside?”

“Of course, not”, says the young gallant.

“That’s ok then...”

“I don’t have a scalpel with me.”

“Arsehole.”

Out of the big box the horsefly hovers clumsily through currents and rivers of moisture which will soon become dew. When it sees the moonlight casting its shadow on the PVC window glass, it remembers it is spineless and shelters inside the bedroom of Jessica and Horace.

In that room another light, the torch of Bozo, roams over the sleeping bodies. Beside the bed the man checks their regular breathing, then pulls out a narcotic spray. With consummate gesture he presses the top of the can.

To his surprise, a white foam flows from the nozzle, and he realizes that asking his wife to prepare the burglary kit is something to avoid in the future.

“Holy shit, what else?” he growls, as he gently removes the shaving foam from the sleeper’s cheek.

As he does so, another thought assails him: what did he use for shaving this morning then? The sticky feeling of something sweetish on his face and a recent escort of midges enlightens him. It was spray cream.

“So, I guess my lady has sprinkled the narcotic in the evening coffee, instead of cream”, he grins maliciously. “Oh well, she also wanted to wait for me, awake.”

He turns off the torch as there’s enough light.

The spouses are lost in the oblivion of REM sleep, the only good news since he crossed the threshold. He rummages in the drawers, throws away lingerie and underwear, finds a couple of earrings and, out of habit, bites them on the aching side.

The scream of pain is suppressed in the silent grimace of a melancholic Batman’s Joker. Then he tries on the opposite side: the earrings pass the test and he puts them in his pocket.

From another drawer he pulls out a dildo. He tries to bite it in vain, then polishes it and finally puts it admiringly in his backpack.

It seems like the beginning of a miraculous catch.

So now, he moves to the big target: the closet. Opening the side door releases only a stench of starch and sweat. Too dark, but the torch lends a helping hand, so revealing the secret life of plaid shirts and sleeveless vests.

Then he moves to the locked central door.

“This is the right place, I have a sixth sense. If not, why lock it?”

He opens it, the torch shines on the interior and...

Suddenly Bozo’s heart accelerates like the ticking of a time bomb.

In the dimness a stiff corpse, huge and transfigured, stands there, then starts staggering from the open cabinet. He’s naked among a flourish of feminine dresses, rugged, in his thirties, long hair, unshaven, priapic erection, eyes wide open, foaming at the mouth, his hands contracted like a claw as if, locked inside, he has been scratching the door until exhausted and suffocated.

Bozo instantly bleaches, eyes and mouth open, withdraws and turns his back. He starts to walk away, but he is not quick, as if something telluric brakes his movements. The corpse instead starts to bob like a horny Frankenstein monster, and falls heavily on the fugitive’s back.

“*Madre de Dios!*” he hisses as if it were a rugby tackle.

That Spanish-speaking exclamation is a literary convention taken by Zorro, we suppose. In truth, Bozo comes out with something censurable, ruminated through clenched teeth. With the heavy burden on his rump, he stirs all fours trying to slip away from the man who grabs him from behind unaware.

The noise wakes up Horace for a moment. He is groggy, his consciousness is primordial, unable to

grasp the world around him. Just one eye wanders over the Chinese shadows of the two men projecting on the wall an apparent homosexual digression. Bozo is motionless, rigid and reluctant about that passive role, eyes fixed on the sleeping man, and a copious sweat dropping from his forehead.

After some seconds Horace imputes the scene to the weirdness of dreams, closes his eyelids, and turns back to sleep with a grunt. At last, the thief is free to growl a madrigal of *Madre de Dios*.

Then he drags himself under the ballast for a few steps, tries to roll away, like a soldier in camouflage hunted by the enemy. But he's clumsy, frightened and tired. As he turns, he hits a marble pedestal on which a small sculpture with uncertain human traits stands. The statue wobbles and falls to the ground in a thud. Then everything calms down.

The thief, unconscious from the impact on his head, lies belly up crowned with shards. By his side the young Frankenstein now looks like a Pompeian man, extinct in 79 A.D. due to an eruption on the skin.

But the noises of the collapse finally wake Jessica, who raises her torso like a sleepwalker and looks around.

And her heart is going "*thump thump, ba boom*".

(Yeah, she suffers from cardiomyopathy).

[It goes on for about 200 pages...]

CHAPTER INDEX

CHAPTER 1 – THE CRIME.....	3
CHAPTER 2 – THE RELIEF.....	13
CHAPTER 3 – THE INSPECTOR.....	22
CHAPTER 4 – THE SKETCH.....	34
CHAPTER 5 – THE ADULTERESS.....	47
CHAPTER 6 – THE DISMISSAL.....	58
CHAPTER 7 – THE COP.....	79
CHAPTER 8 – THE BLACKMAIL.....	94
CHAPTER 9 – THE HEAD.....	110
CHAPTER 10 – THE BURGLARY.....	130
CHAPTER 11 – THE INQUISITION.....	143
CHAPTER 12 – THE AUTOPSY.....	158
CHAPTER 13 – THE PUNISHMENT....	185