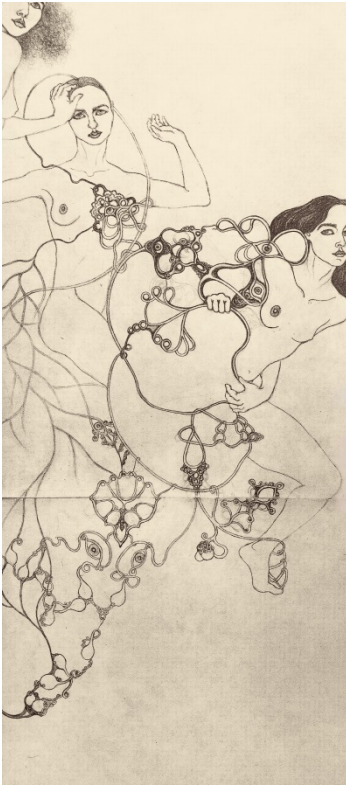




I come from the mud. I live at *fuera*

A tale by Vanessa Longo



-WHAT THE HELL IS THIS MUSH? -

"Lord, this is his..." (explanation interrupted by other shrieks)

- YOUNG MAN, YOU MUST BE JOKING, I HAVE NOT PAID 500 EUROS FOR THAT SHIT; TAKE IT AWAY IMMEDIATELY BEFORE I CALL THE POLICE-

The maître did not repeat it twice and immediately made disappear the repudiated dish from the perplexed client's table.

Dissatisfied.

Pissed off.

Victor crossed the long corridor that separated the dining room to the kitchen with the unexploded bile in his throat—leaving the pizzeria for a little higher salary and attending daily episodes so ignoble had made him regret his serene past when he did not have to compromise his conscience to the point of having to ignore it.

He only saw it out of the corner of his eye because he refused to look at it openly, to feel less complicit. It was just an illusion. He still could feel the feeble beats, perhaps amplified by the tray (or by his guilt).

He went into the kitchen and laid it, or rather, he slammed it on the steel counter that, at that moment, seemed to him an operating room.

In fact, it was there on the operating room table. Miss Pool had placed the body of that poor deer numb by anesthetizers. There, on the table of the operating room, Ignatius had come, urged by the same Miss

Pool, author of the daring capture, and had made the incision while the beast was still alive and was struggling. Yes, because the Russians only want it this way: hot, purple and steaming, the *conditio sine qua non* was that the heart still came to the table pulsating. It was clear that, for this circumstance to occur, from the extraction of the organ to placing the organ under the jaws of the pretentious client, a sneeze of cicada had to pass at most.

So it had not been. Victor knew well that, during the walk to the room of the diners, he had literally suffocated the tormented palpitations of the muscle and, along with it, had also suffocated anger and frustration. That muscle had arrived almost completely rigid, almost completely cold.

Victor, this time he had not made it. He had not succeeded in serving yet another murder to those obtuse feces, full only of a great void.

Now he had to tell the great huntress, restaurateurs, scammer, and assassins. Miss Pool.

From how the subject in question threw his personal belongings at the emergency exit, the perceptive Victor argued that there was no need for it.

When the former waiter of the restaurant "Cuore pepe rosa & corna" found himself, in spite (or maybe not) in the back of the restaurant, he felt hit from behind by something slimy and inert.

Lightning was the reaction of the young man who directed a look full of bitterness towards Miss Pool, the author of the launch, which countered in a calm tone although imperative:

"you made me lose 500 euros, and you knew that our business is the hearts of wild animals served alive; if you want to make you feel guilty, do it outside of here, and since you despise our work, you will also despise the last paycheck. It gives us great pleasure to keep this dirty money. Now



disappear, pure soul".

Miss Pool threw the deer's heart at him. Behind him, and Debasing him and the animal. Even Victor had done it. It was true that he knew what was going on in that place, and it was true that he knew the restaurant menu.

The former maître, now only a medical student, offered the most desolate look that he kept in his heart to that landscape worthy of an apocalyptic scenario. He, the heart of the deer, and for an instant the Miss Pool herself, laid their lower extremities on carcasses of animals extinguished in the name of voidness and human wickedness.

