

RONDELLA AND THE ROBOTINI PACIFICI

My name is Armando Cesare Morelli, born in 1919 and I have been, for more than forty years, a photographer and editor for the newspaper "The Executive."

I have dedicated my entire life to documenting the facts of the world, in pictures and in words, always preserving that objective, detached and rational approach that any self-respecting journalist should have.

So I would like to make it clear that what I am about to report is not the result of the ramblings of a poor demented person.

Until now, the inexorable time that I have spent on this earth and that has led me to this pitiless old age has not affected a single one of my brain cells; so I have decided, before reason abandons me, to tell this story so that it will remain firmly in the memory of each of you, so that you will know what the world really is and what it could be, if only the project of an ancient family of visionaries came to fruition.

I will never forget that date: April 18, 1940, I was twenty-one years old.

While wandering around the weekly market for old stuff in "Misericordia Square," I came across a small stall crammed with knick-knacks. Rummaging through those objects of dubious taste and meager value, I came across a funny little figurine in my hands. Attached under the base was a label that read: 'Washer, anthropomorphic machines. Cortésia, A.D. 1885'. 'Cortésia,' what could it mean?" I thought. Was it perhaps the name of a woman? I had no idea, and neither did the scruffy banquet owner.

"...but what do I know! I found it in an old cellar I

cleared out last month!" He told me without hiding how annoyed he was to give me an answer. "It costs 25 liras. What are you doing, buying it! I'm not wasting my time here!"

"What a boor..." I said to myself.

"I'll buy it!" I replied, reciprocating in the same tones.

I left with the statuette in my hands and on my way home, on the way, I decided to stop at the "Café Colombo" where I used to spend a couple of hours of my day.

As usual I ordered a tea spiked with Gin and sat down at the usual table. I took the figurine back in my hand and observed it more closely. It looked like a small wooden automaton. It was assembled with exposed components and tiny rivulets of oil were dripping from the joints. I touched that little viscous fluid with the tip of my little finger and brought my finger to my nostrils. It smelled of Jasmine.

The waitress, a petite girl with red hair and a face decorated with a myriad of freckles that looked like a starry sky, arrived with my tea and some butter cookies.

"Very kind, Gisella." I gave thanks as she placed the tray on the table.

"Uh! How nice!" She said, looking at the figurine.

"You find?" I replied. We exchanged a smile.

"Ah, Gisella, a washcloth please..." I asked, showing her her oil-stained finger.

"I'll bring it to you right away, Mr. Armando."

I stowed the statuette in the bag in which I kept my camera and some personal belongings. As I sipped what I had ordered, the bell on the door trilled announcing the entrance of Madame Dubois, a nice French lady of ninety-five who, like me, frequented the "Café Colombo."

"Monsieur Armand, what an unusual encounter!" He said ironically.

"To 'home' one always returns, Madame Dubois!" I replied, returning the smile.

"Oooh, you are so right! It is so welcoming... You almost feel like leaving without paying, if you're not careful.... Like we're in the living room at home!"

"Have a seat, please, keep me company..." I told her.

He sat down and, as he did every time, ordered Gisella the usual Panfrutto¹ and the usual glass of whole milk with a sprinkling of turmeric. She began to sip her milk and her face distorted into a grimace of disgust mixed with annoyance. The two small eyes narrowed and her lower lip moved to the side. Like every time.

"Madame Dubois, I still don't understand how you can drink that junk!" I said jokingly.

"But do you know that I can't explain it either? That bitterness, I don't know, at the first sip is really revolting, but then the mouth gets used to it and it becomes pleasant, alternating with the sweetness of the Panfrutto.

1 Immagnary cake made of sponge cake and chestnut jam.

"It will be... For me it continues to be an invention of the devil!" I retorted, laughing.

"Tous les goûts sont des goûts, n'est-ce pas? Taste is not up for debate!"

"Ah, sure, sure, for goodness sake.... Besides, if there are those who appreciate that jumble of junk they try to pass off as Art, I can expect anything! Wait, what is it called again? Ah, 'the assemblage'²! God forbid..." I sentenced in a mocking tone.

We spent almost two hours chatting until Madame Dubois pulled the purse out of her purse and made to get up and pay the bill.

"It was a really good talk, Monsieur Armand, as always." He smiled.

"No, no! Please... Let me treat." I said in a tone of polite imposition. "But where the hell did it go! This bag is a bottomless pit!" I said as I rummaged around, looking for my wallet.

I pulled out the statuette and hastily placed it on the coffee table to make room and facilitate my view.

"Mon Dieu..." said Madame Dubois, at the sight of the statuette. "Is that a... Is it authentic?"

"Mmmh, I don't know.... Do you have any idea what it is?"

² Art form involving the combination of different three-dimensional elements, most often found objects, into a single whole.

"You don't?" He retorted, looking at me out of the corner of his eye.

"I would say no... I bought it this morning, in Misericordia Square, for 25 liras." I replied, handing her the statuette so that she could get a better look at it.

"25 Liras?! Oh, holy smokes..." She replied incredulously, laughing.

"You see? It says here 'Cortésia, Anno Domini 1885.' 'Cortésia' is perhaps the name of the person who built it..."

"It is not a name, Monsieur Armand. 'Rondella' is a first name, or rather ... A surname. 'Cortésia' is a place."

"A place, you say? A city? A country?" I asked interested.

"It is... A place. A place where I found myself by chance, many years ago..." She replied nostalgically.

Madame Dubois and I went out together from the "Café Colombo" and I proposed to accompany her home. I had such a longing to hear that story.... I would have accompanied her to the ends of the earth to meet her. We took the longest route and she told it to me along the way.

You know, my husband was a winemaker. In 1895 he decided to take a trip to southern Italy to learn about the vines there, and I accompanied him.

I didn't know how long we would stay, but I understood that it would not be a short stay. It was very traumatic for me.... It was not at all easy to socialize. I was spending my free

time reading books, taking long walks in the fields, and it was during one of those walks that the event I am about to recount happened.

