

“The Tunnel” by Tiziano Mancini

Translation by Giulia Marchetti (Giulia is a student of foreign languages and literature at the University of Urbino)

I'm not going to bore you with the reasons that have induced me to commit suicide; you are certainly not going to be the one who makes me change my mind. Actually, if you knew my reasons, you'd totally agree with me.

The fact is that right now I'm at the wheel looking for a wall to crash into. You might even show me where to find one. Damn it, you really have to step on the gas in a Fiat Panda if you want to be sure.

I get on the highway.

90...100...120. That'll do it.

Now what? There's no wall, just guardrails, and all head-on collisions are beyond the strip of oleanders in the median. There's the tunnel. Right, there's a nice big traffic divider just after it. I vent all my rage against the gas pedal and I plunge into the darkness. I'll see the light again for just a second, the last light of my life, and that'll be the end of it. A few hundred meters more.

The light. Where is it?

The last moments are truly interminable. To think you have only one more minute left to live is just like when you're twenty and your whole life is ahead of you. The rest of your life is still an entire lifetime. Some moments in life are like flirtatious women: they reject you just when they seem closest. In the same way, death stretches the last moment into an infinity. You don't die. You just lie there on the shore waiting to reach the sea. Nothing happens and you expect everything to happen. So, raise the anchor, then face the storm and come back; if you can, tell me what the ocean is like. Only then will I be willing to listen to you, because the man who stays in the harbor knows nothing of the sea.

This tunnel is really long.

It seemed shorter. The Panda shakes terribly and my thoughts, already incoherent, merge with the noise of metal. Even the car senses death. Yes, she too will die. The moaning of the metal. No mechanic will ever be able to save her, sacrificial lamb, Truffaut's green room. I've lost the syntax; it's hurled itself out of one of the windows and the *consecutio temporum* out of the other. Allow me at last to disrupt the rhythms of my eloquence: no one is compelled to understand me anymore, and I understand myself completely. The party's on and I'm the only guest, privileged, craving for that which is out of the ordinary, but I'll soon fall into line again; it's just a mental holiday. Unburden yourself: you're almost there.

Where the hell is this wall? How long is this goddamn tunnel?

I'm past the bend. Straight ahead into the dark. I can't see the light of the exit into broad daylight. Not even a glimmer. I look in the rear-view mirror. Nothing but darkness behind me. I must have driven

through this tunnel a thousand times, and every time I said, “Why the hell do I even bother to turn on the headlights if I’m already through it?”, and now... . I keep on going. Half an hour has gone by. Half an hour! The car keeps on screaming, travelling towards the impact. I’ve never taken my foot off the pedal.

An hour.

That’s it.

I stop the car. The fan sounds like an airplane in a nosedive. I get out. Asphalt highway, cement wall. I touch it: normal, very normal. I must have made a wrong turn. This must be a new tunnel.

I take off again.

No one coming in the other direction. Another half hour of driving.

Enough of this.

I make a U-turn. Even a head-on collision would do the trick. Another two hours of aimless driving.

Exhausted, out of gas. The car stops, she is safe.

I get out. I see my image penetrating into the depths in search of a collision that it cannot find. I just stand there and watch it; I can’t help myself.

A shadow in the dark that moves away, but does not disappear.

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