Victor bent down, sweating tears swollen with resentment, took the heart of the deer and, with the mastery of the specializing in surgical medicine, probed the lifeless bodies of the "participants" at the macabre banquet in search of his deer. He felt a body still warm and tried, put his heart where it had been tragically eradicated, then he sewed, moaned, cried. He didn't pray, but he strongly believed in it.

Then, defeated, he left that swamp of wrecks never claimed. "His deer" (by now he had won a name since he was practically resurrected) remained to lie on the ground for days, a little to pretend wisely corpse among the corpses, a little because, feeding on food in an advanced state of decomposition, He lacked protein and essential vitamins. This slow and far from being well-performed rehabilitation was the cause of the extreme weakness of the paws of His deer and of that gray, thin, almost translucent mantle. The cook of "Cuore pepe rosa & corna" did not see it. Zar, the new maître, did not see it. Even the fearsome Miss Pool gave no hint of surprise when His deer crept up on his hind legs and took the way to the forest.

His deer roamed like a ghost in what was to be its natural habitat, the forest, but which, in these new garments, felt alien, at times hostile. His deer often found himself wondering why he felt that way. He could not explain himself, but perhaps those hands that had revived him had transmitted to him some infinite particle of himself, something vaguely human. For a moment, Victor and His deer had entered in symbiosis like two identical twins in the mother's womb. So much was enough.

Like a deer, he was too man, and as a man, he was too deer.

This condition of misalignment to his intrinsic nature inevitably led him to dodge his fellow because he was unable to share their enthusiasm and motivation and pushed him to enter into purely human emotions and behavior. Therefore, this was the cause that accelerated the now unavoidable process of approach of His deer to the stateless woman who found a home to the offshoots of the forest whose look curious and welcoming cheered the rehabilitation of the convalescent.

In that woman, he was sure of it, dwelt beauty and magnanimity equally distributed.

In that woman, His deer found shelter from the incredulous looks of his fellows. From the hand of that woman, His deer was first timidly, then voraciously fed. Thanks to that woman, His deer found his corner of Eden.

His deer and Greta (this is her name) had become friends.

Greta fed her deer daily, serving juicy fruits accompanied by lovingly steamed vegetables. The mantle of His deer had begun to shine again, perhaps even more than once. Its legs were solid and well anchored to the ground. Horns rich in mineral salts and lush like oak branches.

His deer was proud of his newfound form, and with a complicit look, he contemplated his beauty to confirm a mutual feeling.

Greta, for her part, reciprocated with infinite care and solicitous care.

The two were inseparable, their joy palpable.

It was Thursday. Day of berries and buds.

His deer had prepared all day for this important evening; he had searched for hours for the fresh snail drool to roll it up and earn that smooth and shiny hair that he wanted to show off in the presence of his Greta. His special human wore a very elegant long dress.

Greta, in the presence of a specimen of deer with a rare and athletic beauty, asked her special animal



to wrap her with powerful legs in an embrace that sanctioned, in fact, the beginning of a true love story.

His deer was impatient to encircle his lady and offer her the noblest feeling that his heart could accommodate.

-My heart is yours- he said.

And she took it.

With a lightning-fast gesture and goniometric precision, the girl pierced that caressing hand that became an infallible claw between the sutures still clearly visible on the chest of the cervid. In doing so, even closer to the face of the deer, even more, she looked straight into the eyes.

-This heart- she said - has always been mine. I'm just taking it back-

His deer was confused, staring at it, and that look reminded him of something that maybe he had decided to ignore, maybe wanted to forget.

As Greta dragged the almost lifeless body of the beast to the back of the house, His deer saw. He saw the other bodies. And he began to remember. He saw the back of the building emerging from the darkness adjacent to Greta's house. He saw "Cuore, pepe rosa & corna". And as the last breath of life came out of His deer's breast, the animal clearly heard a voice calling Greta, His Greta:

"Miss Pool, please hurry, the Russians are waiting!".