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The translation of dialogues in suspense novels: a personal translation of Elizabeth Day's "Magpie"

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Introduction

*Every human, like a moon,
has his own dark side.*

Mark Twain

Many scholars believe that Wilkie Collins is the author who published the first thriller ever, *The Woman in White* (1859). From then on, there has always been some sort of ambivalence regarding the thriller genre, associated with a successful mode of crime writing and at the same time as lacking narrative merit, thus relegating the thriller to the most undeserving of genres (Glover 2003:135). So why are thrillers so irresistible for their readers? They are normally action-packed books, paced with moments of suspense, tension and fear. Heroes and heroines fight villains, risk their lives and solve mysteries that leave readers on the edge of their seats. All thrillers hide mysteries that make us eager to know what is going to happen next and trigger our lust for adrenaline. As James Patterson writes in his book *Thriller: Stories To Keep You Up All Night* (2016):

Thrillers provide such a rich literary feast...this openness to expansion is one of the genre's most enduring characteristics. But what gives the variety of thrillers a common ground is the intensity of emotions they create, particularly those of apprehension and exhilaration, of excitement and breathlessness, all designed to generate that all-important thrill. By definition, if a thriller doesn't thrill, it's not doing its job.

Psychological thrillers in particular are considered terrifying because they shine a light on the dark side of the human mind. We are maybe used to definite patterns of human life and behaviour and when we see a disturbance in that pattern, we need to understand what happened to that broken mind that makes both men and women cold-hearted criminals. As Simpson (2010:187) states: "The "psycho thriller" is a subgenre of the versatile thriller genre in which crime is represented as an outward manifestation of the internal workings of the pathological individual psyche". This means action is present,

but the physical danger the characters face is usually the concrete manifestation of a psychological imbalance.

The psycho thriller has now become a famous worldwide read genre, especially after the publication of novels such as *The Girl on the Train* (2015) by Paula Hawkins or *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn. Its popularity can be seen in the fact that there are also films, television series, videogames or anime that have become very popular among the audience. They are exciting, sometimes even disturbing to read or watch, and the fact that it messes with our minds is probably what makes it so attractive. In addition, their translation has been central in spreading what has been seen as an originally Anglo-American genre (Saego 2014:2).

The present dissertation attempts to explore the complexities of the translation of dialogues in suspense novels discussing the various difficulties it might involve, in form and content, through the analysis of the major issues I encountered while translating selected chapters from *Magpie*, a psychological thriller written by British author Elizabeth Day, released in the United Kingdom in September 2021 and not available in Italian up to now.

In the first chapter, I offer an analysis of the main strategies and techniques used to translate literary texts. Literary translation is in fact a complex matter, in which the translator has to mediate between the original text and the target audience, and he/she can choose from a number of strategies and approaches to do so. Then, I introduce suspense as a narrative device and explain how it is created in fictional dialogues. In the last section, I outline the difficulties a translator may face while dealing with the translation of dialogues in suspense novels, focusing in particular on colloquial language, cultural references, humour and suspense itself.

In the second chapter, I present the genre of the novel I translated. *Magpie* is a psychological thriller, as it respects its typical attributes that have come to define the genre, but I believe it also blends perfectly with a new contemporary genre called domestic noir. This genre represents a specific trend, that is psychological thrillers with

female protagonists, and are set primarily in homes, which are represented as the most dangerous place to be. After presenting the author and her work, I focus on the main themes it deals with, which are infertility and mental health issues. I found both topics extremely relevant especially because they are explored from a female perspective, therefore I decided to investigate them through an analysis of the three main characters, Kate, Marisa and Annabelle.

The third and fourth chapter present my own translation of selected chapters of the book and the examination of the translation process respectively. In the last chapter, I highlight the major strategies I adopted to create a comprehensible and readable target text and how I dealt with the aforementioned linguistic issues.

1. The translation of dialogues in suspense novels

In this initial chapter I will first introduce the main strategies and techniques used to translate literary texts. After that, I will introduce suspense as a narrative device and how it is created in fictional dialogues. In the last section, I will try to outline the difficulties a translator may face while dealing with the translation of dialogues in suspense novels. This theoretical framework is necessary in order to enter into the mind-set of this research: in the last chapter, I will not only present how my work as a translator developed, but also how suspense was created by the author in the book I worked on, as well as an analysis of how I dealt with the translation issues presented here.

1.1 Translating literary texts: an ongoing challenge

Literary texts normally enjoy high social prestige. Their aim is to arouse emotions or entertain and they are judged as fictional, whether fact-based or not. They deliver messages or experiences and their meanings can be interpreted in many different ways. Sometimes they use poetic language or language forms such as word-play or rhyme. They are characterised by heteroglossia, depicting different voices with different viewpoints (Jones in Baker and Saldanha 2019:295). A single text may not display all these characteristics, but the more it does, the more literary it appears to readers. The translation of such texts still dominates theoretical debates. The main objective of a translator is in fact to make the original text accessible to the readership for whom they are translating and mediate between their audience and the text.

Venuti (2008) defines translation as a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source text (ST) is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language (TL), which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation. However, translating is not only a matter of form and content, it does not mean translating literally from a source language to a target language, but it is much more. Bassnett (2002) points out that translation cannot provide full equivalence, so the outcome is in most cases an interpretation of the source text. Therefore, the translator does not take only the

linguistic features into account during the translation, and as a consequence a process of decoding and recoding takes place (Bassnett 2002:23). Before moving on, I shall open a parenthesis on the concept of equivalence. It is clear that when we try to describe the relationship between a given source language (SL) and a given TL in translation, we necessarily come across this notion. However, equivalence is a fundamental, but also controversial issue in translation studies. House (1997) describes it as follows:

The notion of equivalence is the conceptual basis of translation and, to quote Catford, 'the central problem of translation practice is that of finding TL (target language) equivalents. A central task of translation theory is therefore that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence'.

Even though equivalence is here presented as the basis of translation, there is much controversy around the nature of this notion. Some translation theorists have tried to (re)define the equivalence concept and consider it an integral part of the discipline, even if they understand it in different ways; others question its universal usefulness.

In particular, when addressing the thorny problem of equivalence, the structuralist Jakobson (1959) stresses the fact that there cannot be full equivalence between two words. According to his theory, translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes (Jakobson 1959:233). This means that two languages might be consistently different in grammar and structure and translators may struggle to find equivalents. He acknowledges that whenever there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loanwords or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions (Jakobson 1959.:234). He compares English and Russian: he cites the example of *cheese* in English and states that it is not identical to the Russian *syr*, since the concept of cottage cheese cannot be included in the latter. As a consequence, he concludes that in such cases where there is no literal equivalent for a particular source text word or sentence, it is up to the translator to chose the most suitable way to render it. Therefore, Jakobson does not state that translation is impossible, but underlines the differences in the structure and terminology of language.

Nida (1964) contributes to this debate as well. He argues that there are two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. In another edition of the same work Nida and Taber (1982) provide a more detailed explanation of each type of equivalence. In particular, in formal equivalence (or correspondence) the target text very much resembles the source text in both form and content, whereas in dynamic equivalence the effort lies in the fact that the source text message is conveyed in the target text as naturally as possible (Nida and Taber 1982:200). Dynamic equivalence therefore sees translation as the closest natural equivalent to the original, but this concept is not always useful for literary translation: dynamic equivalence is mostly message oriented, while literary translation also concerns the ways in which a given message is expressed (Lefevere 1992:8).

More recently, Baker (1992) adopts a more neutral approach to the issue: she argues that equivalence is a relative notion because it is influenced by a variety of linguistic and cultural factors (Baker 1992:6). The chapters of the book I used as a source, *In other words*, are indeed structured around different kinds of equivalence, that is, at the level of word, phrase, grammar, text and pragmatics. We can find terms such as grammatical, textual and pragmatic equivalence. She makes a distinction between word-level and above-word-level equivalence. She acknowledges the importance of individual words during the translation process because the translator looks at first at the words as single units in order to find their equivalent in the TL. Words have therefore a complex nature, since a single word can be assigned different meanings in different languages; as a consequence, parameters such as number, gender and tense should be taken into consideration when translating a word (Baker 1992:11-12). Grammatical equivalence refers to the diversity of grammatical categories across languages and the difficulty of finding an equivalent term in the TL due to the variety of grammatical rules across languages. In fact, she stresses that differences in grammatical structures may significantly change the way the information or message is carried across. As a consequence, the translator may be forced to add or delete information in the TT because of the lack of specific grammatical categories.

Some of the major categories that often pose problems for translators are number, voice, person, gender, tense and aspect. On the other hand, textual equivalence refers to equivalence that may be achieved between a ST and TT in terms of cohesion and information. Baker (1992) argues that the feature of texture is of immense importance for the translators since it facilitates their comprehension and analysis of the ST and helps them to produce a cohesive and coherent text in the TL. The translators' decision to maintain (or not) the cohesive ties as well as the coherence of the SL text mainly rests on three main factors; the target audience, the purpose of the translation and the text type. Lastly, pragmatic equivalence deals mainly with implicature. Baker (1992) claims that the term implicature is used to refer to what is implied and not to literal meaning. In other words, the focus of interest is not on what is explicitly said but what is intended or implied in a given context. The role of the translator is to work out the meaning of implicatures in the ST and transfer them to the TT. The primary aim of the translator should be to recreate the intended message of the SL in such a way so that it becomes accessible and comprehensible to the target audience.

The main problem with equivalence seems to be that translation scholars cannot agree on the kind and degree of equivalence needed to constitute real equivalence (Lefevere 1992:10). There are in fact objections to the notion of equivalence: Snell-Hornby (1988) for instance suggests that the notion of equivalence in the English speaking world has become so vague as to be useless and criticises it as "imprecise, ill-defined, and as representing an illusion of symmetry between languages" (Snell-Hornby 1988:22). It has also been criticised as having drawbacks, such as lacking consistency, losing intrinsic interrelationship between situational and linguistic factors of communicative interaction, excluding target language texts which do not satisfy the criterion of equivalence from translation proper, not accounting for culture-specific differences, ignoring cultural aspects, treating source texts as the only standard, to which the translator has to subordinate any decision and perpetuating low social prestige of translators (Nord 1997:44). The Italian scholar Umberto Eco also (2000) discusses the concept of equivalence in translation and points out that equivalence in meaning is not possible, even we are presented with a perfect case of synonymy, as there are episodes in which the referential equivalence does not coincide with the connotative one (Eco

2010:25-26). As one can see, the notion of equivalence is a problematic and controversial issue in the field of translation studies and will probably continue to cause heated debates. It is likely that equivalence will remain central to the field of translation.

Going back to translation, it is therefore an act of communication involving several participants, that is the sender, the translator, and the readers (Venuti 2008:19). In the case of *Magpie*, the potential readership is a worldwide one, as this work could be translated into many languages like Day's two previous bestsellers *The Party* (2017) and the essay *How to Fail: Everything I've Ever Learned From Things Going Wrong* (2019). Translation becomes therefore a global practice in which a whole culture should possibly be conveyed through the written word. As Neruda says (cited in Venuti 2013:43)

The translator's double responsibility is to find out what the author has said in his language, and then to say this in the translator's own language with as much fidelity to the author's words and intent as is permitted by the differences between the two languages. He must, in short, make the language curtain as transparent as possible, letting the author speak for himself in a new tongue.

Venuti (2008) states in fact that the most important value of a translator has been seen as invisibility. When a target language reader chooses a translated text, the work of the translator is expected to pass unnoticed, as if the translated work was the original one. On this matter, the American translator Norman Shapiro (cited in Venuti 2008:8) writes: "Certainly, my ego and personality are involved in translating, and yet I have to try to stay faithful to the basic text in such a way that my own personality doesn't show." Even though it might seem a fundamental concept, Venuti criticises it quite sharply. He uses this term "to describe the translators' situation and activity in contemporary British and American culture" (cited in Munday 2016:217). In particular, the concept of invisibility refers to the ability of a translator to translate "fluently" in English and to produce a "readable" TT, given the idea of an "illusion of transparency"; this is means

that it refers to the invisibility of the translator's activity within the text itself. According to Venuti:

a translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text - the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation but the "original" (cited in Munday 2016:217-218).

The effect that should be obtained is the illusion of transparency, or, as Venuti (2008:1) explains "The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text.". Venuti discusses the concept of invisibility along with two translation strategies, that is domestication and foreignization which concern the choices a translator has to make when he or she is working on a translation. The link between these three concepts will be explored in a separate section.

1.1.1 The translation process

Whether or not he/she remains invisible, the translator has to carry out a defined set of activities for every translation he/she makes and take important linguistic decisions. According to Jakobsen (2002), the translation process is divided into three distinct phases: orientation, drafting and revision. The first phase, that is orientation, serves as a familiarisation phase, where translators read and interpret the ST before composing the translation (Jakobsen 2002:192). Comprehension is therefore the main feature of this phase, but its length and the activities performed in it differ among translators: some of them jot down words or phrases and carry out research, some of them read the whole ST, whereas certain translators start translating immediately, skipping this phase altogether (Dimitrova 2005:22). In the second phase the translation is drafted: this involves translators reading the ST again, using external resources such as dictionaries or the Internet and evaluating and revising the emerging text (Jakobsen 2002:193). The

last phase is the revision. It is considered a significant part of the translation process, in fact Dimitrova maintains that “[r]evising is [...] an integral part of the translation process, and has important functions in shaping the final TT” (2005:143).

While reading literature on this topic, I found that it encompasses many aspects and activities as far as terminology is concerned. The term ‘revision’ is in fact used to refer to two different activities, that is for when translators check their own work and for when they check the work of others. On this matter, Mossop (2010:167) coins the terms “self-revision” and “other-revision” to distinguish the two different types of work. Apparently, a clear definition of revision does not exist as well (Shih 2006:295), so I will stick to the one provided by Dimitrova. In her opinion, revision is any change to the translated text “made because the first version written down is evaluated as non-optimal in some way by the person translating” (2005:121). In this phase, therefore, translators normally read their own product (or translation made by others) again and modify it according to what seems necessary to change. As I pointed out before, a translator must make some choices while performing his/her work. The production of the TT in fact involves extensive and continuous decision-making activities (Wilss 1998). The translator, in the course of translation, constantly takes decisions and the series of decisions ultimately form the TT.

Surely, the one provided by Jakobsen is not the only translation process model; others could indeed be presented, but what was discovered during the research is that the names given to the three phases are the only thing changing. For instance, the terminology employed by Mossop (2000) is pre-drafting, drafting and post-drafting, but the activities performed in the phases are exactly the same. In the first phase, the translator familiarises himself/herself with the source text (ST); a full version of the translation is produced in the second phase; and the third phase begins “after sentence-by-sentence drafting is complete” (Mossop 2000:40).

1.1.2 Strategies and techniques of translation

It is accepted that a translator can choose among a number of strategies and techniques. However, before dealing with this, it is important to clarify the terminological

difference between ‘method’, ‘techniques’ and ‘translation strategies’. According to Hurtado Albir (2001):

[...] translation *method* means developing a given translation process governed by certain principles that are consistent with the translator’s objective. Consequently, the method is of a supra-individual and conscious nature (although there are times when it can be unconscious) and responds to a global option that runs through the entire text. Translation *technique* is the specific application which can be observed in the product and affects the minor zones of the text. For example, in the translation of a cartoon, a translator may, on occasions, resort to the technique of adapting a cultural referent, but this will not be the reason why the translation will be marked as free, adapted etc. *Strategy* is of an individual and procedural nature and consists of mechanisms used by the translator to solve problems s/he encounters during the translation process, depending on specific needs.¹ (Hurtado Albir 2001: 249-250 translated by Bardaji 2009)

So, for Hurtado Albir, the main difference between technique and strategy is that the former is related to the result, while the latter is related to the process. Method affects the text as a whole, while technique affects small text units. On the same line, for Zabalbeascoa (2000) a strategy is a specific model aimed at resolving a problem or achieving a specific objective. He proposes the term strategy to for any conscious action focused on facilitating the translation task. In contrast, he sees technique as a concept associated with the decision-taking process and also as an acquired skill in accordance with a prescriptive method of procedure (Zabalbeascoa 2000:121). The former includes reading or text analysis strategies, while the latter refers to skills such as calques, modulation or transposition.

¹ The Spanish original: “Consideramos que el *método* traductor supone el desarrollo de un proceso traductor determinado regulado por unos principios en función del objetivo del traductor; el método tiene, por consiguiente, un carácter supraindividual y consciente (aunque a veces puede ser inconsciente) y responde a una opción global que recorre todo el texto. La *técnica* de traducción es la aplicación concreta visible en el resultado, que afecta a zonas menores del texto; así, por ejemplo, en la traducción de un cómic el traductor puede recurrir puntualmente a la técnica de adaptación de un referente cultural y no por ello la traducción será tildada de libre, de adaptación, etc. La *estrategia* es de carácter individual y procesual, y consiste en los mecanismos utilizados por el traductor para resolver los problemas encontrados en el desarrollo del proceso traductor en función de sus necesidades específicas.”

Certainly, a sentence might well be translated word for word, but it is necessary to point out that a single word might have different meanings: for instance the word *boy* has the equivalent *ragazzo* in Italian, but if the context changes and we analyse the expression *Oh, boy!*, this should be translated into *Oddio!* or a similar expression of surprise. The same happens with proverbs: the English proverb *A leopard cannot change its spots* if translated literally becomes “Un leopardo non può cambiare le sue macchie”. However, this translation cannot be accepted, since the Italian language has an equivalent proverb in meaning, that is *Il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio*. In this last case the translator adopts the technique of substitution, in which the translation has very little in common with the source text (Taylor 1998:52). Further translation strategies suggested by Taylor (1998) are: divergence and convergence, amplification and reduction, diffusion and condensation, reordering.

Divergence and Convergence consist in choosing the appropriate term for a translation from a wide range of possibilities. For example, in the case of divergence, the verb *to take* can be translated in many different ways according to the context, such as *prendere, accettare, ricevere, accompagnare, portare via*. Convergence is the opposite practice: nouns such as *commercialista, ragioniere* or *contabile* converge in the English noun *accountant* (Taylor 1998:55).

When using the Amplification technique, the translator has to add some elements to the source text to achieve full comprehensibility, or when essential components for the understanding of a target language reader are taken for granted (Taylor 1998:55). It can also be used to explain a word or a traditional element in the culture of the source text that has no equivalent in the target language, e.g. *Cream Tea* in the English culture is “an afternoon meal consisting of tea to drink and scones with jam and clotted cream to eat. It can also include sandwiches and cakes”, but in Italian the translation is often reduced to *pasticceria*, which is not the same thing, since cream tea is a meal, while “pastry” is only a type of food (Baker 1992:33). Probably, a whole explanation in the target language translation could be appropriate, so that the reader can fully understand what cream tea is. Reduction instead consists in omitting elements of the source text in

the translation because they are considered superfluous, e.g. if we consider the potential beginning of a sentence as *È tutta qui, in estrema sintesi...*, it can be reduced to *In a nutshell*.

Diffusion and Condensation may be mistaken for Amplification and Reduction, but Taylor explains:

While Amplification and Reduction refer to the actual adding or subtracting of elements deemed to be respectively helpful or superfluous in some way, Diffusion and Condensation are concerned with the phenomenon of linguistically slackening or tightening source text expressions for the target text version, that is, providing more or less elaboration.

For example, the typical Italian expression *Magari!*, which has a number of meanings according to the context in which it is used, can be translated in English with the expressions *If only I could!* or *Would that it were!* (Taylor 1998:57) and the same goes for *Boh*: it has no literal meaning, but it refers to a feeling of insecurity about something, so it could be translated as *I don't know* or *I'm not sure*. On the contrary, some expressions undergo condensation, for example the Italian *a buon mercato* is condensed in the English word *cheap* (Taylor 1998:57); similarly, the definition of “someone who is not prone to care much about anything” in Italian is reduced to the word *menefreghista*, or again “an attitude of distrust, scepticism and apathy towards politics” can be translated with *qualunquismo*.