That day I decided to gather some myrtle to make a homemade liqueur.

I walked slowly, with very short pauses, picking the fruit and placing it in a wicker basket, expertly woven, that I had adorned with juniper berries and leaves.

When I realized that I had barely filled half the basket and the bushes in that area seemed to have no more myrtle berries, I decided to go further into the woods to look for other plants that were more lush.

I was not at all familiar with those areas, soon realizing that my focused attention on picking myrtle had led me to not pay attention to the road I was on and not take landmarks, so I lost my bearings.

I wandered among the trees making my way through the dense vegetation, sometimes laden with thorns that scratched my legs.

I arrived in the presence of a mammoth oak whose branches arched down from the top until they touched the ground, giving the tree the appearance of a large cave.

As I peered down at this marvelous plant from the top to the roots, a presence appeared behind me, in the shadows. I turned abruptly, and as soon as a ray of sunlight penetrated the windswept foliage, it faintly illuminated a truculent, ill-dressed man who had jumped down from one of the thickly leafed branches.

He was a highwayman. His darkened face framed two deep brown eyes that were able to 'knot' my stomach. I realized then, in that handful of seconds, that I had really known fear.

He mumbled something unintelligible, sneering, probably in the local dialect.

I did not understand what he wanted from me, but certainly my crazed heart did not bode well. I dropped my basket and began to run as hard as I could.

I was constantly stumbling over tree roots, intertwining shrubs, and it really seemed that nature was colluding with that frightening man, as if he wanted to capture me and hand me over to him.

I could hear him laughing loudly as I walked away, but he did not pursue me. I hid in a bush, sitting with my head between my knees, and all I wanted at that moment was for my husband's hand to come out of the leaves and say, "It's all right, my love."

I took courage and, on all fours, crawled through the bush until I came out on the opposite side from the one I had entered.

As soon as I put my nose out of the bush, I found myself in front of a dirt path that led to a modestly sized building.

I set off - I certainly did not want to turn back - looking around. The path was lined with fragrant wild plants: wild fennel, fig trees, brambles laden with blackberries and, from time to time, a few strawberry trees with their fruits, beautiful round, red and yellow, that seemed to be decorated like a Christmas tree.

There was an air of peace, everything was silent and only the cicadas dared to interrupt the bliss of that silence. I walked up to the building.

It was an old rural house built on a plot of land bordered by a low wall made of stones, set one on top of the other with maniacal care. Along the entire perimeter, prickly pear plants alternated, a couple of meters apart, and in front of the house stood mammoth centuries-old olive trees, all twisted back on themselves. "What a strange place..." I thought, approaching the entrance. The doorway was ajar and I cautiously entered for help. The small wooden door,

set on one of the two sashes of a much larger doorway, slowly opened pivoting on three large rusty hinges and emitting a shrill, rising squeak.

"Is... Is anyone there?" I asked shyly. "Excuse me for entering without knocking, but the door was open..." I asked without receiving an answer. "Hello!" I said, raising the tone of my voice.

"Good morning miss!" Shouted a male voice from the dimness, jolting me.

"Please forgive me, sir, for entering without permission, but I need help! A highwayman tried to--"

"Don't worry, my dear! He interrupted me.

I still had no idea who he was, but he had a strange metallic voice that echoed in that large, high-vaulted room. Then he continued.

Heh heh. Come, come!" He said, alternating the words with little sobs.

I could hear him approaching walking with a slow, dragging step, accompanied by a noise that I could not define. Perhaps, just to give you the idea, imagine squeaks followed by the noise that a jute sack full of metal sheets repeatedly laid on the ground with regular cadence makes.

When the person who spoke those words finally physically showed up, I reached the height of amazement and disbelief. It was a creature about 70 centimeters tall, with a protruding jaw and a single tooth sticking out near the left corner of its mouth. It gave the idea of an elderly gentleman, was holding a hoe-like tool, and looked ... rather drunk. I

stood still, but I was not startled. He was very courteous and, I don't know why, my instincts didn't give me a sense of danger. We got closer and then he continued to talk to me.

"Who are you? What is your name?" He asked politely.

"Florence, sir. Florence Dubois." I replied.

"May I call you 'pretty tits'?" She said slyly, with those little eyes focused on my breasts.

"How dare you! Villano!" I shouted in his face, wide-eyed.

Without even realizing it, I slapped him in the face, which produced a sound that resembled a blow being struck on a crate full of Scrap.

"...But where am I wrong...?" He said disappointedly, not moving an inch.

I was filled with excruciating pain. "OW!" I said loudly, clutching my palm.

"Ouh! Careful, young lady! You're going to fracture your hand! Heh heh... I'm not a 'jumble of cells, like you humans! Look at that! Pure Ionia wood." He said proudly, hitting his head with the hoe.

As I tried to ease the pain by massaging my palm, I heard another voice coming from another room.

"Grandpa, is that you? What was that shot! Did you fall again?!"

A man in his 40s, not too tall in stature, with a black beard and without a single hair on his head, appeared in the room. He stood in the doorway, looking toward us.

"Oh, I didn't know you had company!" He said, turning to the creature who was with me. Then he continued. "Grandpa, are those oil stains on the floor?"

"Oh, um, hello boy.... NO! Damn it, no... I'm... Ah, yes, that's it! I spit on the floor! Like any self-respecting alpha automaton!"

"Yeah, sure, whatever. Come to the lab, later, so I can fix your leak before we all slip and break our necks!" Then he turned to me. "Sorry, miss, but at a certain age they start having incontinence problems because of worn out seals. They leak oil like old barrels with holes in them!" He said to me, laughing. "Who do I have the pleasure of talking to, Miss...?" He asked.

"Oh, Madame! I am Madame Dubois, Monsieur, Florence Dubois.

