

YPSILON NOIR

by Alessandra Calanchi and Marco Monari

translation by Luca Sartori (Student of foreign languages and literature, University of Urbino)

I bought my Lancia Ypsilon way back in 2001. I remember because it was the year the Twin Towers collapsed – no link between the two events, obviously: it's just a day I can't forget. I'd bought it just a few days before. It still smelled like a new car smells. It had that particular smell that you're not sure if you like or not – you know what I mean? A smell that you just can't forget. I was in my car when, switching on a radio station at random, I found out about the tragedy. Unlike many others, I didn't learn about it from the famous scenes of the twin collapses endlessly broadcast on TV. No, not me. I learned about it from my Ypsilon car radio; so, the shock of the tragedy that was taking place overwhelmed me and mingled with the scent of my brand-new car. It's as simple as that.

In the first few months, my pretty little baby amazed me: it was so easy to drive with its fine-tuned brakes, perfect clutch, smooth stick shift, and polished black bodywork. It was too small a car for a big man like me, I was well aware of this; it was a car more suitable for a girl student or a young secretary than a fifty-year-old man. Nevertheless, I would not have traded it for any other car to get around town: it was swift, sinuous, graceful, and easy to park, and would come to be a quiet, faithful companion, tireless and reliable.

It's unbelievable: I got up to 100,000 km without even realizing it. It goes without saying that I kept it in a garage and took it for regular check-ups at the mechanic's. My Ypsilon didn't have a single scratch and I used to take it to the carwash just to give it some relief from the intense heat of summer or to have it cleaned up after a slushy, smoggy winter's day.

At one point I had to go abroad for work. This was something new to me, something out of the ordinary – I'm a man who loves his routine – yet I accepted my boss's proposal without hesitation. I had not been away from my city for years except for short trips in my own country, and I had always used my car on those occasions. I must confess that I was excited at the idea of going abroad, even if only for a short time. I was ready to board a plane, something which I had not done in over twenty years, and so I did it without qualms. I stayed abroad – more precisely in Spain – for a few days. I did work of course, but I also spent my time visiting museums and strolling about the unknown and fascinating streets. I came back reluctantly and promised myself that I would seek new opportunities to relive those pleasant experiences again.

I was happily walking along carrying a small cabin bag and pulling a trolley that resounded in the garage's comforting silence, when at a certain distance I noticed that my car, parked in the space where I had left it, had a visibly dented door. As I came closer, I realized that all the windows were shattered: the seats inside were covered with tiny, sharp splinters, and even the side-view mirrors had been pried out. I was more astonished than annoyed, and what astonished me most was the fury that had obviously egged the hand of whoever had resolved to commit this act of butchery. How could this be? Why had only my car, among the many, been the subject of such devilish rage? I caressed a seat delicately and then withdrew my bleeding hand. I couldn't get in, let alone drive it in such a state. That was for sure. I phoned for roadside assistance and prepared myself for the long string of nuisances that lay ahead (paying for the tow truck, phoning the insurance company, talking to the upholsterer, reporting it to the Carabinieri, etc.), all things that did actually keep me busy over the following days.

At last my beloved Ypsilon was returned to me. It was gorgeous, spotless, black and beaming: in a word, new – although now, I must confess, for a long time infinitesimal splinters of glass would come out of the pearl grey seats' most hidden folds and would stick in my hand or my hip. They didn't really hurt me but reminded me of the painful event, as if to make sure I would never forget it.

In the meantime, I had just about reached 130,000 km. I began to think that perhaps the time had come to get a new car. But I wasn't sure. Did I really want a new city runabout? Or rather, at the height of my unassuming career, had the time come to grant myself a more powerful machine? Moreover, did I want a new car or a used one? While I was considering my options, I happened to spend a weekend with some friends in the mountains. We left by bus. It was winter, there was plenty of snow and we managed to get a lot of skiing in to our great satisfaction, just like in the good-old days. I came back tired, suntanned and content. I was just a little worried about my car, so as soon as I got back, I looked about myself in the large square: my car was still there, beautiful and faithful. No damage. What a relief.

I stayed around to say goodbye to my friends, telling them the latest anecdotes, joking and shaking hands. I saw them all leave. I wasn't in a hurry: by then it was one in the morning, but the following day was Sunday. I could take as long as I wanted. I got into my car with a smile on my face, ready to start the engine and

enjoy the cosy warmth of my Ypsilon. But when I turned the key: nothing. No sound. No lights on the dashboard. Silence.

The battery had died while I was away, of course. Damn! I thought to myself. Nevertheless, I was sure I had had it replaced no longer than two months before. Could I possibly be wrong? Anyway, it was useless to waste time, or maybe even risky. I immediately tried to call my friends on their cell phones: no answer. The funny thing is that just a short time before we had been joking about people who keep their cell phones switched on all the time, especially at night. My breath was starting to fog up the windows. Shit! The temperature was far below zero. I searched for the roadside service number: I had always kept it somewhere along with the registration papers. But it wasn't there. Feeling dejected, I grabbed my cell phone again to try to connect to the Internet to find an emergency number. It died the very moment I laid my fingers on it. The batteries were dead. Damn it! And the car battery charger? I was sure I had put it somewhere. But where? In any case, it would have been no use to me since the starter didn't work. "What an idiot," I thought to myself. You can guess what I did next: I started walking home. I left my bags and skis (the skis on the roof of the car, of course). I walked and walked. I walked until I could no longer feel my hands and feet. Once I was home, I found the roadside assistance number. I phoned. The car was retrieved. I could not say the same for my skis: in less than three hours they had been ripped off the rack with a tool that had destroyed half of my car's roof, scratched the door, and broken the rear window. I was at home at least.

Last week I came to the solemn decision. I saw the car I was looking for: a nice dark green Freelander, massive, elegant, perfectly suited to me. I stepped into the dealer's office and purchased it. It was love at first sight. I thought to myself: the time has come give up on that city runabout, old, spoiled *and* jinxed. It's time to buff up my public image and turn over a new leaf. Bye bye, Ypsilon. Your time has come.

I got home and went downstairs to the garage to start emptying out my car. I opened the door and... my Ypsilon was gone. I was sure I had parked it in the garage, damn it! How forgetful could I be? Where could I have left it? At the post office? At the supermarket? At work? What a pain!

Then the telephone rings. Unknown number. "Hello?", I answer. It's the Carabinieri. They ask me if I know that an Ypsilon, license plate IM 605NE, of my property, is now out in a ditch along a country road. I don't know what to say. At first I think someone is playing a joke on me. Then I see a gaping hole in the garage door. I hadn't noticed it because I had come in through the main entrance. The gash is really huge. A man could get through it easily. Or, better still, a car. I almost forget that there's an officer waiting for my answer on the other end of the line.

I give an unemotional response, and in the meantime I start walking upstairs again. The officer is assuming that my car has been stolen, crashed into a post, and has rolled down into a ditch. But there's one disquieting detail: the thieves had left not a single trace. Nothing. Nowadays, when just a single drop of saliva or sweat is enough to get a DNA sample. I ask him where the place is and say goodbye respectfully. I call a taxi and wait for it. The taxi comes and I leave.

I arrive at the scene of the crime. My Ypsilon is a just a balled up heap of metal. It looks more like a homicide than a theft, or better still, like a suicide. The Carabinieri are chuckling. I am not. I see the plate, half-destroyed and soiled with mud. The numbers and letters can hardly be made out, and the number "5" is completely deleted. The number "6" looks more like the letter "G". The zero is slightly squashed.

IM--GO-NE.