Reordering has to do with the grammar of the language, the position of the elements in a sentence and the necessary order of the words in order to convey meaning. For instance, Italian intransitive structures may be introduced by a verb with the subject placed in the final position, as in *Non è ancora giunto il tempo*. However, it is impossible to use this structure in English because it does not conform to the syntax of the language: the translator should change the order of the words to obtain *The time has not yet come* or *It is not yet time* (Taylor 1998:62).

1.1.3 The link between domestication, foreignization and invisibility

There are many strategies that a translator can use to solve relevant translation issues in a text, but he/she can also choose two different approaches: a domesticating or a foreignizing one (Venuti 2004:20). The first method is an adaptation of the source text to the target language culture, while the second one is a form of evidence of the fact that the translated text is a foreign production. As stated previously, Venuti discusses the condition of British and American translators, thus he always refers to translation from a foreign language into English; he links invisibility to domesticating strategies of translation that obscure the work of translation as well as the foreignness of the original text. One could state that Venuti in fact wants to encourage the visibility of the translator and therefore urge translators to adopt a foreignizing method of translation.

An example of adaptation is represented by the names of some of the characters in the Italian version of the Harry Potter books:

ENGLISH	ITALIAN
Harry Potter	Harry Potter
Ronald Weasley	Ronald Weasley
Hermione Granger	Hermione Granger
Albus Dumbledore	Albus Silente
Severus Snape	Severus Piton

Writers sometimes use names not only to name characters, but also to describe them in some way. Names often contain allusions to a certain word in the language, and said allusion allows readers to characterise characters to a greater extent (Lefevere 1992:39). This is the main reason why proper names can be problematic elements in literary translation, to the point that there is an enduring debate focusing on whether proper names should be translated or not. Some translator scholars in fact argue that proper names should not be translated because they only entail reference, while other scholars, such as Newmark (1988), suggest that proper names should be translated because they are invested with much semantic content and significance. Proper names in fact, other than transmitting knowledge or allusions, can also influence how the reader thinks, thus allowing new interpretations and ideas to be made (Rabadi 2012:40). Therefore, given

the fact that proper names may convey specific meanings, translators need to decide whether they want to transfer this information or not.

As Sanaty (2009) states, one of the major problems faced by translators of literary works is that of proper names, because names are not ordinary words that present a synonym in the target language that can easily be found in a dictionary. This is because each language has certain names whose meanings are culture specific and this meaning is bound to be lost in translation. This issue becomes particularly complicated when covert or nuanced meanings are embedded in said names, especially when they are used metaphorically, as nicknames, or as loaded ordinary nouns (Nyangeri and Wangari 2019:349).

There are various strategies used to translate proper names, such as the aforementioned domestication and foreignization, but Fernandes (2006) also lists rendition, copy, transcription, re-creation, substitution, deletion, addition, transposition, phonological replacement and conventionality as procedures for the translation of personal names.

As the table shows, the names of the three main characters were transferred, or directly copied, into Italian: this is the strategy that preserves foreignization because it transfers names without providing any changes. The alteration of proper names on the other hand is closer to domestication because a name in the target language is used instead of the one of the source language. Other names of the Harry Potter saga in fact underwent major changes. This means that the translator has to analyse the source text carefully and discern the meaning of proper names, so as to find a possible creative translation. As Apostolova (2004) comments:

The alteration of names in translation is deeply rooted in the cultural background of the translator which entails a translator's phonetic and phonological competence, morphological competence, the competence to recognize the complexity of the context, correct and positive attitude to the message, respect for tradition, compliance with the current state of cross-cultural interference of languages, respect for the cultural values and understanding the responsibilities of the translator. The process is realized

through ‘an ear’ that is sensitive and responsive to aesthetic nuances to the extent of capturing the philosophical motivation for using alternative of new name. (Apostolova 2004:14)

As reported in the table above, the meaning of the name of Hogwart’s headmaster, “Albus”, in Latin is “white”. This recalls his white beard and of course his ‘white’ magic. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “dumbledore” is a local variant of ‘bumblebee’ and the author is reported to have said that “she would like to think that Dumbledore, being a music lover, from time to time becomes self-forgetful humming away as he walks in the Hogwarts corridors” (Chiu 2002:1). For an Italian reader, it would have been impossible to understand the reference to the insect, and therefore the translator decided to change the name to a more suitable one; I think that Astrologo in this case decided to turn to Dumbledore’s calm temperament and broad knowledge and chose “Silente” (= ‘silent’), as he conveys safety and always knows what to do in times of crisis (like a silent book).

The name of the strict teacher of potions, “Severus”, means “stern” in Latin and it reflects his personality. The last name “Snape” probably derives from the Old Norse ‘sneypa’ which means ‘to outrage, dishonour, disgrace’, three verbs that are relevant to the character². It was translated into “Piton” which means “python”. It may seem as if the translator misunderstood the name, but actually I think that she decided to use the symbolism of the books: in the whole saga the snake is a symbol associated with Voldemort, and therefore with evil, and is also the symbol of the House of which Snape is the head, that is Slytherin. Furthermore, the name of the House reminds one of the verb ‘to slither’, which means ‘strisciare’, and is precisely what a snake does.

In both cases, the translator domesticated the proper names and used the technique of substitution, in which a TL name replaces a SL name, even though they are formally and/or semantically unrelated. However, the translator in this case acknowledged and respected both the complexity of the context in which the names were set and found a creative yet suitable translation for them. In the case of the *Harry Potter* saga, one could

² Retrieved from www.wizardingworld.com

maintain that the work of the translator is in a condition of both visibility and invisibility: on the one hand, it is clear that the text is a foreign production, since the name of the three protagonists have not been modified, on the other hand she tried to domesticate the names by making them more Italian sounding and by creating references that an Italian reader could easily understand. After these examples, it is clear that proper names represent a real challenge for translators and they must be familiar with the culture of both the source and target languages in order to find the most appropriate translation. Furthermore, it is clear that translators can use different strategies to translate names within the same text.

1.2 Dialogue and suspense

Dialogue can be defined as a narrative mode that displays a conversation between two characters or a group of people (Koivisto and Nykänen 2016:2). It is therefore an attempt at reproducing oral speech and spontaneous conversation in a written work. The speech of fictional characters is perceived as offering the reader direct access to that individual's emotions and desires (Thomas 2012:57). What characters say can therefore reveal what they are feeling or thinking and the reader has to trust their words in order to understand who they really are. However, books such as thrillers remind us that "human speech conceals far more than it reveals; it blurs much more than it defines; it distances more than it connects" (Steiner 1975:229). In *Magpie* for example, we learn that we should not always trust what a character says because he/she could be lying, or that specific individual might be mentally unstable. Furthermore, dialogue can play a crucial role in immersing us in the social worlds of the characters in the novel and also plays a vital role in advancing the plot: it informs the reader about the actions of the characters, or whether there may be important revelations, disputes, and discussions (Thomas 2012:74).

Dialogue can easily be distinguished from the unfolding narration: it is marked by quotation marks, dashes, or other conventional signs. Conversational exchanges are typically accompanied by speech tags, which identify the speakers and can also provide information about the style or tone of the characters' voices, the rhythm of speech, the actions performed while talking and possible non-fluencies or silences (Koivisto and

Nykänen 2016:2). Simpson (1997) also argues that fictional dialogues can be subjected to the same analytical procedures of naturally occurring conversation. In fact in the interpretation of fictional dialogue, the main assumption is that dialogue makes use of norms and conventions of everyday talk as resources to create meaning (Koivisto and Nykänen 2016:7). This means that understanding fictional conversation and turns-at-talk by the characters is similar to the interpretative process that takes place when engaging in real conversation: the reader interprets words, intentions and actions, judges the characters, their relationships and the situations they are in on the basis of their dialogue.

In spite of this, fictional dialogue differs considerably from naturally occurring conversation. For example, it exhibits a restricted set of resources for indicating the way the turns-at-talk are uttered, since no paralinguistic resources such as intonation, rhythm or emphasis can be used (Koivisto and Nykänen 2016:7). As Page (1988) points out in fact, detailed textual representations of real-life speech would be considered unacceptable in written texts, which lack the detailed rendering of both the contextual and the phonological elements that carry much of the information and significance conveyed by real speech. Therefore, fictionalized orality can be thought of as orality without para- and extralinguistic information. Also, as Leech & Short (2007) point out, dialogue does not entail features of normal non-fluency, such as hesitation pauses, false starts, overlapping talk, and repair, characteristics of natural conversation that pass overlooked when people are communicating. In their view, when these features are represented in a dialogue, they serve a specific “communicative purpose”: for example, non-fluency may be used to depict a character’s state of mind, such as nervousness or feeling awkward in a social situation (Leech & Short 2007:133). These features thus become a means of characterization that are used intentionally by the author.

At this point, one may wonder: what does suspense have to do with dialogue? Surprisingly, the creation of suspense is not vague (Škifić and Petković 2014:52); on the contrary, it is a carefully planned process and dialogues are one of the linguistic devices through which suspense is transmitted to the reader. Suspense is one of the most

relevant features of the thriller genre. The Cambridge Learner's Dictionary³ defines suspense as "the feeling of excitement that you have when you are waiting for something to happen". It is in fact a condition of uncertainty, like awaiting a decision or outcome, usually accompanied by feelings of apprehension and anxiety. In real life, we would feel suspense if we saw someone who is hurt after a car accident and is waiting for rescue. In the same way, in the world of fiction we feel emotions when we come across characters placed in certain situations, even though we know that the character's risk is not real (Brewer 2013:216). This happens because readers are so involved in the story that sometimes they come to feel emotions that they would feel for another human being in similar circumstances.

Creation and maintenance of suspense may be identified in situations in which spectators can "anticipate plot developments (especially of the threatening variety) before the protagonists themselves" (Derry 1988:7). *Romeo and Juliet* could serve as a good example of this: the audience knows that both lovers are alive, but neither of them thinks that the other is still alive. They drink the poison without knowing what the audience knows, creating the dramatic ending we are all familiar with. In my opinion, suspense is not always built up in this way: in some cases, in fact, the reader knows as much as the protagonists of the book. For instance, J.K. Rowling builds suspense in several of the Harry Potter books by having Harry and his friends unravel the details of Voldemort's evil plans a little at a time. For example, Harry often overhears parts of conversations, or is allowed by Dumbledore to know just enough to be helpful, but the reader does not know the entire story until the end.

Brewer (2013) hypothesised a discourse structure for suspense that is normally used in entertainment stories:

³ Definition of *suspense* from the online version of the *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press 2022.

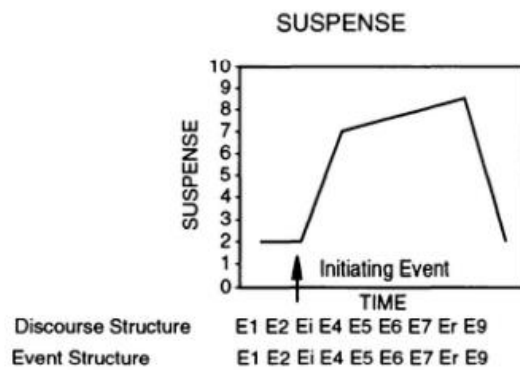


Figure 1: the structure of suspense in entertainment stories
(Brewer 2013:220)

According to this figure, suspense is produced by placing an initiating event in the underlying event structure. The initiating event causes the reader to be concerned about its possible outcome and the consequences for the characters, and possibly the author introduces even more suspense elements in order to prolong the feeling. In the case of *Magpie*, the feeling of suspense is slowly built up in the first part of the book by placing Kate as new intrusive lodger in Marisa and Jake’s home. The real initiating event is placed at the very beginning of the second part of the book. Marisa’s assault against Kate takes place and subsequently there is the plot twist in which the reader discovers that the opposite is true, creating therefore also a surprise effect: Kate and Jake have been a couple for six years and Marisa is their surrogate who moved in with them. In the second part of the book, suspense is maintained also thanks to the flashback structure which provides insights on the past story of the characters and allows the reader to better understand the situation. Thus, Elizabeth Day creates two parallel structures, the temporal frame called “Now” and the one called “Then”, which complement each other and create the feeling of suspense that makes the reader want to go on.

Suspense can be created through dialogues thanks to various techniques, including repetition. It is used to prolong or slow down the dialogue, which creates additional suspense (Johnstone 1996:48). The following example is taken from the movie *Pulp Fiction*, to be precise the scene in which Vincent Vega and Jules Winnfield are driving:

- Also, you know what **they call a Quarter Pounder with Cheese** in Paris?
- **They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with Cheese?**
- No, they got the metric system there, they wouldn't know what the fuck **a Quarter Pounder** is.
- What'd **they call it?**
- **They call it the Royale with Cheese.**
- **Royale with Cheese.** What'd **they call a Big Mac?**
- **Big Mac's a Big Mac, but they call it Le Big Mac.**
- **Le Big Mac.** What do **they call** a Whopper?

This conversation is of exceptional banality and it sounds like a natural exchange, something two people could actually be talking about. The suspense is created by the fact that this is not a normal situation because they are two gangsters driving to an apartment block to retrieve a mysterious suitcase for their boss. What creates even more suspense is the fact that Winnfield has the same conversation about burgers with a man he is about to murder. In the apartment scene the creation of suspense via repetition occurs again, but obscene expressions are also used to achieve the desired effect:

- **What does Marsellus Wallace look like?**
- **What?**
- **What** country you from?!
- **What?**
- **"What"** ain't no country I ever heard of! **Do they speak English** in **"What"**?
- **What?**
- **English, motherfucker! Do you speak it?**
- Yes.
- Then you know what I'm sayin?
- Yes.
- Describe **what Marsellus Wallace looks like!**
- **What?**
- **Say "What" again! Say "What" again! I dare ya, I double dare ya motherfucker, say "What" one more goddamn time!**
- Well he's... he's... black
- Go on!

- ...and he's... he's... bald
- **Does he look like a bitch?!**
- What?
- **Does-he-look-like-a-bitch?!**

In this case, the spectator can expect or also anticipate that there is going to be physical aggression on the part of the characters that use these words, since obscene language is often interpreted as expression of aggression towards others and the language of criminals is often abundant of such expressions (Jay 2000:81). It is also relevant to notice that the lack of correlation between conversations on what Big Macs, Quarter Pounders and Whoppers are called in France and the following violent scene creates additional suspense. What also adds to the creation of suspense in this scene is the juxtaposition between Jules' character and his speech. When he is about to kill the young man, he quotes a passage from the Old Testament – Ezekiel 25:17 – which is very strange, given the fact that he is a full-fledged criminal and his regular speech is full of vulgar expressions.

1.3 Translation of dialogues in suspense novels

Translating dialogues may prove to be a difficult task, mainly because they can present several challenges. It might be difficult to maintain the suspense created in the original novel for instance, or to translate colloquial language and cultural references appropriately. In this section I will analyse the problems a translator may find while dealing with dialogues in novels.

1.3.1 Translating colloquial language

Dialogues often display instances of colloquial language. As Trask (1999) states, it is ordinary, informal speech that people use in everyday communication settings. People use it when they are completely relaxed, unselfconscious and not fixed in any formal circumstances (Trask 1999:27). In this sense, it might be useful to explore the concept of register. Halliday (1964) describes register as a variety according to use, in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times. This is completely different from the concept of dialect, which is “a variety according to user, in the sense that each speaker uses one variety and uses it all the time” (Halliday,

Mackintosh and Stevens 1964:77). Therefore, the term register refers to the type of language that the speakers retain appropriate in a certain situation. In particular, register is chosen by the speakers according to field, tenor and mode. To put it simply, field is the nature of the social action in which language is an essential component; tenor is the nature of the participants and the relationship between them; and mode is the part language is playing, particularly whether it is a written or spoken text (adapted from Halliday 1985:12). Although field, tenor and mode are described as separate components, they work interdependently to describe the context of situation, that is the relevant features of that situation (Bowcher 2017:395).

Examining the way people use language in different social contexts provides information about the way language works, as well as about social relationships in a community, and the way people signal aspects of their social identity through their language (Holmes and Wilson 2017:1). In particular, sociolinguistics investigates how individuals from different backgrounds speak and write. In this sense Baker (2010) investigates sociolinguistic variation and defines it as “a phenomenon whereby speakers will use language differently, depending on one or more regional or social variables” (Baker 2010:4) According to Stockwell (2002) there are two types of variables in sociolinguistic investigation, that is linguistic variables (like sounds, words/phrases, grammatical/syntactic patterns) and social variables (like age, gender, social class, ethnicity, occupation, educational background, social networks or geographic region) (Stockwell 2002:3). Language therefore can vary according to the social class to which the characters of a written text belong, ranging from the upper to the working class.

According to McCrimmon (1963), colloquial English has specific characteristics such as simple often grammatically incomplete sentences, contractions, slang terms and a personal or familiar tone, which tries to create the impression of speaking intimately to the reader. Partridge (1990) distinguishes five types of colloquialisms, in particular in the form of:

- a. Single words, that is words that are used in daily speech, such as “folks” for “relatives” or “tremendous” for “excellent”.

- b. Clipped words, or words created by shortening the original word such as “phone” for “telephone” or “lab” for “laboratory”.
- c. Short Picture words for technical terms: it is a short and picturesque word used as a variation to call another technical term, such as “bugs” for “insects” and for “mechanical faults”.
- d. Contractions: the apostrophe takes the place of a missing letter, such as “we’ll” or “can’t”.
- e. Verb-adverb combinations (phrasal verbs): this combination consists of a verb followed by an adverb, such as “put out” for “expel”, “extinguish”, “publish”, “inconvenience”, “embarrass”, or “retire” (in baseball) or “lay off” for “discontinue work or activity”, “rest”.

These colloquialisms are features of an informal register, which refers to the variety of language defined according to the situation in which it is used (Wales 1990:361). In each language there are certain registers and levels of formality that might vary from one language to another. As Lyons (1977) claims:

It is intuitively clear that there is a scale of formality [...] probably in all languages. We all recognize that certain utterances would be phonologically, grammatically and lexically stilted if used in certain informal or intimate situations; and conversely, that there are utterances that are appropriate in informal situations, but would be judged by most speakers to be colloquial for formal occasions. (Lyons 1977:580)

As Biber (2006) states, the main linguistic difference among registers is word choice, and therefore levels of formality in a language correlate with phonological and grammatical features, but lexical features in written texts are probably the most varied (Biber 2006:478). The vocabulary of a language provides a large variety of alternatives to indicate the same thing, but their meaning is slightly different. Such ‘connotations’ belong to different ‘stylistic levels’ and indicate distinct spheres of action, activity types, topics or ‘social worlds’ within a speech community (Sandig and Selting 1997:138). In literary texts, all these aspects also become aspects of style, which is “the

way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose” (Leech and Short 1981:10). This means that in novel translation

we must know the context. In this case, we must first establish the authorial voice. Is the novelist using an omniscient point of view or speaking through one of the characters? Does the point of view shift? Where does the overall tone fall on the informality/formality spectrum? Only after determining these variables can the translator decide the correct register for a given phrase. Register also applies to individual words. A single word can be jarring if it resonates in a wrong register. [...] What the reader unconsciously perceives as the ‘correctness’ of translation hinges on many elements, including the crucial choice of the appropriate word, both denotatively and connotatively. (Landers 2001:60)

As far as the translation of colloquial language (and therefore an informal register) in literary texts is concerned, Osimo (2011) maintains that, if the source text belongs to a given register, the choices of the Italian translator must be carried out in that context (Osimo 2011:200)⁴.