As I introduced myself, I noticed that his eyes had become shiny and a small tear, a tiny droplet, had run down from the corner of his eye to his cheek.

"Florence, what a splendid name..." Then she wiped away that little trickle of tears and added, "Emh.... Rondella, artisan in Cortésia, at your service."

"Is everything all right, Monsieur? I said something that..." I asked thoughtfully.

"Oh no!" He interrupted. "No, holy washers, no! It's just that... Yes, that is, I... I always feel a certain emotion in front of beauty.

Nothing disrespectful, Madame, don't get me wrong, for goodness sake! It's just something I can't control.... It happens to me a lot, you know? It can happen to me looking at a flowering field in spring, I love flowering fields. Or in the presence of a centuries-old olive tree, in front of a work of art....

"In front of a new welding machine..." Continued the creature, interrupting him.

"You know how much I like welding machines!" Said Washer to the old automaton.

"You get caught by the Stendhal syndrome in front of a... At a welding machine?!" I asked in amazement.

"Certainly! Well, not all of them, of course. It must be a really nice welder. I'm actually particularly sensitive to any kind of technological device. But it must be a really nice device."

"At the opening of the 'Santa Radegonda'³ Power Plant they had to rescue him with smelling salts! AHAAH!" Added the creature mockingly.

"Yes, I mean... I react like that, in front of beauty. And you are... I hope I wasn't inappropriate!"

Although I had just been put on par with a welder, I don't think anyone had ever flattered me in that way, He said

3 Italy's first thermoelectric power plant opened in Milan on June 28, 1883.

nothing and yet, stammering out those few words with those moist eyes, that tiny tear, caused even me an unexpected and deep emotion.

"Tsk! Pussy..." Muttered the creature, looking sideways at Washer.

"Inappropriate?! Not at all! Um... Cortésia,' you say?" I said to Rondella to break our mutual embarrassment. "Is that what this country is called? I thought we were still in..."

"Oh, no, 'Cortésia' is the name of this place." He explained. Then, looking at my hand he said, "Madame, but you bleed! Allow me to take a look..." He took my hand and inspected it. "Mmmh, nothing serious, it's just a splinter of wood and a good bump. A precision pliers and some ice will be enough, come with me..." He said, inviting me to follow him.

We all three climbed to the 'top floor of the building through an old brick staircase, crossed a large terrace and entered a huge, foggy room filled with strange machinery along both side walls. In the center of the room was a large ash counter, at least three by four meters. On the west-facing front wall, on the other hand, was a considerable amount of neatly squared lumber, logs of an essence I could not decipher, and a large glass window that gave a lovely view of the whole farm, allowing the gaze to reach as far as the horizon.

"Just give me a minute!" Exclaimed Monsieur Rondella, as he tinkered at the tool bench.

Meanwhile, I looked around, fascinated by all the contraptions. I was particularly intrigued by a strange machine that had a long wooden antenna rising up to the ceiling, penetrating it, all the way to the outside. Wrapped around the antenna was copper wire, and in the center of the device was a large dial on which was fixed a hand indicating values marked on a numerical scale above.

"What is this strange device, Monsieur Rondella?" I asked him.

"That is a power generator."

"You have a power generator?! In the house?!"

"Certainly! But it's not a common generator. Not like those big power plants you know. Those power plants use combustion. The chemical energy of the fuel, during combustion, turns into thermal energy, which drives a turbine and turns into mechanical energy, which turns an alternator, which turns it into electrical energy. All clear?"

"Of course not." I replied, increasingly confused.

"Perfect, perfect. This generator, on the other hand, runs on human energy."

"Human energy?!"

"Yes, the one that keeps us all alive. The one that is commonly called the 'Soul.' It is elementary, follow me carefully.... Soul is pure energy. Indeed, a combination of energies that can be positive such as kindness, caring for the world around us, love.... Or negative such as hatred,

resentment, envy... It is absolutely normal to have negative feelings; it is human nature. For humans to be complete, for the human machine to function perfectly, there is a need for both types of energy. Without evil, we could not know what good is and vice versa. It is all about how we use these energies and, more importantly, where we employ these energies.

When we have feelings, we are used to direct them toward our fellow human beings, right? Now, if it is good feelings - so positive energies - life flows in peace. If, on the other hand, it is our negative energy that we direct toward someone, that's when the space gets polluted.

And the more we pollute, the more intoxicated we humans become. Because these energies do not only reach the person to whom they are addressed, they propagate in the vacuum, precisely in the ionosphere, at a certain wave frequency, the same for both, traveling very long distances. My generator converts human energy into electrical energy!" Do you see this antenna? It is made of Ionia wood. 'Ionia wood' is a very powerful wood.... Very powerful! I have found that not only can it absorb these human energies, but for some reason it can also disarm of all malicious intent anyone who comes in contact with it.

This antenna is able to pick up these waves, these energies coming from humans all over the planet, and channels them into a converter. The converter divides the negative energies from the positive energies and then converts them into positive and negative electric charges. Otherwise it works like the normal direct current, which you are well acquainted with."

"I ... yes ... Sort of... What about this contraption that emits all this smoke?" I asked in curiosity as he proceeded to pull the wooden splinter out of me with a small pointed

pliers.

"It is vapor, Madame Dubois, not smoke. Nothing but vapor. I called it a 'snow maker.' It is a device of my own invention. It is used to produce the ice with which, if you will extend your hand to me, we will relieve your suffering. Like a good girl, it won't hurt, you'll just feel a little cold.... Done!" He said, placing the ice on my hand. "The cold causes vasoconstriction, slows blood flow and prevents the formation of hematomas and fluid accumulation. It also relieves pain by acting directly on the nerves."

"You are indeed very prepared, Monsieur Rondella..."

"My dear, curiosity always prompts one to ask why, of certain happenings.... Well, you continue to keep it on the point that pains you.... Ah, but you haven't told me where you come from and what brings you here..."

