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THE FUTURE RULING CLASS

(La futura classe dirigente)

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CHAPTER I

Again this year summer has arrived in Rome like a reaction to rejection, but without traumas and the implicit holocaust of past years. Even in my area of new-rich boors everyone seems to have quietly subsided into a coma, simultaneously and of one accord, like an orchestra of idiot savants. The clusters of Ukrainian nannies at the bus stop, the packs of sixteen year olds, the Rumanians at the underground station with Peronis in hand, sculpted in the sunset between office blocks and the construction desert. I go back home in the evening and as I enter my huge empty living room I am seized by a smell of fermentation. I stand on the balcony in my underpants with a six-euro glass of Vermentino; outside everything is left where it is, surviving. I take a sip and think about how even when I was young the summer brought out in me an inexplicable anxiety of associations that I couldn't understand. The heat, sweat, my mother and father: everything became sensitive and sexual, like so many sweet wounds. In the summer, even I - when I was small - felt like a tiny trauma walking around in a humanity of

traumatised people, and in my own way, I was happy like that.

This year, not at all.

Not even the heat manages to shake things free of themselves: work, dogs barking in the gardens, the evening news, the Roman Summer city cultural events, *bruschette* with mozzarella and anchovies, the queues at the weekend on the Pontina motorway going towards the golden melancholy of Sperlonga. I drain my glass and make something to eat. It is the tenth of July 2007, in a month or so it will be my birthday. To get used to the detestable idea, every time someone asks me I say that I'm already twenty-six. The thought regularly brings on stomach cramp and I think: I've got gastritis, I should see a doctor. After supper, at around half past ten, an invisible missile of a 50cc scooter goes past with two stoned hoodlums shouting the Fascist song 'Little black face' into the night, the indecipherable warning that something is about to happen, something inglorious, who knows what and, above all, who knows when.

My name is Michele Botta; I've lived in Rome for eight years. I don't eat much, I take a 44 in shoes, I dress cool like a fake street dude, I pronounce my 'r's with a rhotacism, and behave a bit like a neurotic queen although I like cunt, and I sleep in the foetal position, hugging a pillow, so that every single morning of my existence I wake up knotted with cramp. My face is the one I can see in the mirror now as I brush my teeth. A face that can be summarized in one continuous eyebrow attached to the bridge of my nose, invading the tops of my cheek-bones and emanating outwards to determine the rest of my lineaments, (and the rest of my body, I sometimes think, in dark moments). With age, the old somatic similarity to a hunted gibbon has dwindled. If you wanted to, you could still trace a deposit today, in the area presided over by the presumptuous and ever shiny tuber that is my nose: but in general it should be said that at this point the facial dominant is

my mother. We have always looked alike, but it was at about age twenty-two or three that the figure of the most important woman in my life took wilful possession of my face. Since adolescence, I only had to acknowledge, with a certain irritation, the mysterious similarity that everyone noticed in us, and that was that. Then, when the situation began to get worse, I resorted to desperate remedies: short hair (a miserable expedient: my head is gigantic and shaped like a low-energy light bulb), glasses with big frames, even - once - a roguish effort at moustache and goatee (this too is best forgotten: my piliferous system resists adult life to the last, instead of a beard, isolated patches of mouse fur appeared around my throat). In brief, it was a losing battle. Month by month Mum continued to gain ground, pushing back the old gibbon (that was who it was hunted by: her), and the result is that today my face is practically her face. I haven't got the money for plastic surgery, and besides, I like my face, so despite the more than 200km that I've put between us physically, I am resigned to having her presence with me always. This is why, accomplice the wicked architect who put the mirror right opposite the toilet, every time I defecate, I return to the unwitting wonder of being two years old and, for the first time without a nappy, having her always there at my side to encourage me.

I'm five foot ten, got a diploma, degree and MA all first class; prostate cancer, lung cancer and prolapse of the mitral valve are (in order) the pathologies that I fear the most. I've got skinny legs with small, feeble calves, a short chest and two enormous nipples that are almost impossible to hide and were my misery throughout secondary school, forcing every choice of clothing into the tiny predicament of that *almost*. I'm very good with babies, cats and animals in general, domestic and not, I hate vegetables, I find old people amusing, at eight years of age they took out my tonsils, at fourteen I became aware of the fact that I was fat (it was a defining moment, I remember it

well, in my parent's room, in front of the big mirror with the ivory frame on the year-round wardrobe) and I stopped eating. Something which, according to my mother, would 'stop me growing'. Once I became an adult, I made my peace with food, in fact now I like cooking, although I avoid rubbish.

(Translation: Sophie Henderson)