An example of this is represented by the opening line of J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, where the narrator, the disaffected teenager Holden Caulfield, is telling the reader his story:

<p>If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.</p>	<p>Se davvero avete voglia di sentire questa storia, magari vorrete sapere prima di tutto dove sono nato e com’è stata la mia infanzia schifa e che cosa facevano i miei genitori e compagnia bella prima che arrivassi io, e tutte quelle baggianate alla David Copperfield, ma a me non mi va proprio di parlarne.</p>
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⁴ The Italian original: “Quando si comincia ad avere a che fare con traduzioni professionali, i registri da riprodurre in certi casi sono però tanti, e se il verbo dell’originale appartiene a un registro neutro, standard, anche la scelta del traduttore italiano va fatta (*pardon*, effettuata) in quell’ambito.”

In this case, the translator tried to find an Italian equivalent for all the instances of informal language in the source text. It is true that, all in all, the Italian translation gives back the sense of informality and the character's personality, however, two examples could have been translated differently. First of all, I would have translated 'and all' into *eccetera*, since it can be used in an informal context as well. I find *eccetera* more suitable than *compagnia bella* because this last option refers more to a group of people than to the "other things" that the author means. Also 'kind of crap' could have been translated into *stronzate* rather than *baggianate*. In doing so, the translator has diminished the level of informality and vulgarity of the text because *baggianate* is neither vulgar nor informal.

1.3.2 Translating cultural references

Novels and dialogues may also contain cultural references, that is any reference to a cultural entity which, due to its distance from the target culture, is characterised by a certain degree of opacity for the target reader to constitute a problem (Mailhac 1996:133-134). This definition already focuses on the main problem that culture specific references present, that is the fact that their interpretation is subjective and the difficulty in finding univocal strategies for their translation. Another scholar who refers to the problems these items constitute is Franco Aixelá (1996) for whom these references are:

[...] items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the non-existence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text. (Franco Aixelá 1996:58)

This means that their translation might be a problem not only because a specific item may not exist in a given culture, but also because the relationship between source culture and target culture changes over time and the translation strategies once used to translate something may no longer be valid. In a few words, cultural elements are what

makes a society different from another, so that each culture has its own specificities. Agost Canós (1999) maintains that cultural elements are specific places of any city or country, aspects related to the history, the art and the customs of a given society and age (songs, literature, aesthetic concepts), very popular characters, mythology, gastronomy, institutions, currencies or systems of weight and measurement (cited in Ranzato 2013:70). Newmark (1988:95) proposes a classification of cultural categories based on various lexical fields associated to a culture specific lexicon:

- ecology (such as terms relating to flora, fauna, geography, etc.);
- artefacts (material culture including references to food, clothes, house, towns and means of transportation);
- social culture (words referring to work and leisure);
- organisations, customs, activities, etc. (such as political and administrative references, religious, historical or artistic terms);
- gestures and habits.

What I found interesting, as far as classifications is concerned, is the introduction of “monocultural” and “transcultural” references in Pedersen (2005:10). One of Pedersen’s fundamental parameters is transculturality, that is the way in which nowadays cultures are interconnected. This implies that some cultural elements that were once proper of only a culture are now accessible at a global level and therefore are no longer culture specific. This is the case of references that today can be considered universally known. As a consequence, Pedersen suggests that a distinction should be made between transcultural elements, which are globally known and “retrievable from common encyclopedic knowledge of the ST and the TT audience” (Pedersen 2005:10-11) and monocultural elements which “can be assumed to be less identifiable by the majority of people of the TT audience than it is to the relevant ST audience, due to differences in encyclopedic knowledge” (Pedersen 2005:11). In addition to this, he includes microcultural elements, which are so specific that only a limited part of the ST audience can be familiar with them, like the name of a street or a given area.

Another parameter introduced by Pedersen (2005) is extratextuality, which determines if a cultural reference exists outside the ST, as is the case for most cultural references, or

not. If they do not exist in the real world, the references are considered text internal, that is they are created specifically for the text in question (Pedersen 2005:11). For example, the fictional pub ‘MacLaren’s’ in *How I Met Your Mother* is text internal, as it does not exist in reality and is a fictional element of the text. The third parameter proposed by Pedersen is centrality of reference, which he considers to be one of the most influential in translation. It refers to references that are central in the text, possibly because they represent a central theme or leitmotiv in the text (Pedersen 2005:12-13). He exemplifies this by mentioning the film *The Bridges of Madison County*, a movie by Clint Eastwood released in 1995. The cultural reference is constituted by the bridges of that particular USA area and are central to the plot of the film. This centrality influences the choices of the translator.

Cultural references in a foreign production could also belong to a third culture. Pedersen (2005) includes them in the transcultural references sector, but they are quite different from regular cultural references, as they deal with the degree of familiarity of the source culture with a third different culture, which may be different from the target culture’s degree of familiarity. This example from the TV series *Friends* shows how:

From Season 5 Episode 12:

Context: Ross is upset because he has just learnt that his English ex-wife is getting married again.	
GUNTHER: Here's your scone . ROSS: Oh, thanks Gunther. STUPID BRITISH SNACK FOOD!!!!!! CHANDLER: Did they teach you that in your anger management class? PHOEBE: Hey. You know what might help you deal with it? You two are in the past. You can't be mad about the past. Are you still mad about, you know, the Louisiana Purchase?	GUNTHER: Il tuo plum cake . ROSS: Stramaledetto cibo inglese . CHANDLER: Te l'hanno insegnato nei corsi di autocontrollo? PHOEBE: Sai che cosa può aiutarti? Prova a ragionare così. Tu e Emily siete il passato e non puoi prendertela per il passato. Sei ancora arrabbiato per le rivolte degli indiani?

As one can see, scones are presented as belonging to a different culture, that is the British culture. In the US, they are a popular snack, but in this case they represent the British culture Ross now hates. In the Italian culture however, scones are not popular at all: they cannot be found in stores or pastry shops. To include an example of British food, the translator resorted to ‘plum cake’, which is very popular in Italy. The final historical reference to the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 was substituted with a more generic one to ‘the Indian revolts’, which an Italian audience might be more familiar with.

Translators sometimes also have to deal with cultural references that belong to the same cultural landscape of the target culture (Ranzato 2013:85). In this case the translator needs to take into account the effect caused by the said reference in the target audience, which may be different from the one it causes in the source audience. The example in this case is taken from the TV series *How I Met Your Mother*:

From Season 8 Episode 20:

Context: Lily and Marshall are going to move to Italy soon, so they will no longer live with Ted, who will have to find a place where he can live on his own. They are discussing what they should keep and what they should throw away.	
TED: Guys, this chair has been here forever, you gotta take it with you. Italy!	TED: Ragazzi, questo puff rosso è qui da una vita, quindi dovete portarlo con voi, in Italia!
MARSHALL: Ted, Italy doesn't need something that is wrinkled, red and leaky, and smells like booze and narcotics. They've already got former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi!	MARSHALL: Ted, l'Italia non ha certo bisogno di una cosa raggrinzita, rossa e logora, macchiata di alcol e droghe varie. Ha già abbastanza problemi con chi governa il Paese!
LILY (<i>laughing</i>): I don't know who that is...	LILY: Non so nemmeno chi sia...

The eighth season of the show was released in 2012, which was the year in which the Berlusconi scandal came out and a long series of legal processes (that ended in the present year) started. The omission of this reference on the part of the translators, might

be seen as a sort of censorship, but I do not think this is the case: the TV series was in fact aired by Mediaset in Italy, one of the main broadcasting channels, and Silvio Berlusconi was its owner at the time. This omission could therefore be seen as an attempt at avoiding a personal attack to the owner of the broadcasting channel. The choice of substituting it with a more general *Italy already has problems with the people governing the country* is actually smart: most of the population agrees on this, as it is a quite common thought in Italy, and it avoids personal attacks that might be perceived as offensive by the intended person.

Translators can use a number of strategies in order to adapt cultural references to the target language. There are non-creative strategies like loan and elimination, which eliminate the cultural reference altogether without finding either an official equivalent or a substitute cultural reference, or calque which involves a literal translation with no cultural equivalent in the target culture. More elaborate and creative solutions are compensation, substitution, explicitation, or creative addition (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007:202-207). Even though these techniques are mainly used in the field of audiovisual translation, I maintain that they can be used in the translation of a literary work as well. Even though in audiovisual translation the translator is bound to what he sees on the screen, cultural references are present in literary works too and in some cases it might be challenging to deal with them. In addition, I believe that without considering the screen, the work of an audiovisual translator and a literary translator are quite similar: in this case, translating dialogues permeated by cultural references, so that they become comprehensible to the target culture. I will now consider a couple of examples from the TV series *Friends*, rich in cultural references, in order to demonstrate this:

From Season 8 Episode 18: loan.

Context: Rachel is describing her imaginary marriage with Ross to her parents' friends.	
RACHEL: At sunset. And Stevie Wonder sang <i>Isn't She Lovely</i> as I walked down the aisle.	RACHEL: Era il tramonto. E Stevie Wonder cantava <i>Isn't She Lovely</i> mentre io andavo all'altare.
LADY: Really?	SIGNORA: Davvero?

RACHEL: Yeah, Stevie is an old family friend.	RACHEL: Sì, Stevie è un vecchio amico di famiglia.
LADY: Oh my God, that sounds amazing. I'd love to see pictures.	SIGNORA: Che cosa stupenda. Spero di vedere le foto.
RACHEL: Yeah, so would I. You wouldn't think that Annie Leibovitz would forget to put film in the camera.	RACHEL: Sì, anch'io. Ti immagini il fotografo dei VIP che dimentica di mettere il rullino nella macchina?!
ROSS: Would you excuse us for a second? (<i>Pulls Rachel off to the side</i>)	ROSS: Volete, volete scusarci un secondo? Ma che stai facendo?
Umm.... what are you doing?	
RACHEL: What? I'm not you. This may be the only wedding I ever have. I want it to be amazing.	RACHEL: Che vuoi, questo potrebbe essere l'unico matrimonio della mia vita. E voglio che sia strepitoso.
ROSS: Okay, okay. Ooooh, ooh maybe I rode in on a Harley .	ROSS: D'accordo. Uh, io potrei essere arrivato su una Harley .
RACHEL: Okay, Ross, it has to be realistic.	RACHEL: Senti Ross, deve essere realistico.

This example contains a few cultural references that have been translated as loans. They are names of famous people (Stevie Wonder), songs (*Isn't She Lovely*) and objects (the motorcycle Harley Davidson). The only proper name which has not been translated with a loan is the one of Annie Leibovitz, a celebrity photographer whose name has been assumed to be less well known to the target audience.

From Season 1 Episode 9: official translation and elimination.

Context: Chandler tells his friends why Thanksgiving stirs up sad memories for him.	
MONICA: (<i>hands Chandler a bag</i>) Chandler, here you go, got your traditional Thanksgiving feast, you got your tomato soup, your grilled cheese fixin's, and your family size bag of Funyuns .	MONICA: Chandler, ecco il tuo tradizionale pasto controcorrente : crema di pomodoro, patatine al formaggio e un hamburger da riscaldare .
RACHEL: Wait, wait, Chandler, this is	RACHEL: Aspetta, e questa sarebbe la tua

<p>what you're havin' for Thanksgiving dinner? What, what, what is it with you and this holiday?</p> <p>CHANDLER: All right, I'm nine years old.</p> <p>ROSS: Oh, I hate this story.</p> <p>CHANDLER: We just finished this magnificent Thanksgiving dinner. I have -- and I remember this part vividly -- a mouthful of pumpkin pie, and this is the moment my parents choose to tell me they're getting divorced.</p> <p>RACHEL: Oh my god.</p> <p>CHANDLER: Yes. It's very difficult to appreciate a Thanksgiving dinner once you've seen it in reverse.</p>	<p>cena del Ringraziamento? Insomma che cos'hai contro questa giornata?</p> <p>CHANDLER: E va bene, avevo nove anni. Avevamo appena finito il cenone, me lo ricordo come se fosse ieri, avevo ancora la bocca piena di torta di zucca. E i miei hanno scelto proprio quel momento per dirmi che stavano per divorziare.</p> <p>RACHEL: Ah davvero?</p> <p>CHANDLER: Sì, sì, ed è difficile godersi la cena del Ringraziamento quando la si è vista al contrario.</p>
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The word 'Thanksgiving' was translated twice with the official equivalent *Ringraziamento* and twice without, which creates an incongruity. In the last occurrence of the word, 'Thanksgiving' has been replaced by *cenone*, which is the Christmas Eve traditional dinner in Italy. Since the episode aired in 1997 in Italy, this translation choice reflects the fact that Thanksgiving was not a known festivity in Italy at the time and that possibly it was somehow associated with Christmas. Another culture specific reference, 'Funyun's', is eliminated because the snack brand does not exist in Italy and is therefore unknown to the audience.

From Season 1 Episode 9: substitution.

Context: All the friends had planned to spend Thanksgiving somewhere else, but in the end all plans collapse and they gather to have dinner together.	
JOEY: Set another place for Thanksgiving . My entire family thinks I have VD.	JOEY: Aggiungi un posto a tavola. Anche la mia famiglia pensa che abbia la sifilide.

CHANDLER: Tonight, on a very special Blossom .	CHANDLER: Va bene, d'accordo, ma ti sei fatto visitare?
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In the Italian version, *Aggiungi un posto a tavola* substitutes the original 'Thanksgiving'. It is a very famous musical play from 1973 which has become a common catch phrase in Italian, uttered when somebody turns up unexpectedly for dinner or lunch. The allusion to the TV series *Blossom*, centered on a dysfunctional family, has been eliminated from Chandler's line. Therefore, one could state that substitutions are used when the cultural references are considered to be outside the knowledge of the target culture.

1.3.3 Translating verbal humour

Dialogues often display instances of humour, that is jokes. In this case we are dealing with verbally expressed humour (VEH), that is humour that involves language. As Chiaro (2005) states, it is a well known fact that VEH travels badly because the translator has to face two major barriers: different languages and different cultures. What is more, whether the type of text to be translated is a short text, such as a joke, a long text, such as a novel, or a more complex text, such as a film, a play or a sitcom, the transposition from source language to target language will present the translator with a series of problems of both practical and theoretical nature. This is because the translation of VEH touches upon the most central issues in translation studies, that is equivalence and translatability (Chiaro 2005:3). This is also the case with the translation of poems, for instance. Poetry is considered to be untranslatable, due to the presence of rhetoric devices and irregular word order. It is impossible that two languages share the same features, so that a translator could recreate an identical effect, nevertheless translations of poetry exist. As a consequence, the translation could be considered a new poem, but its functions remain unaltered (Lefevère 1977:109). The same happens when dealing with VEH, more specifically with puns: they are notoriously untranslatable, therefore the translation needs to involve some kind of compromise, mainly because the chances of being able to pun on the same word in two different languages are extremely rare. Thus, also in the case of VEH, the important thing is that the target text serves the same function as the source text, no matter if it is going to be distant from the original

(Chiaro 2005:4). As an example, I will analyse the translation of this passage from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Context: Alice is talking with the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, who taught her the poem "Lobster Quadrille"	
<p>"Thank you," said Alice, "it's very interesting. I never knew so much about a whiting before."</p> <p>"I can tell you more than that, if you like," said the Gryphon. "Do you know why it's called a whiting?"</p> <p>"I never thought about it," said Alice. "Why?"</p> <p>"<i>It does the boots and shoes,</i>" the Gryphon replied very solemnly.</p> <p>Alice was thoroughly puzzled. "Does the boots and shoes!" she repeated in a wondering tone.</p> <p>"Why, what are <i>your</i> shoes done with?" said the Gryphon. "I mean, what makes them so shiny?"</p> <p>Alice looked down at them, and considered a little before she gave her answer. "They're done with blacking, I believe."</p> <p>"Boots and shoes under the sea," the Gryphon went on in a deep voice, "are done with a whiting. Now you know."</p> <p>"And what are they made of?" Alice asked in a tone of great curiosity.</p> <p>"Soles and eels, of course," the Gryphon replied rather impatiently: "any shrimp could have told you that."</p> <p>"If I'd been the whiting," said Alice, whose thoughts were still running on the song, "I'd</p>	<p>«Grazie» disse Alice «è molto interessante. Non avevo mai saputo tante cose sui Merluzzi.»</p> <p>«Te ne posso raccontare molte anche sui Naselli se ti fa piacere» propose il Grifone. «Sai perché si chiamano Naselli?»</p> <p>«Non ci ho mai pensato» confessò Alice. «Perché?»</p> <p>«Perché sono nipoti dei nasi!» spiegò il Grifone tutto soddisfatto.</p> <p>Alice restò sbalordita. «Nipoti dei nasi!» ripeté con aria pensosa.</p> <p>«Certo dei nasi!» confermò il Grifone. «E il tuo del resto credi forse che sia un naso?»</p> <p>Alice incrociando gli occhi tentò di scrutare il suo nasino. Era pensierosa e stette a riflettere un attimo prima di domandare: «E che cos'è per favore se non è un naso?»</p> <p>«Guardalo bene: non è un naso è un Nasello.» spiegò con voce spazientita il Grifone. «Qualunque Gamberetto o Sogliola o Anguilla lo saprebbe. E almeno ricordatelo!»</p> <p>«Se il mio naso è un Nasello» disse Alice, che stava ancora riflettendo su quella stupefacente</p>

<p>have said to the porpoise, ‘Keep back, please: we don’t want <i>you</i> with us!’”</p> <p>“They were obliged to have him with them,” the Mock Turtle said: “no wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise.”</p> <p>“Wouldn’t it really?” said Alice in a tone of great surprise.</p> <p>“Of course not,” said the Mock Turtle: “why, if a fish came to <i>me</i>, and told me he was going on a journey, I should say ‘With what porpoise?’”</p> <p>“Don’t you mean ‘purpose?’” said Alice.</p> <p>“I mean what I say,” the Mock Turtle replied in an offended tone. And the Gryphon added “Come, let’s hear some of <i>your</i> adventures.”</p>	<p>rivelazione del Grifone, «se è un Nasello, vuol dire che devo stare attenta ai Polipi. C'è anche una canzone, che raccomanda ai Naselli di guardarsi dai Polipi.»</p> <p>«Bisogna stare in loro compagnia» singhiozzò la Finta Tartaruga. «Bisogna! Nessun pesce prudente dovrebbe andare in giro senza essere accompagnato da un polipo.»</p> <p>«Davvero?» domandò Alice con grande sorpresa.</p> <p>«Certo» confermò la Finta Tartaruga. «Se un Nasello venisse a dirmi che sta per mettersi in viaggio gli direi... »</p> <p>«A proposito di viaggi» intervenne il Grifone rivolgendosi ad Alice «raccontaci qualcuna delle <i>tue</i> avventure!»</p>
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In this case, in the original version, the first play on word is built on the whiting fish and the colour white. This fish in Italian is called *merluzzo* and it is quite difficult to create a play on word with that. For this reason, the Italian translator decided to insert another fish in the story, that is the hake (*nasello*). In this way, a play on word with *nasello* and *naso* (nose) could be created, as *nasello* almost seems like a diminutive of nose. The second play on word, built around purpose-porpoise, is completely lost in translation. The translator tried to recreate something similar by inserting another fish, the octopus (*polipo*), but it is impossible to create a pun on it. In the Italian version, the part concerning the play on word with purpose-porpoise has completely disappeared, to the point that the Mock Turtle’s speech is interrupted, there is no pun involving the octopus, and the dialogue immediately jumps to the Gryphon asking Alice to recount some of her adventures. Clearly, English and Italian differ considerably and the TT loses part of the significance of the ST. However, the TT contains a pun anyway, even though it is different from the ST. Therefore, all in all, the humorous goal of the text is maintained in translation.