"I come from Burgundy. I am here on a business trip for my husband. During my walk I had an unpleasant encounter and ... I took refuge here, with you."

"Ullallà! Français!" Said the creature.

"Shut up, Grandpa!" Responded hastily, Rondella, to avoid any more gaffes from the creature. Please forgive this insolent, Madame. He is talkative when he has one too many drinks, but he is harmless. 'An unpleasant encounter,' you said... Aaah, these are dark times.... And I'm afraid it will get worse and worse if people don't realize, sooner rather than later, that they are the cause of all the ills that plague this society... If only man could keep the negative energies at bay, releasing only the positive ones, the negative energies

would dwell in each of us, continuing to have their function but, as they did not propagate in space, it would be much cleaner. However, as far as we are concerned, we have been doing our small part here for a long, long time. Here, Madame, we build negative energy inhibitors." Said Rondella putting an arm around the creature's neck.

"Exactly, but who is he...? what is...?" I asked, pointing at the creature, no longer able to hide my curiosity.

"Oh, this is Emilio, Grandpa Emilio, one of our older Robots, he has been in our family for many years. That's why we call him 'Grandpa'."

"That's right, dear beautiful lady, I saw him being born, this poultice! I was there at the changing of his first swaddling clothes, I was there when he vomited his first gruel, I was there when he used the urinal for the first time, and I was there every single time he did any other revolting thing for the first time!" Said Emilio.

I laughed in amusement, and Monsieur Rondella's face turned purple with shame. Then he cast a dirty look at the creature.

"If you tell my private facts again, I will take you apart piece by piece and turn you into a boiler." Said Rondella, under his breath, to the creature.

"'Robots'? That's what they're called? And are these the 'inhibitors' you speak of?!" I asked.

"Exactly. They are anthropomorphic automatons. They, too, like my antenna, are constructed of Ionia wood.

They, too, absorb human energy from the ionosphere and turn it into electrical charges that, thanks to an internal generator, are able to power their motor apparatus and brain circuits. And also, as mentioned earlier, my Robots are able to vibrate the soul strings of the humans they come in contact with at a frequency that inhibits the release of their own negativity. In other words, they bring humans to a state of purity that can inhibit them from directing their bad feelings toward others. I, sooner or later, will be able to spread my automatons widely, and when even the last of humans have been inhibited from releasing their negativity into space, only positive energies will travel in the ionosphere and we, my dear, will have witnessed the greatest change in human history!"

"Oh, but then it's so simple! All you have to do is distribute your Robots to all the people! You could... You could even ship them all over the world! Even as far as Asia and the Americas and have everyone own one!" I said enthusiastically.

"Unfortunately, it is not that simple, Madame.... In order for the Ionia solid, as well as even a Robottino, to have the desired effect on a human being, there are only two ways: Either it is deliberately chosen or it must be given with sincere affection. Rondella replied.

"Hey, boy! Now why don't you tell her where the catch is behind your 'genius' project?" Said the creature.

"Ah, yes, well there you go..." stammered Monsieur Rondella "As science well teaches us, for an electrical system to work perfectly, it is necessary for both charges, that is, both poles, to be present. So, in theory, if negative

energies were to disappear from space and the Robots were to get to absorb and convert only positive energies, their motor apparatus and brain circuits would stop working."

"And we would all become very nice, useless, knick-knacks!" Grandpa Emilio added, displeased.

"Goodness gracious, this is terrible! I said bitterly. Washer remained silent for a handful of seconds, then winced.

"All right, Grandpa... When it happens, if it happens, we'll deal with it!" He said, trying to comfort him.

I took Grandfather's hand affectionately and turned my gaze to Washer.

"May I ask when they were invented and who discovered this?" I asked.

"An ancestor of mine invented them, by a completely fortuitous chance, millions of years ago. I, however, made them come to life! Before me, although they had the same power, they were static, inanimate. Simple, if desirable, figurines. It's a long story, Madame Dubois..."

"Please, Monsieur Rondella, tell!"

He paused for a few seconds to reflect, then answered me.

"All right!" Said Washer, all strutting and proud. "Then make yourself comfortable and..."

"Um. If you'll allow, Washer, I'd like to tell the story."

Objected the creature.

*"No! I'll tell the story! You never remember anything!"
Rebutted Swallow impatiently.*

*"You tell things like at a wake! You are such a bore!"
Said the creature. Then he turned to me, "Mrs. Dumbá,
Dubbá or whatever your name is, who do you want to tell
the story?!"*

*"It's Dubois, the name! All right, you drunken old
grouch! Tell about it!" Disgruntled Rondella agreed.*

*"Very well, dear Rondella, I thank you for your trust." Said
the creature. "So, beautiful lady, open your ears wide! So,
you must know that millions of years ago men were inept.
But really clueless, useless things! They were all the time
twiddling their thumbs, and their only moment of leisure
came during thunderstorms, when lightning would set some
poor defenseless tree on fire.*

*As soon as they caught a glimpse of the flames, in fact,
Homo Ineptum, that's what I call them, would put on the first
quartered animal fur they could find and come out of that
hovel of a cave, charged with amazement, shouting "Uh!
Uh! Aah ah uuuuuuh!" And they would sit around the
stake, as if it were a movie theater.*

*The Ineptum were a nomadic people and never stayed in one
place for long. The more fortunate lived in natural shelters
of their own, such as caves, while the less well-off were
assigned makeshift shelters built of poor materials such as
skins and bones of large animals.*

*These primitive humans were omnivores and used to feed on
rotten carrion with a side of various vegetables gathered
around the countryside or they caught small insects such as*

'Malotasaurus' or 'Cocolodonts,' then, probably tired of suffering from diarrhea, they changed their eating habits by trying to get some fresh meat.

Not having any kind of weapon at their disposal, Homo Ineptum went hunting equipped only with two small feet suitable for upright gait and much, much, optimism.

As soon as they spotted prey, these clueless ancestors would start chasing it running grotesquely like Aunt Vincenzina with arthritis, hoping that the animal would trip over something and fall ruinously, hitting its head on a rock and losing consciousness.

This failed hunting technique was making Homo Ineptum increasingly frustrated and dissatisfied, so, one of them, the laziest of the group, said "Uh! Uh! Uhehecaz!" Which in local parlance meant "Ouh, so, I don't feel like running anymore. Either we find a solution to reduce physical activity and catch prey with as little effort as possible or someone will have to open a restaurant soon."

Guess what, who was this guy, but it's obvious.... An ancestor of Rondella!

This archaic Rondella was very short, very hairy, with a rounded head, a very small face, and a little jaw. Basically like this fat guy here, but thinner and with hair." Said the creature, pointing to Monsieur Rondella. "Once back at the cave with a copious spillage of lactic acid and a stomach emptier than my flask of wine after a balmy night, our primitive Rondella began to think... But the more he thought, the farther he got from the solution. So, increasingly unmotivated and impatient, he said to the female, "Uh!" - meaning "I'm going out" - and the female replied "Uhuhuhuhuh!!! Uh uh uh, uh uh, uh uh, uh uh uh, uh uh uh, uuuuuuhuh uh, uhuh ah ah aaah uhuhuhuh!!!!!!!!!" That is, "Where are you going! Who are you hanging out with!!! And don't do as usual that you're stopping by the hunting

club to chat with the other homo ineptum!!! Don't be late, this cave is not a hotel!!! And while you're out, take a pound of carrion for dinner!"

The primitive Rondella came out slamming.... Nothing. Slamming nothing, they didn't even have doors.

Anyway, once out of the cave he began to wander kicking pebbles, tearing up blades of grass and thinking and rethinking how he could catch his prey without running and without getting tired.

Nothing, zero, total blank, his mind was a black hole that had swallowed every idea, every possible solution. So, having reached the height of irritability, he took a long branch nice and straight and hurled it up with all the energy in his body.

The branch began to travel through the air, higher and higher, and then higher still, almost touching the sky, until it began its descent, lower and lower, closer and closer to the ground, until it stuck into the soft ground.

The primitive Rondella, after seeing that scene, realized that that practice could help him bring down prey, so he gathered all the nice straight branches he found on his way and started training with a target that he arranged a few meters away from him.

In those days those areas were populated by 'Cruelopods,' ferocious and vicious beasts of which the Ineptum were very fond.

Cruelopods were herbivorous beasts, but they preyed on other animals for no reason, just for the sake of killing them. As soon as they spotted another animal, they would lurk behind the bushes and, when the prey was close enough, jump out, maul it and then run off to gorge on vegetables.

What scoundrels, aren't they! In short, one day, while the Primitive Rondella was intent on practicing his launches, he saw in the distance a giant Cruelòpode, which, as usual,

with its bloody mouth and belly full of chicory, was sprawled out dozing like Uncle Paride after New Year's Eve dinner.

The time was right. He began to walk slowly toward the unclean beast, with feline stride, until he was close enough to take aim and throw his staff straight at the Cruelopod.

The primitive Rondella made the throw.

The stick, like the previous time, traced a very long parabola in the air, ended up on the side of the beast, but bounced and fell pathetically on the grass.

The Cruelopod was so sleepy and saturated with chicory that it did not even feel the stick that had hit it, so the Rondella Ineptum used the opportunity to make a new attempt.

He took the last stick he had left and, after aiming well, hurled it. The stick again traveled the same trajectory.

Unlike previous times, however, to the amazement of the Primitive Rondella, the stick managed to stick deeply into the behemoth's buttocks.

The Cruelopod began to struggle and making the typical chilling cry of the crudelopods , which was like, "Uaaaahrggh... Grunf! Grunf! Ghrrrrrrraaaaaahrggh," he got up, pulled the stick out of his butt with those scary fangs he had and ran away faster than the wind. "Uh! Uh!" said the Rondella Ineptum, which translated would be "Owww, the stick got stuck! Probably by hitting an area affected by vital organs, I might be able to take it down!"

Rondella ran to retrieve the stick, observed it very carefully, studied it, and noticed that the end was very different from the others he had thrown. He realized that that end was sharp, then realized that he had to make all the sticks he would find from then on sharp.

He studied various techniques to tip the sticks. First he tried blowing on them, then he rubbed them with his hands, but none of these techniques worked and the Primitive Rondella

returned to the cave more frustrated than before.

The next day, after a sleepless night, he went to look for a nice quiet place on the coast, since the only thing capable of relaxing him was to go and contemplate the sea, and wandering around those desolate moors he found an area in which he had never been, chock-full of vegetation and where the scents of nature were as intense and intoxicating as he had ever felt them before.

The sea was there just a few steps away, as still as motor oil inside a barrel, bluer than the bluest prince a princess could ever wish for. Only a cliff separated him from that wonderful water, a cliff that he imprudently decided to cross.

As soon as he put his feet on those stones, however, he was pervaded by an excruciating pain.

Hopping on one leg and backing away, like a drunken kangaroo, he looked at the sole of his hairy foot and noticed that there was a very deep and bleeding cut.

The Rondella Ineptum wondered what on earth had caused him that wound and, intrigued, knelt down and brought his head closer to the rocks.

He cautiously ran his hand over the surface of the rocks and noticed that they ended in razor-sharp tops.

It was then that another insight came. He picked up a large rock, slammed it hard enough to dislodge that blade of stone from the rest of the rocks, immediately went looking for a nice straight stick, and, having found the suitable one, began to nick the end of it with the sharp stone until it was incredibly sharp.

Needless to say, from that day on, Ineptum Washer's sticks became perfect weapons, and both he and all the members of his group began to use them habitually, bringing big results at lunch and dinner.