According to Chiaro (2010), a translator may use four different strategies to deal with the translation of humour:

a. Leaving the verbal humour unchanged

When the humorous remark works in English as well as in Italian, it is possible to leave it unchanged, as the following example from the episode *The Hamburger Postulate* of the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* shows:

<p>Howard: What do you recommend for someone who worked up a man-sized appetite from a morning of weight training and cardio-funk? Penny: A shower.</p>	<p>Howard: Cosa consigli a chi ha una fame da lupo per aver fatto sollevamento pesi, cardio-funk e sudato come un cammello? Penny: Una doccia.</p>
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As one can clearly see, the joke was translated almost literally, but the humour of the dialogue remains unaltered in the target language as well. In this case the humour is also situational because Howard and his friends are sitting at a table at The Cheesecake Factory waiting to order food, so Penny misinterprets the question on purpose and gives an unexpected answer that does not conform to the context of the question.

This is sometimes done even if the humorous remark is lost in the target language. This was the case for this example taken from the film *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulin* (2001):

<p>Tenez, allez voir ma mère, elle a une mémoire d'éléphante de mer !</p>	<p>Le conviene andare a trovare mia madre. Ha una memoria da elefante mia madre. È un'elefantessa!</p>
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This utterance plays on the homophony between *mère* (mother) and *mer* (sea) and also on the expression *avoir une mémoire d'éléphante* (have the memory of an elephant – elephants never forget). The humour is created thanks to the fact that ‘sea elephant’ in

French happens to be *élépahnte de mer*. In this case the wordplay was completely lost in translation because the Italian version is almost a word-for-word rendition of the source text, therefore it passes unnoticed and not as an attempt at humour.

b. Replacing the verbal humour with a different instance of verbal humour

Sometimes translators need to substitute an untranslatable joke with another one which would be more suitable for the target language. This could be considered as the ideal strategy, as the recipient of the translation will also experience verbal humour. In the English version of *Amélie*, an attempt at retaining the verbal humour was made by substituting the French homophone with a ‘blend’:

Tenez, allez voir ma mère, elle a une mémoire d’éléphante de mer !	Go and see my mother. She’s got a memory like an elephant. Mum-ephant.
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This portmanteaux word shows a humoristic attempt which is in line with the source text.

c. Replacing the verbal humour with an idiomatic expression

This example from the movie *Shrek* shows how the verbal humour of the original production can be substituted for an idiomatic expression in the target language:

Donkey: Donkeys don’t have layers. <u>We wear our fear right out there on our sleeves.</u>	Ciuchino: Gli asini non hanno strati. Noi, <u>noi sudiamo sette camicie per la paura.</u>
Shrek: Wait a second. <u>Donkeys don’t have sleeves.</u>	Shrek: Ehi, un momento! Gli asini non portano le <u>camicie!</u>

What Donkey says in the original version is a transformation of the idiom “to wear (one’s) heart on (one’s) sleeve”, which means “to show one’s feelings openly by one’s behaviour”. The idiom is modified by substituting the word “heart” with the word “fear”: the humorous effect lies in the fact that Shrek interprets it literally and points out that “donkeys don’t have sleeves”. The Italian translation substituted the original

humoristic remark with the idiom *sudare sette camicie*, which means “to sweat blood”, and is used without any sort of modification. As a consequence, in the Italian version the humour only plays on one level, that is on Shrek’s inability to discern between literal and figurative meaning.

d. Ignoring the wordplay altogether

In the case of word play, sometimes it is impossible to translate or reconstruct the joke so that it is maintained in the target language. In this case, a translator cannot help but ignoring it and leaving it unchanged, even though we can never be sure whether the omission is a translation strategy or a lack of recognition of the original wordplay (Chiaro 2010:12). In *The Simpsons* episode *Bart Gets an Elephant* Homer is driving with Lisa and Marge, when he accidentally crashes against the statue of a deer, and this is the dialogue that follows:

Homer: “Do’h!”	Homer: “Do’h!”
Lisa: “A deer!”	Lisa: “Un cervo!”
Marge: “A female deer!”	Marge: “Un cervo femmina!”

The Italian translation of the dialogue can hardly be considered funny and the word play is therefore lost. In the original version the word play is based on the fact that Homer’s usual exclamation “Do’h” [dəʊ] is pronounced in the same way as ‘doe’ [ˈdəʊ], which is the female deer Marge refers to at the end of the dialogue. In Italian, however, there is no homophony between “Do’h” and the word *cervo*. This word play in order to be fully understood also implies a cultural reference to the song *Do-Re-Mi* from the musical *The Sound of Music* (the first words of the song are “doe, a deer, a female deer”), which is also completely lost in translation.

1.3.4 Translating suspense

Among all the previously handled issues, suspense is a major occurrence when it comes to thrillers. According to Leone (2014), the best way to render suspense in translation is to leave the dialogue as it is as much as possible in order to respect the techniques used to create it in the original version, that is repetition, the use of obscene expressions and

the juxtaposition between the speech and the situation in which the character is placed. In order to analyse the translation of suspense in dialogues, I will consider the Italian translation of the examples from the film *Pulp Fiction* reported above:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Also, you know what they call a Quarter Pounder with Cheese in Paris? - They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with Cheese? - No, they got the metric system there, they wouldn't know what the fuck a Quarter Pounder is. - What'd they call it? - They call it the Royale with Cheese. - Royale with Cheese. What'd they call a Big Mac? - Big Mac's a Big Mac, but they call it Le Big Mac. - Le Big Mac. What do they call a Whopper? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sai come chiamano un quarto di libbra con formaggio a Parigi? - Non un quarto di libbra con formaggio? - Hanno il sistema metrico decimale, non sanno che cazzo sia un quarto di libbra. - E come lo chiamano? - Lo chiamano Royale con formaggio. - Royale con formaggio. Come lo chiamano il Big Mac? - Beh, il Big Mac è il Big Mac, ma lo chiamano Le Big Mac. - Le Big Mac. E come lo chiamano il Whopper?
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does Marsellus Wallace look like? - What? - What country you from?! - What? - "What" ain't no country I ever heard of! Do they speak English in "What"? - What? - English, motherfucker! Do you speak it? - Yes. - Then you know what I'm sayin? - Yes. - Describe what Marsellus Wallace looks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dì un po', Marsellus Wallace che aspetto ha? - Cosa? - Da che Paese vieni? - Cosa? - "Cosa" è un Paese che non ho mai sentito nominare! Lì parlano la mia lingua? - Cosa? - La mia lingua, figlio di puttana! Tu la sai parlare? - Sì. - Allora capisci quello che dico? - Sì. - Descrivimi perciò Marsellus Wallace!
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<p>like!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What? - Say “What” again! Say “What” again! I dare ya, I double dare ya <u>motherfucker</u>, say “What” one more goddamn time! - Well he’s... he’s... black - Go on! - ...and he’s... he’s... bald - Does he look like a <u>bitch</u>?!? - What? - Does-he-look-like-a-<u>bitch</u>?!? 	<p>Che aspetto ha?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cosa? - Dì “cosa” un’altra volta! Dì “cosa” un’altra volta! Ti sfido, due volte ti sfido <u>figlio di puttana</u>, di “cosa” un’altra maledettissima volta! - È... è nero - Vai avanti! - ...e... è senza capelli - Secondo te sembra una <u>puttana</u>?!? - Cosa? - Secondo te lui ha l’aspetto di una <u>puttana</u>?!?
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In both cases, the techniques to create suspense have been respected in the translation too. All the instances of repetition were reported and eventual obscene expressions were translated into Italian. What might be criticized in the first example is the fact that the name of the burger ‘Quarter Pounder with Cheese’ was translated literally into *quarto di libbra con formaggio*. It might be difficult for an Italian audience to understand what the dialogue is about, since we have no idea of what a quarter pounder is. However, this translation could be the best possibility, otherwise it would not be consistent with the rest of the dialogue. In the second example, the biggest modification concerns the line “‘What’ ain’t no country I ever heard of! Do they speak English in ‘What’?” that in Italian becomes “*Cosa*” è un Paese che non ho mai sentito nominare! Lì parlano la mia lingua? (back translation: “‘What’ is a country I have never heard of! Do they speak my language there?”). This change from *English* to *la mia lingua* was necessary: it would be extremely strange for an Italian audience to hear *Parlano inglese lì?* in a movie dubbed in Italian. I consider *la mia lingua* as an excellent choice given its neutral nature (it could be any language) and it is maintained throughout the whole dialogue.

2. *Magpie*: a psychological thriller reflecting modern society

In this second chapter, I will present the psychological thriller and the domestic noir, a new contemporary genre that in the case of *Magpie* blends perfectly with the psychological thriller. I will then introduce the author and her work, as well as the key issues the book deals with, that is infertility and mental health problems. This last section presents my research job as a translator. As stated in the previous chapter, the work of translation starts with a first phase called ‘orientation’: being a familiarisation phase, the key actions performed by the translator are a first general reading and interpretation of the source text. This first step may vary from translator to translator: in my case, I read the whole book first and decided to investigate its genre and the author. After that, I focused on the main topics that *Magpie* tackles, so I decided to carry out a research on infertility and mental health, as it is essential to fully understand the book and make sense of the translation issues I will deal with.

2.1 The psychological thriller

The psychological thriller is a subgenre of the thriller genre, even though some critics consider it to be only a specific style of thriller rather than a subgenre and a cut above the standard thriller (Frey 2010:30). It describes literature or films that deal with psychological narratives in a thriller setting. In thrillers there is a general emphasis on physical danger and action, rather than an in-depth character study, and the plot is structured on the principles of suspense and anxiety that readers experience when the protagonist is fighting against all kinds of odds, all seeming equally overwhelming. Thrillers cannot be reduced to a set of restrictive features, but they all have something in common: they reflect our deepest fears and contemporary anxieties, which can be psychologically and historically ingrained. Their evocative power is clearly visible, since they have become a staple of narrative in media such as comic books, films, print, television formats or videogames. On the other hand, it is difficult to find an official definition for the psychological thriller, but this might fit the purpose:

[Psychological thrillers are] thrillers that focus on characters that have extreme psychological disorders, such as psychopaths and people with split personalities. These disorders accordingly cause serious personal issues, that

eventually lead to conflicts with strangers and other characters. Sometimes, the main character is a psychopath that serves as both the protagonist and the antagonist.⁵

The psychological thriller calls more attention to the psychological foundation of the characters. It is therefore a genre that contains a contradiction in itself, an ongoing balance between whether we are able or unable to understand the mind (Melchorsky 2014:1). It has become a famous widely read genre these days, thanks to authors such as Stephen King, often called a “master of the psychological thriller”, or, more recently, Paula Hawkins (*The Girl on the Train*). The popularity of this genre can be seen in the fact that there are also films (*American Psycho*, *Gone Girl*), TV series (*Mr. Robot*, *You*) videogames or anime (*Death Note*) that have become very popular among the audience. Mecholsky (2014) suggests some typical attributes that have come to define the genre:

- Psychotic killers as antagonist or protagonist, often beyond the reach of the law and often prompting obsessive investigation; in many cases, the antagonist is a family member;
- Children in danger;
- Revenge for psychological trauma, often perpetrated by a family member;
- Unreliable narrators whose unreliability usually comes from some kind of psychosis, sometimes in the form of found documents;
- Prominent citizens, close family relations, or presumed innocents who turn out to be psychotic;
- Severe psychological illness, trauma, or memory loss in a main character that often haunts and threatens long past the traumatic event, often caused by a family member.

According to this list, social and personal fears are the main initiators of the psychological thriller. In particular, these characteristics reveal a deep terror: insidious secrets threatening social and personal identity might hide underneath appearances.

⁵ Literary Terms (2015, June 1). Retrieved October 25, 2021, from <https://literaryterms.net/>

There certainly are some literary works of the past that prefigure today's psychological thrillers, in particular this genre has a connection to the Gothic and detective fiction. Detective stories focus on rational explanations of events and narrative closure, while the psychological thriller concerns itself more with questions of subjectivity and transgression and makes no guarantees regarding narrative resolution, recalling, therefore, the fascination of the Gothic fiction with interiority and subjectivity (Pittard 2015:1050). In particular Munt (1994:20) identifies the features of this genre as "a dissolving sense of reality; reticence in moral pronouncements; obsessive, pathological characters; the narrative privileging of complex, tortured relationships". Hence, this genre tries to combine strong sensations with questions of the mind.

What must be credited to Gothic fiction is also the discovery of the domestic environment as something that might thrill us: the mysteries which are at our own doors are the most appalling ones, since often terrible things happen in familiar places. Film director Peter Hutchings in fact, states that various films have been labelled psychological thrillers, but it usually refers to "narratives with domesticated settings in which action is suppressed and where thrills are provided instead via investigations of the psychologies of the principal characters" (Hutchings 2009:253).

Psychological thrillers usually rely on specific narrating techniques, one of these being the presence of a plot twist, that is an unexpected development that changes the direction or the expected outcome of the plot (Frey 2010:100). This element is essential in order to maintain a high level of tension in the narration and capture the attention of the audience or readership. One example of this is the movie *The Others*, in which a mother is convinced that her house is haunted; at the end of the film, she (and the audience) discovers that she and her children are actually the ghosts.

Another feature of modern psychological thrillers is the presence of multiple often unreliable narrators or of peculiar plot elements: for example, Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* has three alternating narrators, none of whom can be trusted, and the main protagonist Rachel suffers from alcohol-induced memory loss. This means she is not completely aware of her actions, and she struggles to distinguish her memory and her

imagination. This increases the thrill and mystery of the book, since she tries to recover the memories that might explain a woman's disappearance and she wonders whether she might somehow be responsible for it.

Another equally important feature is probably the presence of a back-story, that is a background history for the characters (Frey 2010:102). This deepens the psychological aspect of the work, since the reader will be able to understand the character better and see him/her under a different light; most importantly the reader can gain insights on the past of the character and understand his present behaviour.

What is noteworthy is the fact that the main protagonists of many contemporary psychological thrillers are complex female characters (Korhola 2018:1). This can also be credited to Gothic novels, which often created unconventional strong women as central characters of the narration, but lately there has been an influx of female authors telling stories of violence, crime and abuse from a female point of view. This might be seen as an attempt to reclaim female agency in a cultural climate where the roles assigned to women in popular culture are hotly debated issues. As Whitney (2021) writes: "We no longer want to be the victim, and female-led thrillers give us back a quota of our power."

2.2 The domestic noir: a new contemporary genre

The domestic noir is a new disturbing literary genre, whose bestsellers are Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012) and Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train* (2015). The success of both novels led to the creation of a specific trend: psychological thrillers with female protagonists. In 2016 the neologism grip-lit was coined, which as Arter explains, respects some specifics:

'grip lit' is more often than not female-led (and frequently authored) fiction with a psychological and/or emotion-led hook, often revolving around a crime and, more often than not, it is not unlike a 'thriller' ... The bestseller lists are dotted with such titles, often with the female protagonist/instigator/narrator in question forming part of the title; a Girl

that is, for example, *Gone, on a Train, in a Red Coat, with a Dragon Tattoo* (Arter 2016)

The domestic noir is in fact a hybrid subgenre that “brings together the violence and mysteries of thrillers and the ‘clue-puzzle world’ of detective fiction” (Plain 2020:102). The novelist Julia Crouch claims to have invented this label along with her publicist in 2013:

In a nutshell, Domestic Noir takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants. (cited in Joyce and Sutton 2018:12)

One could say that domestic noir novels are just psychological thrillers with a new name, since they contain all the elements of the thriller, but there is something peculiar about these new novels: an expression of mistrust towards contemporary masculinity and an awareness of the potential dangers of the domestic environment (Philips 2021:142). Domestic noirs in fact centre on power relationships, in particular the villain is a man who wants to exert power over an isolated, often not believed, woman. The domestic danger and the sadistic man are therefore a standard feature of this genre.

The term was then embraced by other fellow novelists like Rebecca Whitney, who states that “readers have a constant thirst for dark realism in novels; for books in which they can identify with the principal characters yet find themselves taken out of their day to day experiences.” (Whitney 2015), or crime novelist A.J. Waines describes the genre in this way:

The Family...is a cauldron for crime, bringing with it abductions, incarcerations, issues with infertility, infidelity and missing children. The home is rife with buried family secrets that come back to haunt us. This

subgenre plays on the idea that the home is the safest place to be – OR IS IT..? (Waines 2014)

These narratives in fact present the home as the most dangerous place to be and show a specific type of crime, that is coercive control, a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse used to harm, frighten or punish the victim, who is always a woman. Therefore, the reader is offered a female gaze on abuse and witnesses crimes such as child abuse or domestic violence, even before psychological abuse or coercive control were recognised as criminal offenses (Philips 2021:158). Thus, domestic noir explores the reality of the female experience: the way the female characters are treated, their struggles and the way they respond to them, echo the social truth.

2.3 The author and her work: *Magpie* by Elizabeth Day

Elizabeth Day is an English novelist, journalist and broadcaster. She was a feature writer for *The Observer* from 2007 to 2016 and currently writes for *You* magazine. During her career as a writer, she has published seven books, in which she explores the most diverse issues, from the impact of sexual abuse by a family patriarch to life in contemporary London⁶. Her last work *Magpie*, which is going to be studied in this dissertation, explores the issue of infertility, as well as mental health problems.

The plot of *Magpie* revolves around a young couple who lives in London, Jake and Kate, and their quest to become parents. Kate is unable to conceive naturally and decides with her partner to try in vitro fertilisation. She undergoes five cycles of IVF, but everything turns out to be useless, so they are forced to explore other options, such as adoption or surrogacy. They come to know about a surrogacy organisation that hosts events in which couples meet potential surrogates, and during one of these parties they meet Marisa. She seems to be the perfect fit for them given her relative young age and personal history, so they decide to move on with the procedure immediately. Almost as soon as Marisa discovers she is pregnant, Kate suggests that it would be better if she moved in with them, so that they can take care of her properly, but after some time Jake

⁶ Retrieved October 30, from <https://www.elizabethdayonline.co.uk/>

and Kate realise Marisa is not mentally stable. One evening Kate is physically assaulted by Marisa while she was entering her home: Marisa accuses her of being Jake's lover and of ruining her relationship with him even after they accepted her as a lodger in their home. After this episode, Jake and Kate discover that Marisa suffers from schizophrenia and decide it would be better if she lived with Jake's parents, since Jake's father is a retired general practitioner and can take care of her and make her take her medicine again. At this point, it looks like Marisa is the evil character that must be tamed, but the reality of things is very different. Kate will have to face Annabelle, Jake's mother, who has always detested Kate and decided Marisa would be better suited for her son. She tries to manipulate them all through the book, so that Kate would eventually leave Jake and give up on her dream of having a child. Luckily, she will not manage to achieve her goal.

Magpie is set in contemporary times in London. In the novel, all the main features of a psychological thriller listed by Melchorsky (2014) are present. Marisa and Annabelle are in fact two apparently innocent characters who turn out to be psychotic: Marisa suffers from schizophrenia, while Annabelle manifests the typical traits of a narcissistic personality disorder.

Furthermore, Marisa serves as both protagonist and antagonist. This may be evidenced by the structure of the book: it is divided into two parts, the first one being told by an all-knowing narrator from the point of view of Marisa. For the reader, she is the main protagonist of the story, and we follow the events from her distorted point of view, while gaining insights on her personal history. The reader is led to believe in Marisa with no questioning, to the point that one can feel some kind of hatred raging inside towards Jake and especially towards Kate. Only at the beginning of the second part of the book, do we discover that Marisa is actually the unreliable narrator and that the truth is completely different. This unexpected plot twist, as well as the shift in the point of view from Marisa's to Kate's and the flashback structure of the whole second part, contribute to maintain a certain level of tension throughout the whole book. On the contrary, the character of Annabelle emerges immediately as a sort of antagonist, but her role is not quite clear, since she alternates moments of hostility and moments in which she is ready to help the young couple. Only in the final chapters the reader

understands that she is the real threat, since she is manipulating everyone and willing to tell the most unconceivable lies to reach her purpose.