Thanks to that revolutionary discovery, not only did he understand that by using stones he could invent so many

other tools suitable for building things and solving countless problems, but he kicked off an era that would be invaluable, dare I say fundamental, for the advancement of civilization, and it was at this precise moment in history that the Rondella Ineptum, with an evolutionary leap, became the legendary 'Rondella Habilis'.

With the spread of this new hunting technique, Crudelópode meat was increasingly present on community tables, and although it was a delicious meat and much appreciated by the Habilis, they had a hard time eating it because it was very stodgy and difficult to digest.

One Saturday evening, after a thunderstorm, while everyone was gathered around a small burning sapling, the Rondella Habilis proposed a good feast of Crudelópode, so all the females in the group went to get the meat supplies they had at home.

The meat was grouped and arranged on a kind of tabletop made by placing logs side by side that were very close to the stake. Everyone took a piece and began to eat it, tearing off small parts with their teeth that could be easily chewed.

At a certain point, due to a gust of wind, flames rose from the sapling and these went to touch that very rudimentary tray that the Habilis had devised. The stand caught fire and the meat began to roast.

Rondella managed to save a few pieces of scorched Crudelópode and felt that it smelled inexplicably inviting to him, so, intrigued and with his mouth watering, he tried to take a bite.

Our friend could not believe his taste buds! That meat was the height of pleasure and enjoyment, and he immediately invited the other members of the group to taste it!

Everyone, but really everyone, was thrilled, and Rondella immediately began to think of a method that would allow him to reproduce that event.

He thought that if the flames accidentally approached the logs and the logs caught fire, perhaps he could bring the logs closer to the flames! And so he did! He approached the fire with a long log and leaned it against the flames. The log caught fire in turn, and the Rondella Habilis realized that he had as many as two options! He could either pass fire from one log to another or keep a fire burning, adding wood, as long as he needed it.

Thanks to his Discovery, Rondella was able to enable his entire community to learn how to cook meat and to use fire for warmth during the long, cold winters.

As time passed and with practice, Rondella acquired a whole series of knowledge that led him to evolve more and more, becoming smarter and wiser, and all those skills that Rondella Habilis had developed were passed down from generation to generation.

Physically, too, I must say he improved quite a bit! His posture was more and more like that of modern man, and his features had also changed a lot. He no longer looked like a leftover from a zoo! Oh God, he was still ugly, but at least, looking at his face, he didn't make you want a nice pair of cataracts!"

"Holy washers, Grandpa! Take it easy!" Said Rondella annoyed.

"Heh heh... Sorry, buddy boy..."

Anyway, You should have seen what devilry he had invented! With stone and wood, he had made axes, hammers, chisels, drills, saws built using the strong and sharp teeth of Reprobodont - that would be a kind of prehistoric shark - and then brushes made of hair with which he painted unthinkable things on the cave walls.

In short, The Washer Habilis had become a 'Rondella Sapiens.'

He had learned to work stone masterfully and continued to build more and more sophisticated, polished and finished tools. All these inventions enabled man to cultivate edible plants, build fences where he could raise animals, etc., etc. And whenever he finished a new invention he would immediately run to show it to the rest of the group so that everyone could benefit from it.

The downside, however, was that all of this became a cause for quarrel among the other pairs in the group, because all the females were constantly telling their respective males, "The male... - now I don't know what the Rondella Sapiens' wife was called.... Let's make it 'Gabriella,' for example. - 'Gabriella's male is an exemplary husband! You don't even know how to put a nail in the wall!" And the males in the group began to dislike him more and more, partly because he was good-looking too, by the standard of the time, and, besides, the more time passed, the more he improved evolutionarily!

"Ouh, Rondella, who knows what happened then, right? I say, to get back to you, of course genetics is a mystery, there must have been some kind of involution that..." said Grandpa turning to Rondella.

"Go ahead." Interrupted, threateningly, Rondella.

The other members of the group were increasingly envious and angry.

The males said nasty things about the Rondella Sapiens because he was more desirable than they, and the females gossiped about Gabriella because envy ate them up.

Thus the primitive Rondella found themselves isolated,

marginalized and with not even a 'soul to chat with.

Time passed slowly. In the cave of the lonely Rondella Sapiens the days were a succession of repeated gestures and already heard silences.

One fine day, while the Rondella Sapiens - whom from now on, for simplicity's sake, we shall call 'Piergiorgio' - was busy tidying up his rudimentary laboratory, Gabriella came in and asked him, "Excuse me, Piergiorgio, but don't you find me a little fat?" And Piergiorgio, very evasively and with terror painted on his face, replied, "Uh!" Then Gabriella exclaimed, "And stop it, you jerk! I mean it! Look at my belly, it's swelling!" And Piergiorgio said, "But no, you furry little meatball, um, you must have eaten something that created a little air in your belly, that's all."

Soon the Rondellas realized that it was not aerophagy at all, in fact Gabriella gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Well, 'beautiful' always by the standards of the time.

This little babe totally turned their lives upside down, and neither of them had the slightest idea how to take care of a child! But fortunately, nature always has a solution to everything, and at that point, parental instincts ran to their aid.

Despite the parental instincts trying their best, however, the new parents were a total mess.

Not only was their life a disaster as they moved from place to place without ever having any stability, but Gabriella hadn't slept in two weeks, the baby was annoying worse than an anal fistula, and the Rondella sapiens kept telling themselves how all this could have been avoided if that day 'the stork,' instead of doing her dirty work, had gone to play soccer.

Little Jason - let's pretend that was the child's name - was insufferable, as capricious as if he were a Broadway star and had driven Piergiorgio to exasperation.

One fine day, after a Crudelópode hunt, while strolling along the seashore, Swallow came across a small wooden log that had an unmistakable anthropomorphic shape. He picked it up and noticed that it was just all there: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and a small body. Well, certainly not well defined.... They were as one might find them on a centuries-old olive tree trunk, all twisted in on itself and unmistakably reminding us of a human form.

Arriving at the cave, as he did every time, he entered listlessly, with an overwhelming instinct to emigrate to Mexico, greeted by Gabriella's exasperated screams and Little Jason's desperate crying that had no intention of subsiding.

Suddenly, as if by magic, as if a shamanic rite had interceded some higher force, Little Jason stopped whimpering.

The parents were stunned, in disbelief, wondering what on earth was the cause of that miracle.

Then, all of a sudden, they noticed that Little Jason was leaning out of his "very comfortable" granite high chair trying to grab the wooden log his father had brought home.

Rondella, still dumbfounded, handed the wooden log into the hands of the little boy, who, as soon as he grabbed it, put on a huge smile, a sight they had never witnessed before!

From that day on, the Rondella family became a serene and happy family, and Little Jason became an adorable child, always accompanied by his inseparable woody friend.

Piergiorgio was so grateful to that log of wood that, little by little, he began to modify it, making it more and more like a sapien: first he added two small logs to it to act as arms, then two more to make legs, and then lots of decorative details like shells and natural stones... In short, the result was amazing, and as soon as it was finished, he went straight to the cave to give Little Jason that adorable little

puppet!

On the way back, about halfway there, he crossed paths with a member of his group-let's pretend his name was Mario-who, with his usual envious, rancor-filled eyes, went up to him to attack him and began to enunciate the ritual words that I will list below, in chronological order:

- 1) "Ehy, watch it, jerk!" And he gave him a shove.*
- 2) "What are you looking at!" And gave him a shove.*
- 3) "You don't know who I am!" Another shove.*
- 4) "You think you're smarter than us Habilis, huh? Huh?"*
- 5) "I'm talking to you, loser!" Another shove.*

Then, all of a sudden, the bully's head lowered causing his eyes to fall on the wooden puppet. He opened his eyes wide and his trembling hands slowly approached the puppet, and the closer they got the more Piergiorgio, for fear that Mario would want to break it, backed away trying to protect it from his clutches.

At one point, when the Rondella Sapiens had managed to get a few steps away, Mario took an incredible leap, like a hungry lion, and wrapped himself around his neck! Holy crap, what apprehension!!!

Rondella tried to wriggle out with all the strength he had, because he was convinced that this criminal was trying to choke him! But since, as we mentioned earlier, the Rondellas have never been inclined to either physical activity or combat sports, he did not succeed.

Just when he had now decided to let go of his inauspicious fate and surrender himself into the skeletal arms of the old "lady with the scythe," Rondella noticed something strange: as the seconds ticked by, he kept breathing! That is, he was not dying!

Then she realized that she was not choking him, she was

hugging him!!! Ahahahahah! Do you understand!!! She was hugging him!!! Like females! Aaaaahahaha!"

"Excuse me, Grandpa..." Said Rondella. "I find your view of this event rather superficial. Feelings are feelings. A hug has no gender. It is a manifestation of affection, of a healthy feeling, of a beneficial exchange of positive energy..."

"Rondella, I'm telling the story. Go get waxed." Said Grandpa, teasing him.

So this redneck hugged him really hard, and since the Rondella Sapiens was prone to these 'glycemic' things, he was not at all displeased by it; in fact, he was pleasantly surprised that this little puppet had caused this sudden change of mood in that handsome little bundle!

Still excited by the scene he had witnessed, Piergiorgio decided to leave the wooden puppet with that repentant bully, and he was infinitely grateful!

Rondella Sapiens was happy that the creature had gained him a new friend, so he greeted Mario warmly and resumed his walk to the cave.

The next day Rondella returned to the same place and looked for another log of wood, but he could not find a single one that even remotely resembled a sapien. So she decided to get a nice plump one of the same kind and go back to her workshop to carve it and try to make it look like one. So he did! He built a new puppet and little Jason was delighted!

Meanwhile, Mario, the repentant bully, met with other members of the group over the next few days, and everyone who saw the strange figurine fell in love with it and began to long for one.

At that point, all members of the group went to the Rondella Sapiens to ask him to build a puppet and he was completely overwhelmed with requests!

Gradually, the community began to fill up with puppets, anyone who owned a Rondella puppet was completely incapable of negative feelings, and the group became cohesive and supportive again as it once was, eventually creating a real stable village.

With all those puppets to build, however, Rondella could no longer perform basic survival activities.

He could no longer go hunting and cultivate the garden! He absolutely had to find a solution, and very quickly too, otherwise his family would starve to death!

He then established that, with each delivery, the recipient of the puppet would have to bring him something in return: Some food, some skins to clothe him and his family, in short, whatever was useful for daily life. Here, then, at this precise moment in history, barter began and the first form of labor activity in human history was created.

"Ooooh, but 'Thank you very much' to your ancestors, dear Washer! All mankind will be grateful to you, forever and ever, for condemning it to a life of toil and sweat... But what were you thinking of, damn you!!!" Said Grandfather Emilio, turning sharply toward Monsieur Rondella. "Let's go on..."

The fact that Rondella no longer had to migrate from place to place was a good thing. In the meantime, he enlarged his workshop exponentially, and then, with all the time he had to devote to his work, he had the opportunity to experiment with new types of processing until he discovered metals. Metals were indeed a revolution! It was here, in fact, that human civilization entered powerfully and forcefully into the

well-known 'ancient age'.

"Oh, yes, dear Madame 'Daunbailò'..."

"It's 'Dubois,' Monsieur Emilio!"

"Yes yes, whatever you say... Everything starts from here. Human evolution, progress, all the technological and scientific discoveries made in the coming centuries... All of this was only possible because one curious, ignorant little human being had the intuition, the hunch that mere animals on two legs could be more than a container of bones, flesh and muscle, leading all his kind to be the strongest and most intelligent species in the entire known universe. I mean, that is, um, it could have been the most intelligent species."

"This legend is really incredible..." I said, incredulously, to my interlocutors.