The theme of children in danger is also present, even though in this case the child still has to be born. This probably gives the book a completely different feeling, making it even more difficult and challenging.

Magpie, besides being a psychological thriller, could also be defined as a domestic noir with a twist. As stated in the previous section, the main characters of domestic noirs are usually isolated women controlled by a man who represents the evil character, but in this book, the dangerous character is not Jake, Kate's husband, but a female character, that is Annabelle. She is the one trying to control everyone, with a special attention to humiliating and frightening Kate. The author therefore disrupts the major trend of the domestic noir by placing an evil woman as main antagonist.

The main feature of this genre is also respected: the centres of action are mostly home settings, and therefore the home, which is commonly perceived as a shelter from the threats of the outside world, is represented as the most dangerous place to be. Kate is in fact physically assaulted by Marisa in her own home and verbally assaulted by Annabelle every time she sees her in her country house. Both homes become a site of fear and violence for Kate, be it physical or psychological.

The book also includes a recurring symbol which is present in the title as well, that is magpies. While Kate is showing Marisa around the house, one magpie enters from the kitchen doors, disrupting the peace of the moment. According to the well known nursery rhyme, one is "for sorrow": the reader should therefore be able to foresee that something bad is going to happen and the symbol shall be well kept in mind because it will come back. In fact, shortly before discovering she is pregnant, Marisa sees two magpies in the backyard and immediately thinks "two for joy". Actually, while reading the book I could not help but ask myself: is it Annabelle that the author wants the reader to identify in the magpie? The magpie in fact is not only a bird of ill omen, but also a symbol of deceit, opportunism and illusion. What led me to this conclusion is the sentence on the book cover: *She has almost everything. The rest she'll take*. By analysing Annabelle's character, the reader discovers that she has in fact almost

everything, but she does not have control over Kate yet and she will try everything she can in order to gain it.

The themes explored in this novel are infertility and mental health issues, which I will discuss thoroughly in the following sections.

2.4 The issue of infertility

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), infertility is “a disease of the reproductive system defined by the failure to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse” (WHO 2020). The term is also used to refer to women who are unable to “carry a pregnancy to term”, meaning that they have stillbirths or miscarriages. Apparently, infertility is quite common, since it is estimated that one in four couples in developing countries is affected by it. But even though it seems to be a widespread condition that has always existed, it does not enjoy much visibility. In fact, only with the advent of assisted treatments and technologies, it is represented more: people start talking about it and topics like miscarriages, pregnancy loss, adoption, IVF or surrogacy are starting to enter the public consciousness and finally breaking the ‘conspiracy of silence’ they were in (Feasey 2019). Infertility and non-traditional family building started to be visible in the media environment with films such as *Juno* (2007) or *What to expect when you are expecting* (2012). In *Magpie*, the reader has a complete overview of IVF and surrogacy in particular, and also experiences what a woman feels like when diagnosed with infertility.

2.4.1 “Damaged, faulty in some way she cannot define”: women and infertility

Women recounting finding out that they could not have children because diagnosed with infertility, describe it as “a loss of [their] womanhood” (Bronstein and Knoll 2015). This feeling can be attributed to the fact that the upbringing of children has always been a part of life and is still among the most desired plans of adulthood. Motherhood in particular is still a goal for many women worldwide. Becoming aware of the impossibility to have children is hard and there might be various negative consequences for women, such as anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, guilt and self-blame

that might lead to depression, because it is a very upsetting experience for an individual to go through (Begum and Hassan 2014:1290). Sterling (2013) tells us that

most people go through a series of intense feelings after being diagnosed with infertility, including anger, sadness, grief, guilt and self-blame. Individuals are hit at their very core as infertility challenges basic beliefs, faith and hope in the 'normal' workings of our bodies, and may leave people feeling broken and defective.

Infertility is understood as if it were a pathology and the woman herself blames her body for it, as if this unpredictable and unintentional condition was her fault. All these feelings can be found in Kate, the protagonist of the book, after one year of trying to become pregnant:

She didn't want him to be as obsessed as she was, and yet at the same time she worried that he was fixated on a baby and she was letting him down. All of this whirred through her mind when they had sex and when Jake was on the verge of coming, she sometimes pretended she was too so that it would be over, so that he would have ejaculated inside her without this prolonged attempt to turn her on, which seemed unnecessary now. What did her own pleasure count when she was failing so conspicuously to do the thing other women did without thinking?

Then it was December again and a whole year had passed, and they had agreed to go to Annabelle and Chris's for Christmas and Kate was dreading it, but they packed up the car and made the trip to the farmhouse-that-wasn't-a-farmhouse and when they arrived, Kate was so shattered she made her excuses and went straight to bed. She knew Annabelle would prefer to have her out of the way, and she cried into the lace-trimmed pillow at how alone she felt.

She is also overwhelmed with feelings of jealousy and injustice that seemingly everyone can get pregnant easily and effortlessly, and fear that she will never find happiness without a maternal role:

[...] In the corner of the cafe, a baby started wailing, as if in echo of her own unhappiness, and the mother unbuttoned her blouse and began to breastfeed. The baby, instantly calmed, suckled away intently. Looking at them, Kate was overcome with a mixture of jealousy and awe. She was desperate. She wanted nothing so much as she wanted a baby. She was incapable of seeing anything other than this. She felt she would die if she did not become a mother.

Only when she manages to become pregnant through IVF does she feel happy and relieved:

Kate was happier and more at peace than she had been in ages. For those twelve days, she stopped crossing the street to avoid prams or buggies, choosing instead to smile broadly at the parents, as though they already shared a secret kinship. She imagined that the women could tell, that there was a special pheromone only mothers could scent on each other.

She feels at peace because she can finally fulfil the gender constructions usually attributed to women and she no longer feels like a second class citizen who “fails to adhere to acceptable boundaries of ‘proper’ womanhood” (Edge 2015:138).

Women who do not manage to have children might in fact feel socially emarginated, and as a consequence they might start enacting specific behaviours in order to avoid facing certain situations:

Slowly but perceptibly, Kate cloaked her emotions in cynicism. It was a form of self-protection. When another friend announced their pregnancy, uploading blurry twelve-week scans to Facebook, she groaned and cracked a bitter joke with Jake. She crossed the street to avoid women walking with

toddlers, their dimpled fists held in bigger, adult hands. She started to complain about babies crying in restaurants and to avoid social gatherings where she knew there would be newborns that Kate would be expected to coo over and interact with. It was all too painful.

The awareness of being infertile can therefore be extremely painful for a woman and can sometimes lead to further problems in the couple (e.g. men leaving because the woman is unable to have children). In these cases however, the couple can always decide to turn to alternative methods to conceive.

2.4.2 In vitro fertilisation

Today, medicine and science can help couples facing this situation with techniques like in vitro fertilisation (IVF), which is a complex series of procedures used in modern times to help with fertility and assist with the conception of a child. During IVF, mature eggs are retrieved from ovaries and fertilised by sperm in a lab. Then the fertilised egg (sometimes even multiple eggs) is transferred to the uterus. One full cycle of IVF takes about three weeks and can be repeated in the future. The procedure can be done using a couple's own eggs and sperm, or it may involve eggs, sperm or embryos from a known or anonymous donor. In some cases, a gestational carrier might be used.

Even though it is considered to be the most effective form of assisted reproductive technology, it was described by women participating in it as one of the most stressful experiences of their lives. The book discusses at length this aspect of the procedure. In fact, we read that Kate feels relief when she understands that she will not have to repeat the procedure again. This is because receiving a negative pregnancy report after an IVF treatment triggers feelings of grief, as if the woman had lost a child. In this case, various coping strategies are developed to reduce the emotional stress, like self-talk and sleep (Lukse and Vacc 1999:250):

She accepted that the cycle would fail with a fatalism that seemed safer than the alternative hope, so when she started bleeding again, this time on the final day of the two-week wait, she wasn't surprised or even particularly

upset. She had, over the preceding eighteen months, become immune to fluctuating emotions. She was like one of those robots she had once seen in Seoul airport when travelling back from a film festival. The robots had scooted along the terminal floors, with a friendly expression on their faces, and a touchscreen you could press to find the right answers. This is what she became: at work, at home, with Jake. She answered questions and took part in conversations but she had no real feeling beneath the surface. If she allowed herself to feel the smallest things, Kate knew it would lead ineluctably onto the bigger things and then that would be the start of a fatal unravelling, like a single dropped knitting stitch that ruins the whole pattern.

After all the negative results and useless cycles, Kate sinks in a sort of fake indifference, in which she pretends to be numb in order not to feel even the smallest emotion.

It is clearly hard for someone to go through all this, and blogs can be a sort of safe online community for women experiencing infertility, “a place to chronicle their personal stories, create communities, seek support, and raise awareness about their condition” (Miller 2008:79). Blogging is an available to everyone more immediate form of writing and communicating, and also fulfils an extreme need that the loneliness of women experiencing infertility triggers: the need of realising that they are not the only ones, they are not alone. These women look out for support that they can hardly find and blogs become a way to escape the social stigma. The only way for Kate to find support after the last IVF cycle is turning to a blog to reassure herself that she is really pregnant, even if the reality of things is going to hit her soon after:

In search of reassurance, she joined one of them with an anonymised username and asked whether you could be pregnant but not feel pregnant. The replies flooded in.

‘Wouldn’t worry hun. I didn’t have any symptoms until week 8 and my dd [darling daughter] is asleep upstairs. She’s five now’ wrote @ivfwarrior

‘Anxiety is 100 per cent a symptom!’ added @ttctlc

‘If you’re worried have a chat with your consultant,’ said @cyclingunicorn. ‘But it’s very early days, so try not to stress!! Get your OH [other half] to give you a nice relaxing massage! Put your feet up! You’re carrying precious cargo!! xoxoxoxo.’

The messages each came with a lengthy addendum underneath, in the style of an email signature. There, the women (and it was always women) would outline their own fertility histories in baffling detail, listing MCs (miscarriages) and BFNs (Big Fat Negatives) and numbering each failed IVF cycle, some with DEs (donor eggs). Within each footnote was a story of exhaustion and grief, reduced to a few minimal sentences, and after a while, Kate’s vision grew blurry and she shut down her laptop and went to bed.

This clearly shows how these communities are a way to find support for these women who have to face a reality that seems to exclude them, and manage to face this difficult experience. This is illustrated also during the lunch at Annabelle’s, where she does not want her guests to use their phones while at the table:

Kate takes off her coat and hangs it in the hallway. She slips her phone reluctantly into the pocket – Annabelle doesn’t like them to have their mobiles at mealtimes but leaving it behind always feels to Kate as though she’s temporarily cut adrift from a world that understands her as a woman in her own right, rather than Jake’s inconvenient appendage.

In these lines we understand that the whole situation makes Kate feel powerless because there is little she can do about it, and the feelings of inadequacy are now overwhelming, especially if special treatments like IVF fail.

Couples who find themselves in this situation start taking into account alternative solutions like adoption or surrogacy, which are often only considered in a worst-case-scenario.

2.4.3 Surrogacy

Surrogacy is such an ancient practice that it is even reported in the Bible. When Rachel saw that she was not having any children by Jacob, she offered him her servant: “Here’s my servant Bilhah. Sleep with her so that she can have children for me. Then I too can have a family through her.” (Genesis 30:3). Surrogacy is therefore the practice whereby a woman carries and gives birth to the child of another woman, who is usually infertile. This is often seen as a last option to achieve parenthood, since many couples still prefer having a child who is biologically related to them. There are two types of surrogacy: the traditional one, in which a surrogate mother uses her own egg fertilised by the intended father’s sperm, and the host IVF surrogacy, when the surrogate mother carries the intended parents’ genetic child conceived through IVF (Nakash and Herdman 2007:246).

The book deals with traditional surrogacy and also gives an overview of how surrogacy works in the United Kingdom. First of all, we learn that surrogacy is legal in the UK and that no money other than healthcare expenses should be paid to the surrogate mother. It is in fact illegal to advertise and be paid to become a surrogate mother. Nowadays, the law does not recognise surrogacy as a binding agreement and there is not much the parents can do in order to secure their position prior to the birth of the child. As a matter of fact, law on surrogacy in the UK has remained the same since the Surrogacy Agreement Act in 1985, but apparently some changes are on the way. In 2019, the Law Commission recognised that a main flaw in the current law is precisely the Parental Order process, that is the fact that the surrogate mother is the legal mother of the child from birth, rather than the intended parents. The intended parents must therefore go through the Court process to obtain a ‘Parental Order’ so that parenthood is transferred to them. This can be a very long process, taking six months or more to go through in some cases. The Law Commission have suggested that rather than obtaining a Parental Order post-birth, intended parents could become the child’s legal parents as soon as the child is born, provided that the surrogacy arrangement takes place in the UK. This reform would speed up the process for intended parents to gain parental responsibility for the child, while ensuring greater certainty for all parties involved (Page 2021).

Other than legal matters, surrogacy often poses other problems like the relation between the intended parents of the child and the surrogate mothers. In the book, Kate and Jake want to participate in Marisa's pregnancy to the point that she is asked to move in with them. Post-birth contacts sometimes stop by mutual agreement, but in other cases the parents still want to send pictures of the child or let the child know about the surrogate mother and her own family. This aspect is also tackled in the book and the opinion of the author in this matter is clear:

The gaps between the postcards got longer as time went on and then they stopped altogether. Kate was secretly relieved. It was difficult for the three of them to know how to be with each other. So much had happened, and the experiences they had shared had been uniquely intense. It was necessary to maintain a distance between them now for the good of everyone involved. There was no easy place for Marisa to occupy in their family.

[...]

They would tell Leo when the time was right, when he was old enough to understand. 'Mummy and Daddy had help to make you extra special,' is what they would say. What happened after that, and whether Leo would want to make contact with Marisa, would be beyond Kate's control.

However, the contact between the surrogate mother and the child should be discussed as soon as possible, to avoid any problem that might arise in the future (Nakash and Hardiman 2007:249). There is in fact a number of arguments to take into consideration, for instance, what happens if the host mother wishes to keep the child or wishes to have an abortion? What if the intended parents reject the child (e.g. because of disability)? These are only some of the questions that arise while discussing this topic, which as one can see is a debatable issue.

The health state of the surrogate mother is taken into consideration as well before proceeding. There are indeed some criteria that a woman must respect in order to become a surrogate: first of all, they must be resident in the UK, then be at least 21

years old and be physically and mentally healthy enough to carry a pregnancy. In the book, Marisa is clearly not mentally stable, but her condition was unknown before she was quite far along in the pregnancy, which leads the reader to think that she lied about her personal details and medical history to surrogacy organisation.

Even though it is a global practice that has been present for a long time, surrogacy is seen as an end of the road measure, something to turn to when nothing else worked. This is mainly due to the problems that can derive from it, especially when the surrogate suffers from a severe mental illness, an issue that will be explored in the next section.

2.5 Mental health issues

In this section, I will deal with the mental health issues presented in the book, that is schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder. I believe it is relevant to understand them in order to analyse and translate primarily the dialogues, since these illnesses influence the speech of the characters. I will therefore try to expand on their condition in the most accurate way possible.

2.5.1 Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a severe psychotic illness that is very much present in all countries and cultures. It is estimated that about 1 person on 100 may experience this disorder at some point in their lives. The DSM-IV-TR⁷ (2002) describes it as “a chronic, more or less debilitating illness characterized by perturbations in cognition, affect and behavior, all of which have a bizarre aspect.” A patient suffering from schizophrenia has lost touch with reality, in the sense that he or she believes things that cannot be true (delusions) or hears voices and sees visions that are not real (hallucinations). These are the most common symptoms along with disorganised speech and catatonic or bizarre behaviour (Frith and Johnson 2003:27). In the novel, the reader understands that Marisa is mentally unstable when she attacks Kate, and discovers that she is schizophrenic when Kate enters Marisa’s room and by flickering in her diary sees a prescription for Risperidone, a drug used to cure schizophrenia. Patients that suffer from this psychosis

⁷ First, M. B., Frances, A., & Pincus, H. A. (2002). *DSM-IV-TR handbook of differential diagnosis*. American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc..

also experience a deterioration of their intellectual and social functions, meaning that they are unable to work or take care of themselves (DSM-IV-TR 2002:329). This passage clarifies the fact that Marisa has been mentally ill for some time, and her condition worsens if she does not take the medicine:

She turns the doorknob and walks into the room. The curtains are drawn, so at first she doesn't see the mess. When she switches on the light, Kate gasps. The floor is covered with balled-up clothes and used tissues and cotton buds and old fast-food cartons. A half-drunk mug of tea is growing mould across the surface. In the corner, by the plug sockets, is what looks like a thick beige snake. When she gets closer, Kate realises it's a twisting clump of rotting takeaway noodles. She gags. The room smells of turpentine and sweat and stale food mixed with an indefinable rotten sweetness as cloying as pear drops. She puts a hand over her mouth, making her breathing more shallow. She picks her way across to the window and when she opens it, fresh air rushes in.

The disorder of the room is a sign that Marisa is profoundly unbalanced: she cannot take care of the environment surrounding her or of herself, since she has been wearing the same dirty t-shirt for days and Kate can smell her sweaty odour, as stated multiple times in the book. Patients may in fact become untidy and neglect to bathe or wash their clothes. In the following passage, the inability to work is explored:

Then she sees the desk. On the old architect's table are several jam jars filled with paintbrushes in dirty water the colour of silt. But there is no evidence of any painting. Instead, there are sheets and sheets of paper covered with scrawling handwriting in permanent marker. The words are so close together they make no sense at first. When Kate peers closer, she notices that they are not, in fact, words but names. Kate and Jake and Marisa written over and over again, looping through and under each other like a thicket of weeds, spreading their roots across all the available space until the paper is more black than white.

Marisa worked as an illustrator for children's books for a living, but clearly she has not been able to work since she moved in with Jake and Kate. Furthermore, she develops a real obsession towards Kate and Jake in particular: the cork-board above her desk, where she used to pin the photos of children she paints into her fairytales, is covered with photos of Jake, the most haunting one being a photo of Marisa and Jake together that reveals to be two separate photos stuck together to give the impression of a closeness that does not exist.

Almost all the symptoms of the illness can be seen in Marisa. Kate and Jake had noticed that there was something wrong with her, in particular that she had been having an odd behaviour, as if she was no longer the girl they met. This is one of the first signs of the illness, as studies on family members of schizophrenia patients reveal: at some point, from the time of puberty to his early thirties, the patient starts to show unusual behaviour, often described as "no longer being himself/herself". For example, some important decisions might seem strange (e.g., a college student suddenly drops out), or a worker might feel that other workers are unfair to him, even if this is not true, to the point that the anomalies become striking (Arieti 2015:72). In the case of Marisa, she was easily irritated by the silliest things, even by the mere presence of Kate in the home; she was obsessed with Kate, to the point that she follows her to work one day.

The prevailing symptom in Marisa is delusion: she starts to believe in this alternative reality her mind created, in which she and Jake are together as a couple and trying to have a baby, while Kate is the new lodger, who has been sleeping with Jake and trying to sabotage her relationship. In the second part of the book, the reader discovers that the truth is completely different: Kate and Jake are the couple who wants a baby, while Marisa is their surrogate. After discovering this, the whole first part of the book is seen under a completely different light, that is as the delirium of a psychotic mind. This becomes clear when Kate starts reading Marisa's diary:

It starts: 'The house is perfect' and as Kate reads, she realises Marisa is recounting the day that she came to visit Richborne Terrace and Kate

showed her around, and they'd been interrupted by a magpie flying in through the kitchen doors. Except for this incident, Marisa remembers the event differently. She barely mentions Kate or the surrogacy, and does not use her name. Turning the pages, Kate sees the pattern repeating itself again and again: entire scenes from their life told from Marisa's warped perspective, where she has written Kate out of the narrative, referring to her as 'the lodger' in her own home. Marisa has invented a whole relationship with Jake that doesn't exist. Their meeting in the cafe is depicted as though it were a date. Marisa has even written about Jake fucking her, which can't be true given that she is sure, even without checking, that every single night she refers to in the diary, Jake was in bed with Kate, not Marisa.

What is striking is the lucidity of the descriptions to the point that they seem true and Kate, as well as the reader, start questioning if there might be some verities in Marisa's diary. There is the certainty that Marisa is ill only when Kate discovers a prescription for Risperidone in the diary, a drug used to treat schizophrenia, psychosis and mania.

Schizophrenia is known to be a mysterious disease that might happen to anyone, therefore it is also complicated to trace its origin or cause in a patient (Frith and Johnstone 2003:87). What is sure is that there are certain factors that can influence the life of a person, like biological and environmental factors. Studies show that there is a higher risk for people who have close relatives (parents) who suffer from schizophrenia to develop the symptoms, therefore shared genetic material enhances the tendency to develop the disease (Frith and Johnstone 2003:54). However, not all patients have a family history of the condition: it is estimated that in more than a half of them no family history of psychotic illness in general can be found. It can therefore be stated that genetic factors have an important role in the cause of schizophrenia, but they cannot be the only variable taken into account, and also social and psychological causes must be considered. In particular, one recurrent question concerns whether a dysfunctional family can cause schizophrenia. In the 1940s various family theories that put emphasis on the family as a whole arose. It was suggested that symptoms arose as a reaction to pathological relationships within the family or to abnormal patterns of communication

(Frith and Johnstone 2003:61). In the case of Marisa, the reader does not know anything about her family history from a clinical point of view, but she states that her mother abandoned them when she was little. This can definitely cause a trauma in such a little child, also because after some time her father became absent, busy dating other women. At some point, in the second part of the book, we learn that Marisa has not spoken to her father or sister in twenty years, so basically she no longer has a family, since all ties have been abruptly cut.

However, this might not be the most traumatic event in Marisa's life: she was raped at the age of 17, in a day in which she skipped school to look for her mother. A person who has been sexually assaulted generally experiences high levels of distress afterward: the trauma can leave you feeling scared, angry, guilty and anxious, all sensations Marisa experiences immediately after the rape. The event seems to be "threatening, incomprehensible, and unmasterable" for her (Micale and Lerner 2001:126). Survivors of sexual assault are likely to develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition triggered by a terrifying event that the individual experienced or witnessed. Indicators may include severe anxiety, uncontrollable thoughts, nightmares or re-experiencing the event:

She has never told anyone. She has never spoken about how she didn't sleep at all that night, about how she cried without making a noise as grey daylight filtered into the room, about how Kevin snored as if it were normal – this most abnormal, most shocking of things – or about how when she got up to leave, she was so terrified of waking him that she gagged and almost threw up, or about how her clothes, when she put them on, didn't seem to be hers any more; they seemed instead to belong to an alien being, a person who was still so unaware of life's ugliness that she had allowed herself to be raped. The fault, she thought then, was hers, not his. He had attacked her, but she had let it happen. She has revisited the moment when her muscles went slack again and again and again. In her nightmares, it is always this point she returns to: the carpet rough against her back, her jaw rigid, her

entire body tensed, and then, like wind dropping in a sail – nothing. She is engulfed by shame.

These lines clarify that Marisa started suffering from PTSD and her daily life is being affected by it. At this point, one may wonder if something like PTSD can spark schizophrenia. As a matter of fact, PTSD symptoms and psychosis symptoms often occur together and a 2018 study found that there is a significant genetic overlap between schizophrenia and PTSD, to the point that some patients present both pathologies. Therefore, it is possible to assume that Marisa started suffering from PTSD after the sexual assault and soon afterwards started showing the symptoms of schizophrenia, such as delusions and disorganised behaviour.

2.5.2 Narcissistic personality disorder

The narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships and a lack of empathy for others. People that suffer from this condition may be generally unhappy and disappointed when they are not given the special admiration they believe they deserve. They may find their relationships unfulfilling, and others may not enjoy being around them. They are “interpersonally exploitive, taking advantage of other to achieve their own ends” (Sperry 2012:149).

All these traits can be found in the character of Annabelle, Jake’s mother. In the book, the reader witnesses the relationship Kate and Annabelle have, one in which Annabelle has always behaved with an evident attitude of superiority towards her. It can be assumed that her need for attention makes her harbour feeling of hate towards Kate because now she is no longer the only woman in the life of her son, who is going to have a new life with his girlfriend. Annabelle’s grudge becomes evident when Jake and Kate talk to her after moving in a bigger house and finally announce that they have unsuccessfully been trying to have a baby:

‘It’s palatial,’ she said, even though it wasn’t and certainly not when compared to Annabelle’s own sprawling residence in the countryside. ‘You two don’t need this much room, surely?’

They were sitting on the L-shaped sofa in the kitchen extension. Kate and Annabelle were sharing a bottle of Chablis, while Jake was drinking a Peroni beer straight from the bottle, despite his mother’s protestations that he really should get a glass.

‘Don’t you like the house then?’ Jake asked.

‘Oh no, no I didn’t say that. It’s lovely. And how you’ve done it up is very ... well, it’s very sweet. I just wondered if you ever felt like you rattled around a bit, that’s all.’

Annabelle tilted her face towards him. She was wearing another one of her floaty thin-knit cardigans, her wrist weighed down with a chunky gold charm bracelet that shook every time she took a drink.

Kate refilled her glass, staying silent.

‘We don’t rattle around,’ Jake said. ‘And it won’t always just be us anyway, will it?’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Well, when we have children ...’

Annabelle laughed.

‘Children?’ she said, enunciating the word as if Jake had outlined a preposterous conspiracy theory. ‘But surely you can’t be thinking ... you’re ... well ... I hadn’t ... you’re not even married, darling!’

It is clear that Annabelle cannot feel any happiness for the achievements of the couple like moving in a bigger house, or for their future project of having a baby. On the contrary, she almost seems disgusted by the idea. Her attitude worsens when the next day Jake and Kate explain the difficulties they are having in getting pregnant, even after trying IVF:

‘You know my dear friend Trisha? Her daughter had IVF five times and no luck. They don’t know why. I suppose it’s just one of those things. And it

must be awful for you to go through, darling Kate. I worry that doctors suggest all sorts of medical procedures when maybe there's nothing to be done, and the procedure itself can be so draining, can't it? From what I understand, I mean. Of course I've never been through anything like that myself.'

Kate tried, as much as possible, to let Annabelle's words wash over her. A year ago, she would have been righteously indignant at the invasive nature of Annabelle's opinion but now she no longer seemed to have the mental or physical capacity to make her case. And really, she told herself, it was none of Annabelle's business. She wished Jake hadn't told her.

'It is draining, yes,' Jake said. 'Kate's been heroic.'

Annabelle blinked slowly, those clear blue eyes seeming to become even clearer as she spoke.

'Poor Kate,' she patted Kate's arm. 'It must be so tough. I read somewhere that giving IVF to women who aren't able to conceive is a bit like giving chemotherapy to a terminal cancer patient.'

In this case, Annabelle shows no empathy at all for Kate and all the troubles she is going through. On the contrary, she underlines how she never had to experience such things, or how IVF did not work for other people she knows, making Kate feel awful. In her final comment, rather than giving Kate some hope, she suggests that she should give up on her desire of having a baby altogether.

Narcissistic people often manipulate others in order to achieve their own ends (Ronningstam 2005:92). In order to do so, they use specific techniques like gaslighting, a manipulative behaviour designed to weaken, trick and destabilise the victim, in particular they will deny they said something or did something that you know they said or did. In this passage, Annabelle has just attacked Kate, telling her that the baby is not biologically hers and that Marisa and Jake have been having an affair:

'Annabelle,' she says. 'I'd like you to tell everyone what you just told me in the kitchen.'

Annabelle straightens and sighs audibly.

‘Oh for goodness’ sake, what is it now? I don’t know what you’re talking about, Kate.’

Annabelle swivels on her heel and faces her, and Kate is astonished by her composure. Annabelle’s face seems to have become younger and less lined, as though the viciousness of a few minutes ago has invigorated her.

‘You know exactly what I mean.’

Annabelle shrugs and lifts her hands, palms facing upwards in a gesture of supplication.

‘I honestly have no idea. I just know that everything I do seems to annoy you in some way and I’m on the verge of giving up altogether. Apparently nothing I do can ever be good enough. You see,’ Annabelle shifts on her feet, directing her next comment to Jake, ‘this is exactly what I’ve been telling you about.’

[...]

‘You told me, in the kitchen, that Jake and Marisa were better off without me,’ Kate says. ‘That Marisa’s the biological mother. That I’ve been impossible and it’s no wonder Jake’s been spending so much time here behind my back.’

A beat of silence. Kate’s cheeks are hot. Chris, lifting the glass from the floor, suspends his arm mid-air. Jake walks towards her, his face pale.

[...]

‘What utter nonsense,’ Annabelle says. ‘Jake, I’ve been trying to tell you for some time that I’ve been worried about Kate’s mental health, haven’t I? What further proof do you need?’

‘Mum, that’s not—’

‘I just can’t believe that you’ve invented this ludicrous ... conspiracy,’ Annabelle continues. ‘And you’re lashing out at me – me! I’ve done so much for you, even if I haven’t always understood you. I ... I ... just don’t know what more I could have done.’ Annabelle’s eyes are moist now, welling with self-pity.

As typical of the gaslighting technique, Annabelle pretends not to know what Kate is talking about: she denies everything and plays the role of the victim instead, making Kate look like a mentally unstable liar. At some point, she even pretends to cry to show how hurt she felt.

What Annabelle also does is playing hot and cold games. Narcissists will flatter you to get what they want and then use aggression. The negative moments are interspersed with positive ones, so that one might not even realise that he is being manipulated. This is exactly the case: Annabelle is at times kind and generous towards Kate (e.g., she accepts to take Marisa into custody because Kate “is family, and family comes before anything else”), at times hostile. During the verbal attack in the kitchen, she elicits feelings such as shock, awe and guilt to maintain the control over her and carry on her lie-based power game:

‘Chris and I did everything we could, putting ourselves in God knows what sort of danger, and we nursed that poor girl back to health—’

‘That poor girl?’ Kate asks, incredulous.

‘Yes. That poor girl. Who you took advantage of because of your *demented* obsession with having a baby.’

Kate, shocked, feels tears begin to form.

‘That’s not true.’

‘Yes it is. Jake’s told us how impossible you’ve been, how he doesn’t feel he can ever satisfy you.’ Annabelle is getting into her stride now, the words delivered like the rapid staccato gunshots of a firing squad. ‘It must have been quite obvious Marisa wasn’t in a fit state, but you insisted on moving her in with you to keep an eye on her and then you acted surprised when it all got too much for her. I mean, honestly, Kate. What were you thinking?’

Kate hangs her head. Annabelle is right. She should have known. She had pressurised Jake into doing it. She had wanted to believe in Marisa’s perfection so badly that she had ignored any signs that contradicted it.

Annabelle does not comfort her. Instead, she takes two long steps towards her so that she is inches away from Kate's face. Her voice drops to an almost-whisper, which feels far more menacing than shouting.

'That child isn't yours anyway,' Annabelle says, the words delivered in a fine spray of spittle. 'Not biologically. It's quite clear to everyone else that Marisa and Jake are far better suited than you two ever were.'

'What ...?' Kate shakes her head, as if to rid it of the buzzing noise.

'Well just look at them, dear,' Annabelle says, her lips twisting upwards in a strange little smile. 'They're two peas in a pod, aren't they? You must have noticed!'

Kate steps backwards, so dizzy that she is sure the kitchen floor must have dissolved underfoot. Her back thumps against the wall and the impact causes the pages of Annabelle's calendar to flutter. She remembers seeing the initial J there on multiple different days. She hadn't allowed herself to think about what it really meant but somewhere, in the unacknowledged grimy pit of her denial, she had known.

'He's been spending an awful lot of time with her,' Annabelle says, as if reading Kate's thoughts. 'You can't be that dense, Kate. Come on. He's been down here most weeks and the two of them have been getting on like a house on fire.'

'What? But I thought she didn't want us here ...'

Annabelle tilts her head in a pose of sympathy.

'She didn't want *you* here, Kate. Jake and I had a long chat about it and decided it would be best.'

Kate remembers the spa weekend and Jake's early departure. He must have come here, she realises. All those unexplained absences for work. He was here all along. With Marisa. She presses the palm of each hand against the wall, wanting it to break open and swallow her. Annabelle is still speaking.

'... and it's been lovely to see. Marisa is so easy to talk to, don't you find? It's only a matter of time until Jake realises ...'

She stops then, as if aware she has gone too far. Annabelle doesn't need to complete the thought. Kate can do it for her. It's only a matter of time until

Jake realises he should be with Marisa, the mother of his child. It is only a matter of time until Kate loses everything.

As the dialogues show, Annabelle makes Kate feel guilty for the situation they are in and leans on her weak spots, that is the idea of losing Jake and the baby forever. The worst part is that Kate starts believing in everything Annabelle says and questions her own actions, behaviours and experiences. Annabelle's finishing blow is aimed at Kate's inability to be a biological mother:

‘Marisa and I have become close because that girl hasn't got a mother,’ she says, standing over Kate like a shadow. ‘It should be perfectly clear,’ Annabelle pauses, checking she has Kate's total attention. ‘Or maybe you can only see that kind of thing when you've had a child yourself.’

In this way, Annabelle thinks she has permanently destroyed Kate's willpower and that now she is completely under her control, but this actually appears to give Kate greater power: after this assertion, she finds the strength to fight back and reveal Annabelle's deceit. What is more, it is clear that Annabelle makes Marisa feel special not because she values something about her, but only because she is another pawn in her game.

These are just the most evident traits of the narcissistic personality disorder in Annabelle's character, but there are many clues scattered in the book. For example, Annabelle does not value her husband's work: he is a retired general practitioner and she said that “he never aimed for much in life”, or the fact that she has such a controlling relationship with her son Jake. Her behaviour must have had a pervasive influence in Jake's life, since he is clearly so afraid of her that he cannot even respond to all the terrible things she says. Only in the end he finds the courage to fight back and understands that he should not have done what he did for her in his life (e.g., defend her and do everything he could to please her).

Concluding remarks

This chapter has presented the genre, the author and the content of the book I worked on, that is the psychological thriller/domestic noir *Magpie* by British author Elizabeth Day, as well as the main issues it deals with, that is infertility and mental health. Its main goal is to serve as an overview of Day's publication and as an introduction to the translation that will be offered in the next chapter.

3. The translation

In this chapter I will present my own translation into Italian of *Magpie*. In order to fulfil the aim of the research, I chose the chapters that presented most dialogues.