"Legend?! what legend, Mrs. Babbà?!" Blurted out the creature.

"'Dubois, Monsieur Emilio!" Oh, that's all right... Sorry! I didn't mean to imply that..." I replied regretfully.

"Don't mind him, Madame Dubois, Grandpa is a bit rough in his manners! He only meant to say that none of what he told is a figment of imagination. This story has been passed down in my family for generations!"

"It is mind-blowing! Only one thing is not clear to me.... If it is the Ionia wood that has these powers, would it work even if it were a simple log of wood?"

"No. In the most absolute way. Or rather, it would only work if a human being desired that very log of wood. Now let me ask you a question: if you saw a log of wood on the ground, would you be attracted to it?"

"mmmh, no. I guess not."

"Exactly! A human being, when he or she is very young, tends to become attached to a puppet because it gives him or her security, a certain warmth that recalls the presence of the parents even when they are not near. And that is exactly what happens with our little robots! Adults become attached again to an 'idol,' let's call it that, that conveys the same feelings to them." That's why Washer Habilis and his son were attracted to it, because that wooden log had a funny anthropomorphic shape! It was a puppet! And Mario, the bully, was also attracted to it because Rondella had added legs, arms and decorated it! All three of them had longed for it!"

"This story is... I mean, you will understand that I find it hard to believe.... Automata, human energy! È... it's really crazy!" I said, increasingly fascinated.

"Genius and madness have something in common, both live in a different world from the one that exists for others,' Schopenhauer said."

In the middle of our conversation, all of a sudden, I heard the big grandfather clock chiming at half past. I was so immersed in that fantastic journey, in that surreal world, that I completely forgot about my own life, so I gasped.

"My goodness, it's Noon! My husband will be back in

the house by now! He will be worried! I have to run, Monsieur Swallow, thank you so much for your help!"

"You're welcome, Madame," he said, kissing my hand. "We have a buggy, allow me to have our Camellia accompany you." Then he turned to the creature. "Grandpa, could you call, please..."

"Yes, yes of course, right away. CARMELA! CARMELAAA!" Shouted Grandfather.

Into the room, like a fury, throwing open the door, came a stout, tall, awkward woman.

"For the hundredth time, you senile old man, my name is 'Camelia'! Not 'Carmela'!" She said loudly, turning to Grandfather.

I think she was some kind of maid but she didn't give the idea at all, because she treated everyone in a very austere tone.

"Madame Dubois, may I introduce our beloved Camellia? The pillar of this house. You know, she raised me like a son since my mother left us because of malaria." Said Rondella.

"My pleasure, Camelia, thank you for your willingness." I said.

"But you are welcome Madame. You, today, have been a breath of fresh air, in this den of fools!" She replied ironically.

We went into the shed, Camelia opened the door, and we entered an ancient room. Along the walls was a multitude of disused farm tools and old wine barrels on which were resting, probably for years, dusty glass bottles joined together by very thin strands of cobweb. On the floor, a few large glass demijohns, some smaller ones covered with straw, and also lots of olive wood stacked for the winter. From one side wall to the other, about fifty centimeters from the large barrel vault, ran iron wires spaced about a meter apart that were used, Camelia explained to me, to dry tobacco.

In the center of the room was a small wooden buggy, all decorated, with the shafts resting on two bricks placed vertically.

"Would you mind moving, Madame? I have to go out in the buggy..." Camelia asked me politely.

She took one of the two rods and raised it as if she were lifting a chicken feather. She then dragged the buggy out of the shed and walked toward the barn. After a few minutes I heard the sound of the buggy approaching pulled by what I thought would be a horse. As soon as it was visible I discovered, to my surprise, that the buggy was being pulled by a cute little donkey who, as soon as he saw me, let out a loud braying sound, almost as if he was happy to see me, as if he wanted to say hello! Then he vibrated his long ears, shaking his head, and I reached out to pet him.

"Oh, it looks like "Gauss"⁴ really likes you! Come up, Madame, You wouldn't want your husband to give you away!" Said Camellia.

4 Name given to the little donkey in honor of 'Johann Friedrich Carl Gauss,' German mathematician, astronomer and physicist (1777-1855)

We headed toward the driveway and stopped in front of the gateway, where Rondella and the old automaton were waiting for us.

"Have a good trip home, Madame." Rondella said to me.

"Call me 'Florence.'"

"'Florence'. What a splendid name..." She repeated, smiling. Then he added, "See to it that your presence here was not just a fortuitous and isolated event."

We looked into each other's eyes, then I looked away. "Thank you for your help, Monsieur Rondella. And thank you for... Thank you for everything."

We left Cortésia. Camelia took me home and I told my husband about the misadventure that had happened to me. I did not tell everything. My encounter with Monsieur Rondella I decided to keep it to myself. I told that I had found refuge in the home of an elderly peasant couple. Not because he was jealous, no, but because I wanted it to be my memory and no one else's. I think the guilt of wishing, even for a moment, that I would not want to leave that place and never return home will never go away.

Over the next few weeks Rondella and I met in the village from time to time. Although he had no need to, he always strolled along leaning on a stick with a Robottino head for a knob, fully dressed and wearing a cap on his head. I could feel his presence thanks to the patter of the stick on the pavement and, punctually, after searching for him with our eyes, our glances would cross but neither of us would ever

take the initiative to approach the other; each time we would just smile and nod. Then my husband and I decided to stay in Italy, but we moved here, up north. To Cortésia I never returned; he never saw him again.

I took my leave of Madame Dubois and returned home. I was so excited by her story. I asked her if she knew the exact spot, but she told me that she had no idea; besides, she had gotten there by accident and after almost fifty years, despite having seen the way back, it would be impossible to remember. She told me only the village where it was built, nothing else; she knew neither the exact spot nor whether it was still inhabited, but I promised myself that one day I would find it, even at the cost of discovering only ruins and a pile of rubble.

To be continued...