<p>Chapter 12</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Her head is throbbing. She has the unpleasant sensation of liquid coagulating at the nape of her neck. The thought of blood makes her feel faint and she blinks her eyes shut for a minute, to rid herself of the image.</p> <p>‘Kate.’</p> <p>Her name.</p> <p>‘Kate.’</p> <p>There it is again. Her name spoken in a recognisable voice that she can’t yet place.</p> <p>‘Open your eyes, Kate.’</p> <p>Her head is still fuzzy. Someone has upended a snow globe and scattered her thoughts like glitter.</p> <p>‘Kate.’</p> <p>It is a female voice. It is one she knows, but not intimately. It is someone she has been worried about. And then, suddenly, it comes to her. Marisa. Thank God. Marisa is here. She must have come in after her and disturbed the intruder and found Kate lying here.</p>	<p>Capitolo 12</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Le pulsa la testa. Ha la sgradevole sensazione di avere del liquido che si coagula sulla nuca. Si sente svenire al pensiero che potrebbe essere sangue e chiude gli occhi per un minuto per liberarsi da quell’immagine.</p> <p>«Kate.»</p> <p>Il suo nome.</p> <p>«Kate.»</p> <p>Eccolo, di nuovo. Il suo nome pronunciato da una voce familiare che non riesce a riconoscere.</p> <p>«Apri gli occhi, Kate.»</p> <p>Si sente confusa, come se qualcuno avesse capovolto una di quelle sfere di vetro con dentro la neve e sparpagliato i suoi pensieri come fossero brillantini.</p> <p>«Kate.»</p> <p>È la voce di una donna. Una che conosce, ma non strettamente. È qualcuno di cui era preoccupata. E poi, all’improvviso, le viene in mente. Marisa. Grazie a Dio. Marisa è qui. Deve essere entrata dopo di lei e aver disturbato l’intruso, trovando Kate distesa a terra.</p>
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<p>‘Mrsssa,’ Kate slurs. A tooth has loosened in her mouth. Her tongue is swollen. She tries to say she’s glad Marisa is here but it comes out as ‘Sgldsshhear.’</p> <p>‘Don’t speak,’ Marisa says.</p> <p>Kate opens her eyes fully. She sees the edges of Marisa’s slippers: fluffy beige booties Kate has always hated. They look so matronly, and Marisa is so young. She doesn’t make the best of herself. But why is she thinking this now? She needs to concentrate. She needs to get up off the floor and get some medical attention. Marisa will have called an ambulance, she is sure. But why is Marisa wearing slippers if she’s just come in from outside?</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Why is Marisa just sitting there? Why isn’t she trying to help her?</p> <p>‘Sit up, Kate.’</p> <p>Marisa’s voice is monotone, almost robotic. Perhaps it’s tough love, Kate thinks. Perhaps she thinks this is the best way to snap her out of her shock.</p> <p>‘Ambulance,’ Kate says. Without the tooth, it is easier to make herself understood.</p> <p>‘You don’t need an ambulance, Kate. You’re perfectly fine. I just want to talk.’</p> <p>That is the first odd signal that reaches Kate’s jagged synapses. Oh, she thinks,</p>	<p>«Mrsssa,» farfuglia Kate. Sta perdendo un dente. La sua lingua è gonfia. Prova a dire che è felice che Marisa sia qui, ma le esce un «Sflcshqui.»</p> <p>«Stai zitta,» dice Marisa.</p> <p>Kate apre completamente gli occhi. Vede i bordi delle pantofole di Marisa: soffici stivaletti beige che Kate ha sempre odiato. Sembrano così matronali, mentre Marisa è così giovane. Non si valorizza per niente. Ma perché sta pensando a questo ora? Deve concentrarsi. Deve alzarsi dal pavimento e ricevere cure mediche. Marisa avrà chiamato un’ambulanza, ne è certa. Ma perché Marisa indossa le pantofole, se è appena entrata da fuori?</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Perché Marisa se ne sta seduta lì? Perché non cerca di aiutarla?</p> <p>«Mettiti seduta, Kate.»</p> <p>La voce di Marisa è piatta, quasi robotica. Forse è amore severo, pensa Kate. Forse pensa che questo sia il modo migliore per farla reagire allo shock.</p> <p>«Ambulanza,» dice Kate. Senza il dente le è più facile farsi capire.</p> <p>«Non hai bisogno di un’ambulanza, Kate. Stai benissimo. Voglio solo parlare.»</p> <p>Questo è il primo strano segnale che raggiunge le sinapsi frastagliate di Kate.</p>
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<p>Marisa is not going to help after all. Marisa is not acting as she thought she would. Oh, she thinks. Oh.</p> <p>Then Kate notices that she can't move her legs. They seem to be fused together, impossibly heavy to lift. She lowers her head. Looking down along the hallway floor, she sees there are coils of rope wound tightly around her thighs.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>'Hello there.'</p> <p>Marisa is sitting on a kitchen chair, erect and poised in the half-gloom, the rope twisted several times around her hand and wrist. Her blonde hair is loose around her shoulders. She is wearing a grey cardigan and a grubby T-shirt and no bra. Her pregnant belly sticks out. Her legs are spread apart.</p> <p>There is a strange nonchalance to her stance. It reminds Kate of a portrait of the Virgin and Child she has seen on Jake's laptop: a late medieval altarpiece fragment, with the mother looking monumental and stolid against a gold-leaf background. The only sign of her relation to the adult-seeming baby standing on her lap is the slightest inclination of her head, swathed in blue-gold cloth. Even her hands, elegantly placed around the child, seem not actually to touch his flesh.</p>	<p>Oh, pensa, Marisa non ha intenzione di aiutarmi, dopo tutto. Marisa non si sta comportando come pensava che avrebbe fatto. Oh, pensa. Oh.</p> <p>Poi Kate si accorge che non riesce a muovere le gambe. Sembrano essere fuse insieme, un peso impossibile da sollevare. Abbassa la testa. Guardando giù lungo il pavimento dell'ingresso, vede spire di corda attorno alle sue cosce.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>«Ehilà.»</p> <p>Marisa è seduta in penombra su una sedia della cucina con la schiena dritta e composta, la corda attorcigliata più volte intorno alla sua mano e al polso. I suoi capelli biondi sono sciolti sulle spalle. Indossa un cardigan grigio e una maglietta sporca, senza reggiseno. Il suo pancione sporge. Tiene le gambe divaricate. C'è una strana nonchalance nella sua posizione. Ricorda a Kate un ritratto della Vergine con Bambino che ha visto sul portatile di Jake: un frammento di pala d'altare tardo-medievale, con la madre dall'aspetto monumentale e imperturbabile su uno sfondo a foglia oro. L'unico segno del suo legame con il bambino dall'aspetto adulto in piedi sul suo grembo è un'inclinazione minima della testa, avvolta in un drappo blu-oro. Anche le sue mani, poste elegantemente attorno al bambino,</p>
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<p>‘How long have you and Jake been sleeping together?’</p> <p>Marisa asks the question calmly but there is a flush on her cheeks, a dot of red at the centre of each one that suggests a flaming core of anger. Kate is so surprised by the question, so utterly taken aback by the surreal weirdness of the situation that it takes a moment to register what is being asked. For a second, she forgets about being scared.</p> <p>‘What?’</p> <p>‘You heard me.’</p> <p>Kate laughs. She tries to haul herself upright once again and this time, she manages it. She bends both her arms to the deadweight of her legs, half pushing, half carrying until they lie at an approximate 90-degree angle to the rest of her. She sits with her back slumped against the wall, exhausted by the effort. Sweat drips from the end of her nose. She wipes it away with the back of her hand and when she draws it away, it is smeared with blood.</p> <p>‘What ... have you ... done to me?’ Kate asks. Marisa raises an eyebrow.</p> <p>‘Oh, Kate, Kate, Kate. Whatever I’ve done to you pales in comparison to what you’ve done to me.’</p>	<p>sembrano non toccare veramente la sua carne.</p> <p>«Da quanto tu e Jake andate a letto insieme?»</p> <p>Marisa pone la domanda con calma, ma appare un rossore al centro di ognuna delle sue guance che suggerisce la presenza di una rabbia ardente. Kate è così sorpresa dalla domanda, così presa alla sprovvista dalla stranezza surreale della situazione, che le ci vuole un attimo per capire ciò che le viene chiesto. Per un secondo si dimentica di avere paura.</p> <p>«Cosa?»</p> <p>«Mi hai sentita.»</p> <p>Kate ride. Cerca di tirarsi su ancora e questa volta ci riesce. Piega entrambe le braccia al peso morto delle sue gambe, spingendole e spostandole, fino a quando non si trovano ad un angolo di circa 90 gradi rispetto al resto del suo corpo. Accascia la schiena al muro, esausta per lo sforzo. Il sudore le cola dalla punta del naso. Lo asciuga col dorso della mano e quando la ritrae è imbrattata di sangue.</p> <p>«Cosa... mi hai... fatto?» chiede Kate. Marisa alza un sopracciglio.</p> <p>«Oh, Kate, Kate, Kate. Qualunque cosa io ti abbia fatto scompare in confronto a ciò che tu hai fatto a me.»</p>
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<p>‘I don’t know what you mean.’</p> <p>Kate starts to cry. She hates herself for it.</p> <p>‘Why am I bleeding?’</p> <p>‘Don’t worry. You’ll live. It’s just a minor blow to the head.’</p> <p>She has never seen Marisa like this – cold and distant. Even her language has acquired a medical gloss. Usually Marisa is so chaotic and ruffled and earth-motherly. Kate has always believed her to be a bit hopeless. Strange, yes. Lately, her behaviour has been erratic and worrying. But this – this – is beyond anything she could have imagined.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>The screaming unsettles Marisa.</p> <p>‘Shush, Kate, shush.’</p> <p>But Kate carries on because the noise of it reassures her she is still alive. That there is still hope. She screams. No words, just sounds and the more she does it, she realises, the more Marisa becomes agitated.</p> <p>‘Kate, please stop. Shush, shush, shush, now. You’re OK. You’re fine. It’s OK. I’m not going to hurt you. I promise.’</p> <p>Marisa shifts forward in her chair, placing the knife carefully onto the floor. Kate registers that it’s a knife from the wooden block in the kitchen, one of the ones that needs sharpening. She used it the other</p>	<p>«Non so a cosa ti riferisci.»</p> <p>Kate inizia a piangere. Si odia per questo.</p> <p>«Perché sto sanguinando?»</p> <p>«Non preoccuparti. Vivrai. È solo un piccolo colpo alla testa.»</p> <p>Non aveva mai visto Marisa così – fredda e distante. Anche il suo linguaggio sembrava quello di un medico. Di solito Marisa è così caotica, trasandata e terra terra. Kate ha sempre creduto che fosse un po’ senza speranza. Strano, decisamente. Negli ultimi tempi il suo comportamento era stato imprevedibile e preoccupante. Ma questo... Questo va al di là di qualsiasi cosa potesse immaginare.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Le urla inquietano Marisa.</p> <p>«Zitta, Kate, taci.»</p> <p>Ma Kate continua perché quel rumore le assicura che è ancora viva. Che c’è ancora speranza. Grida. Nessuna parola, solo suoni, e si rende conto che più lo fa, più Marisa si agita.</p> <p>«Kate, per favore, basta. Shh, shh, shh. Stai bene. Va tutto bene. Non ti farò del male. Lo prometto.»</p> <p>Marisa da seduta si piega in avanti e appoggia con cura il coltello sul pavimento. Kate si accorge che è un coltello preso dal ceppo di legno in cucina, uno di quelli che hanno bisogno di</p>
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<p>day to slice into a tomato and the knife was so blunt it was difficult to dent the skin. This calms her. Marisa can't hurt her with this knife. It is for show, nothing more.</p> <p>'I just want to talk,' Marisa says. Her voice is different now, less flat and more fevered. 'I feel like I'm going mad and I just want to talk.'</p> <p>You are, Kate wants to say. You are going mad. These are not the actions of a sane person. For months, she's been worried about Marisa, about the way she barely sleeps or eats, about the way she slinks around the house as if she's stalking Kate. There was that time, a few weeks ago, that she found Marisa following her in the tube station at Oxford Circus. She was spooked enough to tell Jake about it.</p> <p>'It's like she's obsessed with you,' he said, stroking her hair out of her eyes. 'A girl crush or something.'</p> <p>But she knew, even then, it wasn't a harmless crush. It was something darker. It was as if Marisa actually wanted to be Kate, to inhabit her form, to stitch together clothes made of her skin.</p>	<p>un'affilatura. L'aveva usato lei l'altro giorno per affettare un pomodoro e la lama era talmente smussata che era difficile intaccarne la pelle. Questo la tranquillizza. Marisa non può farle del male con quel coltello. È solo scena, niente di più.</p> <p>«Voglio solo parlare,» dice Marisa. La sua voce è diversa ora, meno piatta e più febbrile. «Mi sembra di impazzire, voglio solo parlare.»</p> <p>È vero, vorrebbe dire Kate. Tu stai impazzendo. Una persona sana di mente non fa queste cose. Da mesi era preoccupata per Marisa, per il modo in cui dorme o mangia a malapena, per il modo in cui si aggira per casa, come se stesse perseguitando Kate. C'era stata quella volta in cui, qualche settimana fa, aveva beccato Marisa a pedinarla nella stazione della metropolitana di Oxford Circus. Ne era stata talmente spaventata da raccontarlo a Jake.</p> <p>«È come se fosse ossessionata da te,» disse lui scostandole i capelli dagli occhi. «Come se avesse una cotta per te, o qualcosa di simile.»</p> <p>Ma anche allora sapeva che non era un'innocua cotta. Era qualcosa di più oscuro. Era come se Marisa volesse davvero essere Kate, abitare il suo corpo e cucire abiti fatti con la sua pelle.</p>
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<p>‘It can’t be good for the baby, all this,’ she said to Jake. ‘I’m really worried about her. And we both know it’s more important than just her. The baby’s my main concern.’</p> <p>They had plans, the two of them, for what would happen when the baby arrived. What they would do. How happy they would be once Marisa had left their lives.</p> <p>‘I know,’ he said. ‘I’ll talk to her.’ And Kate had trusted him to do so. She always had.</p>	<p>«Tutto questo non può fare bene al bambino,» disse a Jake. «Sono davvero preoccupata per lei. E sappiamo entrambi che lei non è l’unica cosa importante. La mia preoccupazione più grande è il bambino.»</p> <p>Loro due avevano pianificato cosa sarebbe successo una volta arrivato il bambino. Cosa avrebbero fatto. Quanto sarebbero stati felici quando Marisa sarebbe uscita dalle loro vite.</p> <p>«Lo so,» disse lui. «Le parlerò.» E Kate confidò che lo avrebbe fatto. Come sempre.</p>
<p>Chapter 17</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>They went for a coffee in the ground-floor cafe. They didn’t go on holiday, but spent the next couple of months trying to occupy themselves with other projects. They had friends round for dinner. They went to the cinema and art galleries and restaurants they had heard other people recommend. Annabelle came up and stayed for the weekend in the room that would eventually be the nursery, but which they had filled for now with a double bed. She was polite about the house and brought Kate a huge bunch of peonies to say thank you for having her. Only once did she revert to form, when</p>	<p>Capitolo 17</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Andarono a prendere un caffè nel bar al piano terra. Non si presero una vacanza, ma passarono i due mesi successivi cercando di tenersi occupati con altri progetti. Invitarono amici a cena. Andarono al cinema, alle gallerie d'arte e in ristoranti raccomandati da altre persone. Arrivò Annabelle e per il fine settimana rimase nella stanza che prima o poi sarebbe diventata quella del bambino, ma che per il momento avevano riempito con un letto matrimoniale. Si complimentò per la casa e portò a Kate un enorme mazzo di peonie per ringraziarla dell’ospitalità. Solo una volta tornò alla sua vera natura,</p>

<p>she asked why they'd moved into such a big place.</p> <p>'It's palatial,' she said, even though it wasn't and certainly not when compared to Annabelle's own sprawling residence in the countryside. 'You two don't need this much room, surely?'</p> <p>They were sitting on the L-shaped sofa in the kitchen extension. Kate and Annabelle were sharing a bottle of Chablis, while Jake was drinking a Peroni beer straight from the bottle, despite his mother's protestations that he really should get a glass.</p> <p>'Don't you like the house then?' Jake asked.</p> <p>'Oh no, no I didn't say that. It's lovely. And how you've done it up is very ... well, it's very sweet. I just wondered if you ever felt like you rattled around a bit, that's all.'</p> <p>Annabelle tilted her face towards him. She was wearing another one of her floaty thin-knit cardigans, her wrist weighed down with a chunky gold charm bracelet that shook every time she took a drink. Kate refilled her glass, staying silent.</p> <p>'We don't rattle around,' Jake said. 'And it won't always just be us anyway, will it?'</p> <p>'I don't understand.'</p>	<p>quando chiese perché si fossero trasferiti in una casa così grande.</p> <p>«Sembra un palazzo,» disse, anche se non lo era, e certamente non se paragonata alla vasta residenza in campagna di Annabelle.</p> <p>«Voi due non avete bisogno di tutto questo spazio, vero?»</p> <p>Erano seduti sul divano a forma di L nell'ampliamento della cucina. Kate e Annabelle stavano condividendo una bottiglia di Chablis, mentre Jake stava bevendo una Peroni direttamente dalla bottiglia, nonostante sua madre protestasse che avrebbe proprio dovuto prendere un bicchiere.</p> <p>«Quindi la casa non ti piace?» chiese Jake.</p> <p>«Oh no, non ho detto questo. È adorabile. E il modo in cui l'avete arredata è molto ... beh, è molto dolce. Mi chiedevo solo se non vi foste mai sentiti come se fosse un po' troppo grande per voi, tutto qui.»</p> <p>Annabelle inclinò il viso verso di lui. Indossava un altro dei suoi fluttuanti cardigan a maglia sottile, il suo polso appesantito da un grosso braccialetto d'oro che oscillava ogni volta che beveva.</p> <p>Kate riempì il suo bicchiere in silenzio.</p> <p>«Non è troppo grande per noi» disse Jake.</p> <p>«E comunque non saremo sempre e solo noi, no?»</p> <p>«Non capisco.»</p>
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<p>‘Well, when we have children ...’ Annabelle laughed. ‘Children?’ she said, enunciating the word as if Jake had outlined a preposterous conspiracy theory. ‘But surely you can’t be thinking ... you’re ... well ... I hadn’t ... you’re not even married, darling!’ Kate snorted. Jake’s neck was mottled red.</p> <p>‘It’s not the nineteenth century, Mother.’</p> <p>‘No, I know, but ...’ ‘Actually, we’ve been trying to get pregnant and it hasn’t been easy, and I – we – would appreciate a bit more sensitivity on that front.’ When he was furious, Jake’s syntax became formal and middle-aged. Annabelle looked as though she had been slapped. Beneath the peachy circles of blush, her face was pale. ‘I’m sorry to hear that,’ she said, placing her glass on the coffee table. She stood up from the sofa and swept out of the room, leaving a trail of Christian Dior perfume in her wake. Kate emptied her glass. ‘That went well,’ she said drily. Jake walked over to the kitchen counter, slamming his empty beer bottle into the recycling bin with such force she was surprised she didn’t hear it shatter. Kate</p>	<p>«Beh, quando avremo dei figli...» Annabelle rise. «Figli?» disse, enunciando la parola come se Jake avesse delineato una assurda teoria complottista. «Ma sicuramente non potete pensare ... siete... beh ... non avevo ... non siete nemmeno sposati, tesoro!» Kate sbuffò. Il collo di Jake era chiazzato di rosso. «Non siamo nel diciannovesimo secolo, Madre.» «No, lo so, ma...» «In realtà, ci stiamo provando da un po’ e non è stato facile, e io - noi - apprezzeremmo un po' più di sensibilità su quel fronte.» Quando Jake era furioso, la sua sintassi diventava formale e attempata. Sembrava che Annabelle fosse stata schiaffeggiata. Sotto i cerchi color pesca del blush, il suo viso era pallido. «Mi dispiace,» disse, posando il suo bicchiere sul tavolino. Si alzò dal divano e uscì dalla stanza, lasciando dietro di sé una scia di profumo di Christian Dior. Kate svuotò il suo bicchiere. «È andata bene,» disse ironicamente. Jake si avvicinò al bancone della cucina, sbattendo la sua bottiglia di birra vuota nel cestino con una forza tale, che lei si stupì di non averla sentita andare in frantumi.</p>
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<p>knew she should go over to him and try and broker some kind of peace with Annabelle but she was too tired. She told him she was going to bed, and left the wine glasses on the coffee table for him to clear away.</p> <p>The next morning, at breakfast, Annabelle sat with an uneaten slice of toast in front of her, very still and upright. She hadn't applied her usual make-up, Kate noticed. She looked old and pale and clearly wanted to demonstrate her hurt.</p> <p>'Some coffee, Annabelle?' Kate asked.</p> <p>Jake was sitting opposite his mother, ostentatiously reading a copy of <i>The Economist</i> so that he didn't have to interact.</p> <p>Annabelle shook her head, resting a hand on her clavicle as she did so.</p> <p>'I'm sorry if I spoke out of turn,' she said finally, her voice clear. 'I didn't realise ... it was such a <i>difficult</i> subject for you both.'</p> <p>Jake didn't say anything, but he raised his head from the magazine and met his mother's eyes. Well, Kate thought, I suppose it falls to me to explain.</p> <p>'The thing is, Annabelle, we've been having IVF.'</p> <p>Annabelle looked blank.</p> <p>'Fertility treatment,' Kate said. 'I can't</p>	<p>Kate sapeva che sarebbe dovuta andare da lui e cercare di mediare una sorta di pace con Annabelle, ma era troppo stanca. Gli disse che sarebbe andata a letto e lasciò i bicchieri di vino sul tavolino del salotto affinché lui li portasse via.</p> <p>La mattina dopo, a colazione, Annabelle sedeva dritta e immobile con una fetta di toast intatta davanti a sé. Kate notò che non si era truccata come faceva di solito. Sembrava vecchia e pallida e chiaramente voleva dimostrare il suo dolore.</p> <p>«Un po' di caffè, Annabelle?» chiese Kate.</p> <p>Jake era seduto di fronte a sua madre e leggeva ostentatamente una copia dell'<i>Economist</i> in modo da non dover interagire.</p> <p>Annabelle scosse la testa, appoggiandosi una mano sulla clavicola.</p> <p>«Mi dispiace se ho parlato a sproposito,» disse infine, con voce chiara. «Non mi ero resa conto... che fosse un argomento così <i>difficile</i> per voi.»</p> <p>Jake non disse nulla, ma alzò la testa dalla rivista e incontrò lo sguardo di sua madre. Beh, pensò Kate, suppongo che tocchi a me spiegare.</p> <p>«Annabelle, il fatto è che abbiamo fatto la FIV.»</p> <p>Annabelle sembrò assente.</p> <p>«È un trattamento per la fertilità,» disse</p>
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<p>seem to conceive naturally.'</p> <p>'We can't,' Jake corrected her softly.</p> <p>'Oh, I see. And, what do the doctors say the chances are?' Annabelle enquired politely.</p> <p>'Around 30 per cent,' Kate said.</p> <p>'We've had two cycles,' Jake added.</p> <p>'Unsuccessfully. They advise three.'</p> <p>Annabelle reached for the marmalade and started spreading it on her cold toast. She replaced her knife carefully on the plate and took a small bite, chewing thoughtfully. They waited for her to swallow and for the next, inevitable comment to slice into the room.</p> <p>'I'm just worried about you both, that's all.'</p> <p>'We'll be fine,' Jake said.</p> <p>'I wouldn't want you to get your hopes up only for them to be dashed,' she continued, frowning with concern. She reached across the table and rested her hand on Kate's arm.</p> <p>'You know my dear friend Trisha? Her daughter had IVF five times and no luck. They don't know why. I suppose it's just one of those things. And it must be awful for you to go through, darling Kate. I worry that doctors suggest all sorts of</p>	<p>Kate. «A quanto pare non riesco a concepire naturalmente.»</p> <p>«Non <i>ci</i> riusciamo,» la corresse Jake delicatamente.</p> <p>«Oh, capisco. E quante sono le possibilità secondo i medici?» chiese gentilmente Annabelle.</p> <p>«Circa il 30 per cento,» disse Kate.</p> <p>«Abbiamo fatto due cicli,» aggiunse Jake.</p> <p>«Inutilmente. Ne consigliano tre.»</p> <p>Annabelle prese la marmellata e iniziò a spalmarla sul suo toast freddo. Rimise con cura il coltello sul piatto e diede un piccolo morso, masticando pensosamente. Aspettarono che lei deglutisse e che il prossimo inevitabile commento si affacciasse nella stanza.</p> <p>«Sono solo preoccupata per voi, tutto qui.»</p> <p>«Staremo bene,» disse Jake.</p> <p>«Non vorrei che vi faceste delle illusioni per poi vederle andare in frantumi,» continuò, accigliandosi con preoccupazione. Allungò la mano dall'altra parte del tavolo e la poggiò sul braccio di Kate.</p> <p>«Hai presente la mia cara amica Trisha? Sua figlia ha fatto la FIV cinque volte e non è mai riuscita. Non sanno perché. Si vede che non era destino. E deve essere terribile per te, Kate, tesoro. Ho paura che i medici suggeriscano ogni sorta di</p>
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<p>medical procedures when maybe there's nothing to be done, and the procedure itself can be so draining, can't it? From what I understand, I mean. Of course I've never been through anything like that myself.'</p> <p>Kate tried, as much as possible, to let Annabelle's words wash over her. A year ago, she would have been righteously indignant at the invasive nature of Annabelle's opinion but now she no longer seemed to have the mental or physical capacity to make her case. And really, she told herself, it was none of Annabelle's business. She wished Jake hadn't told her.</p> <p>'It is draining, yes,' Jake said. 'Kate's been heroic.'</p> <p>Annabelle blinked slowly, those clear blue eyes seeming to become even clearer as she spoke.</p> <p>'Poor Kate,' she patted Kate's arm. 'It must be so tough. I read somewhere that giving IVF to women who aren't able to conceive is a bit like giving chemotherapy to a terminal cancer patient.'</p> <p>For a second or two, Kate wasn't sure if she'd heard her correctly. She shifted her arm and Annabelle's hand dropped onto the table. She stood, pushing her chair</p>	<p>procedura quando forse non c'è niente da fare, e la pratica stessa può essere così estenuante, vero? Da quello che capisco, insomma. Naturalmente io non ho mai affrontato nulla del genere.»</p> <p>Kate cercò, per quanto possibile, di farsi scivolare addosso le parole di Annabelle. Un anno fa, sarebbe stata giustamente indignata dalla natura invadente dell'opinione di Annabelle, ma ora sembrava non avere più la capacità mentale o fisica di far valere le sue ragioni. E davvero, si disse, non erano affari di Annabelle. Desiderava che Jake non glielo avesse detto.</p> <p>«È estenuante, è vero,» disse Jake. «Kate è stata eroica.»</p> <p>Annabelle sbatté le palpebre lentamente, quegli occhi azzurro chiaro sembravano diventare ancora più limpidi mentre parlava.</p> <p>«Povera Kate,» accarezzò il braccio di Kate. «Deve essere così dura. Ho letto da qualche parte che fare la FIV a donne che non sono in grado di concepire è un po' come fare la chemioterapia a un malato terminale di cancro.»</p> <p>Per un secondo o due, Kate non fu sicura di aver sentito bene. Spostò il braccio e la mano di Annabelle cadde sul tavolo. Si alzò, spingendo indietro la sedia così</p>
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<p>back so quickly that it slammed onto the floor. Jake reached out for her but she wouldn't go to him. Not now. She was furious with them both. With Annabelle for saying the things she did and with Jake for being related to her.</p> <p>'That's not helpful, Annabelle,' Kate said quietly. Then she left the kitchen and walked out of the house, forgetting her coat, so that when she returned two hours later, she was cold and damp. Jake greeted her with a hug in the hallway.</p> <p>'She's gone,' he said. 'We had a massive row. I'm sorry. She won't be speaking to you like that again.'</p> <p>Kate allowed herself to be hugged but didn't say anything. She marvelled at how, even in this close physical proximity to the man she loved, she could possibly feel so alone. But she did.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Chapter 18</p> <p>'I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING MAD,' Marisa says. 'I just want to talk.'</p> <p>'OK,' Kate says, making her voice as soothing as possible. 'I understand. Let's talk. I'll tell you everything you want to know.'</p> <p>Marisa's shoulders relax. She immediately seems calmer. She puts the knife onto the hallway table.</p>	<p>velocemente da farla sbattere sul pavimento. Jake cercò di raggiungerla, ma lei non sarebbe andata da lui. Non in quel momento. Era furiosa con entrambi. Con Annabelle per ciò che aveva detto e con Jake per essere imparentato con lei.</p> <p>«Non sei d'aiuto, Annabelle,» disse Kate a bassa voce. Poi lasciò la cucina e uscì di casa, dimenticando il cappotto, così che quando tornò due ore dopo, aveva freddo ed era bagnata dall'umidità. Jake la accolse all'ingresso con un abbraccio.</p> <p>«Se n'è andata,» disse. «Abbiamo litigato di brutto. Mi dispiace. Non ti parlerà mai più in quel modo.»</p> <p>Kate si lasciò abbracciare, ma non disse nulla. Si meravigliò di come potesse sentirsi così sola, pur essendo fisicamente vicina all'uomo che amava. Eppure, era così.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Capitolo 18</p> <p>«MI SEMBRA DI IMPAZZIRE,» dice Marisa. «Voglio solo parlare.»</p> <p>«Va bene,» dice Kate, rendendo la sua voce il più rilassante possibile. «Capisco. Parliamo. Ti dirò tutto quello che vuoi sapere.»</p> <p>Le spalle di Marisa si rilassano. Sembra essersi calmata subito. Mette il coltello sul tavolino dell'ingresso.</p>
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<p>‘Sorry about that,’ Marisa says. ‘I wasn’t going to use it.’</p> <p>‘I know.’</p> <p>She smiles at Kate, a cracked smile that makes the rest of her face look lopsided. Her hair is knotted and unwashed and Kate can smell the other woman’s body odour, the earthy bitterness of it underneath her clothes.</p> <p>‘Oh Marisa,’ Kate says. ‘What’s wrong?’</p> <p>Marisa’s chest is heaving now and she is slumped in the chair, the tears streaming down her cheeks. She lifts her head, staring out from beneath her lank strands of hair. Kate presses herself against the wall as if she can make herself disappear through sheer force of will. But there is nowhere to go and her legs are still bound by the rope.</p> <p>‘Marisa, sweetie, please could you undo the rope? I promise I won’t go anywhere, it’s just that I’m a bit uncomfortable.’</p> <p>Marisa keeps staring at her, her mouth hanging open. Kate is not sure how much she has understood. Marisa seems almost unreachable. How, Kate thinks, how have we let it get to this? How did this happen? Kate keeps up the soft patter, as though she is taming a wild horse, encouraging it closer with soft-voiced encouragement</p>	<p>«Mi dispiace,» dice Marisa. «Non avevo intenzione di usarlo.»</p> <p>«Lo so.»</p> <p>Sorride a Kate, un sorriso incrinato che fa sembrare sbilenco il resto del suo viso. I suoi capelli sono annodati e sporchi e Kate riesce a sentire l’acredine terrosa che il corpo dell’altra donna emana da sotto i vestiti.</p> <p>«Oh Marisa,» dice Kate. «Cosa c’è che non va?»</p> <p>Marisa crolla sulla sedia ansimando con le guance rigate di lacrime. Alza la testa, guardando ciò che la circonda attraverso le sue sparute ciocche di capelli. Kate si appiattisce contro il muro, come se potesse scomparire con la sola forza di volontà. Ma non c’è nessun posto dove andare e le sue gambe sono ancora legate dalla corda.</p> <p>«Marisa, tesoro, per favore, potresti slegare la corda? Prometto che non andrò da nessuna parte, è solo che mi sento un po’ a disagio.»</p> <p>Marisa continua a fissarla a bocca aperta. Kate non è sicura di quanto abbia capito. Marisa sembra quasi irraggiungibile. Come abbiamo fatto ad arrivare a questo? Pensa Kate. Come è successo? Kate mantiene il leggero picchietto, come se stesse addomesticando un cavallo selvaggio, incoraggiandolo ad avvicinarsi</p>
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<p>and a sugar lump in the palm of her hand.</p> <p>‘Please, just untie the rope, darling, and then we can talk. We can sit on the sofa in the kitchen with a cup of tea and we can sort all this out. You’re not in trouble. I’m fine. I’m not angry with you. Please, Marisa.’</p> <p>After a few minutes of this, Marisa sits straighter in her chair and scoops up her hair with both hands, tying it in a loose knot at the back. Her face seems clearer somehow, the internal demons kept momentarily at bay. She stands, pressing one palm against her belly as she does so in a protective gesture. She bends to undo the knots in the rope, reaching for the knife to saw through when her fingers don’t work. Gradually, the rope loosens and Kate can feel the blood rushing back to her feet.</p> <p>‘Thank you, Marisa.’</p> <p>‘I don’t want to go to the kitchen. We’ll just sit here.’</p> <p>Marisa slides down to sit next to Kate, her back against the wall. She is so close that Kate can feel Marisa’s hair tickle her cheek and this is somehow more frightening than when she was looming over Kate with a knife. Kate tries to block out the smell and the terror and to regulate her breathing. She closes her eyes briefly,</p>	<p>a bassa voce e con una zolletta di zucchero sul palmo della mano.</p> <p>«Per favore, slega la corda, tesoro, e poi potremo parlare. Possiamo sederci sul divano in cucina con una tazza di tè e risolvere tutto. Non sei nei guai. Io sto bene. Non sono arrabbiata con te. Per favore, Marisa.»</p> <p>Dopo alcuni minuti, Marisa si siede più dritta sulla sedia e si raccoglie i capelli con entrambe le mani, legandoli in uno chignon basso. Il suo viso sembra in qualche modo più composto, i demoni interiori tenuti momentaneamente a bada. Sta in piedi, premendo un palmo sulla pancia in un gesto protettivo. Si piega per sciogliere i nodi della corda, usando il coltello per tagliare quando le sue dita non bastano. La corda si allenta gradualmente e Kate sente il sangue affluire di nuovo ai suoi piedi.</p> <p>«Grazie, Marisa.»</p> <p>«Non voglio andare in cucina. Ci sediamo qui.»</p> <p>Marisa scivola a terra tenendo la schiena contro al muro e si siede accanto a Kate. È così vicina che Kate può sentire i suoi capelli solleticarle la guancia, e questo è stranamente più spaventoso di quando incombeva su di lei con un coltello. Kate cerca di ignorare la puzza e il terrore, e di regolare il respiro. Chiude per un attimo</p>
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<p>gathering her thoughts.</p> <p>‘What is it, Marisa?’</p> <p>‘I know,’ Marisa says.</p> <p>‘You know what?’</p> <p>‘Stop it. I’m not stupid. I’m not a fool even if you think I am, even if I’ve never been as clever as you. I already asked you once. So let me ask you again: how long have you and Jake been sleeping together?’</p> <p>Kate is nonplussed.</p> <p>‘Six years,’ she says. ‘You know that.’</p> <p>‘How can you say it so casually? We invite you into our home and this is how you repay me? By breaking up my relationship?’</p> <p>‘<i>Your</i> relationship?’</p> <p>Marisa nods and, all at once, Kate gets an instinctive flash of understanding that she immediately wishes she could un-see.</p> <p>‘But ... what ... Marisa ...’ She stumbles over the words. Her voice is hoarse, almost a whisper. It can’t be what she thinks, surely? Marisa doesn’t ... she hasn’t ... she couldn’t ...</p> <p>‘You’re our surrogate,’ Kate says. Marisa looks blank, as if she hasn’t heard.</p> <p>‘You’re our surrogate,’ Kate repeats. ‘Do you understand?’</p> <p>Then Marisa does the most curious thing.</p>	<p>gli occhi, raccogliendo i suoi pensieri.</p> <p>«Cosa c'è, Marisa?»</p> <p>«Lo so,» risponde Marisa.</p> <p>«Sai cosa?»</p> <p>«Smettila. Non sono stupida. Non sono un’idiota, anche se tu pensi che lo sia, anche se non sono mai stata intelligente quanto te. Te l’ho già chiesto una volta. Quindi lascia che te lo chieda di nuovo: da quanto tempo tu e Jake andate a letto insieme?»</p> <p>Kate è senza parole.</p> <p>«Sei anni,» dice. «Lo sai bene.»</p> <p>«Come puoi dirlo con tanta disinvoltura? Ti invitiamo dentro casa nostra ed è così che mi ripaghi? Distruggendo la mia relazione?»</p> <p>«La tua relazione?»</p> <p>Marisa annuisce e, tutto ad un tratto, Kate comprende ciò che vorrebbe non aver mai capito.</p> <p>«Ma... cosa... Marisa...» Balbetta. La sua voce è roca, quasi un sussurro. Non può essere quello che sta pensando, no?</p> <p>Marisa non... non ha... non potrebbe ...</p> <p>«Sei la nostra surrogata,» dice Kate.</p> <p>Marisa sembra persa, come se non avesse sentito.</p> <p>«Sei la nostra surrogata,» ripete Kate.</p> <p>«Hai capito?»</p> <p>Poi Marisa fa una cosa stranissima.</p>
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<p>She takes Kate's hand in hers and starts to laugh, slowly at first but then the laughter gathers pace and becomes a shrill, unstoppable noise.</p> <p>'Oh Kate,' she says, breathlessly between giggles. 'Kate, Kate, Kate, you poor thing. You've got it all wrong. I'm Jake's partner. We're having a baby together. You're our lodger.'</p> <p>When Kate was a child her father used to drive to a car boot sale on the second Sunday of every month. Sometimes, if she got up early enough, he would take her with him. They lived at the bottom of a valley and the drive would take them steeply up the road on one side of their house, and then back down towards the nearest village. There were few other cars at that time in the morning, so Kate's father used to speed up as they climbed the hill so that she would feel her tummy flip as the car careened over the other side.</p> <p>'Tummy flip!' she would scream with delight. There was a sort of gleeful terror at the thought that the car could lose control and when it didn't, her insides seemed to need an extra beat to catch up with the speed of the outside world.</p> <p>Hearing Marisa speak to her now, and understanding the depth of her mental</p>	<p>Prende la mano di Kate nella sua e comincia a ridere, all'inizio lentamente, ma poi la risata prende ritmo e diventa un rumore stridulo e inarrestabile.</p> <p>«Oh Kate,» dice senza fiato tra una risata e l'altra. «Kate, Kate, Kate, poverina. Hai frainteso tutto. Sono io la compagna di Jake. Avremo un bambino insieme. Tu sei la nostra inquilina.»</p> <p>Quando Kate era piccola, suo padre era solito guidare fino ad un mercatino di auto usate la seconda domenica di ogni mese. A volte, se lei si alzava abbastanza presto, lui la portava con sé. Vivevano in fondo a una valle e il viaggio li portava ripidamente in salita costeggiando un lato della loro casa, e poi di nuovo giù verso il villaggio più vicino. C'erano poche altre auto a quell'ora del mattino, così il padre di Kate accelerava mentre risalivano la collina, in modo che lei sentisse le farfalle nello stomaco mentre l'auto scendeva dall'altra parte.</p> <p>«Farfalle nella pancia!» gridava lei con gioia. C'era una sorta di allegro terrore al pensiero che la macchina potesse perdere il controllo e quando non lo faceva, le sue interiora sembravano aver bisogno di un battito in più per mettersi al passo con la velocità del mondo esterno.</p> <p>Sentendo Marisa parlarle ora, e comprendendo la profondità del suo</p>
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<p>imbalance, Kate feels her tummy flip again, except this time it doesn't return to normal. This time, the car never makes it to the other side. Instead, it flies through the air, somersaulting into the tarmac with crashing, fatal force.</p> <p>'Marisa,' Kate says, and she tries to be as clear and concise as possible. 'Jake's my partner. We've been together for six years. We couldn't conceive. We asked you to be our surrogate and move in with us. You're carrying our baby. Ours. Not yours.'</p> <p>Marisa doesn't say anything for a while. She turns away, huddling into herself and Kate can see her picking at the ragged cuticles of her right hand. They sit in silence for several minutes before Marisa opens her mouth to speak.</p> <p>'The thing is, Kate—'</p> <p>She is interrupted by the sound of a key turning in a lock. The front door opens. Jake is home.</p> <p>Chapter 26</p> <p>[...] She flicks through the address book. She looks first for any family members, but there are no listings for the Grover surname and no one recorded as 'Mum',</p>	<p>squilibrio mentale, Kate sente di nuovo quella sensazione di vuoto allo stomaco, solo che questa volta non torna alla normalità. Questa volta la macchina non arriva mai dall'altra parte. Vola in aria invece, facendo un salto mortale sull'asfalto con una forza letale.</p> <p>«Marisa,» dice Kate, cercando di essere il più chiara e concisa possibile. «Jake è il mio compagno. Stiamo insieme da sei anni. Non riuscivamo a concepire. Ti abbiamo chiesto di essere la nostra surrogata e di venire a vivere con noi. Tu porti in grembo il nostro bambino. Il nostro. Non il tuo.»</p> <p>Marisa non dice niente per un po'. Si gira dall'altra parte, rannicchiandosi su se stessa e Kate la vede mentre si strappa le cuticole frastagliate della mano destra. Stanno sedute in silenzio per diversi minuti, prima che Marisa apra la bocca per parlare.</p> <p>«Il fatto è, Kate...»</p> <p>Viene interrotta dal suono di una chiave che gira nella serratura. La porta d'ingresso si apre. Jake è a casa.</p> <p>Capitolo 26</p> <p>[...] Sfoglia la rubrica. Come prima cosa cerca qualche familiare, ma non c'è nessuno con il cognome Grover e nessuno salvato come "mamma", "papà" o Anna,</p>
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<p>‘Dad’ or Anna, her sister. The book, which is covered in thin fabric patterned with cherries, proves to be scarce on useful information. Marisa has used it mostly for doodles – intricate curlicues and looping flower petals and hieroglyphic eyes all folded in on each other so that the page becomes more ink than paper. But there are a few names dotted about, here and there. Kate checks her watch. It’s a little after 8 a.m. It is not a particularly friendly time of day to call a stranger, but it’s not so unreasonable as to be actively rude.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>In this way, Kate methodically works her way through Marisa’s contacts. They are mostly former clients. A couple don’t know who she’s talking about. One is a school friend who hasn’t heard from Marisa ‘for absolute yonks’. A few more don’t answer. Two go straight to voicemail. On the twelfth call, she dials a number for a woman listed as Jas.</p> <p>‘Yo.’</p> <p>‘Hi there, sorry to bother you so early,’ Kate starts, easing into the now-familiar patter. ‘I was calling about Marisa Grover.’</p> <p>‘Ris? Wow. I wasn’t expecting that. Is she</p>	<p>sua sorella. L'agenda, ricoperta con un tessuto sottile decorato con ciliegie, scarseggia di informazioni utili. Marisa l'ha usata soprattutto per scarabocchiare - ghirigori intricati, petali di fiori che volano e occhi geroglifici tutti ripiegati l'uno sull'altro in modo che la pagina diventi più inchiostro che carta. Ma ci sono alcuni nomi sparsi qua e là. Kate controlla l'orologio. Sono poco dopo le 8 del mattino. Non è un orario particolarmente amichevole per chiamare un estraneo, ma nemmeno così irragionevole da essere effettivamente scortese.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>In questo modo Kate si fa strada metodicamente tra i contatti di Marisa. Sono per lo più ex clienti. Un paio non sanno di chi stia parlando. Una è una compagna di scuola che non aveva notizie di Marisa "da secoli". Altri non rispondono. Due vanno direttamente alla segreteria telefonica. Alla dodicesima telefonata, compone il numero di una donna indicata come Jas.</p> <p>«Ehi.»</p> <p>«Salve, scusi se disturbo così presto,» inizia Kate, usando le formule ormai familiari. «Chiamo per conto di Marisa Grover.»</p> <p>«Ris? Wow. Non me l'aspettavo. Sta</p>
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<p>OK?’</p> <p>‘Yes, she is, she is,’ Kate says. ‘She’s been living with me these past few months and she’s been taken slightly unwell and I wanted to reach out to her friends and family to let them know.’</p> <p>‘What’s wrong with her?’</p> <p>‘Are you a friend or ...?’</p> <p>‘Yeah, I’m a friend. We were really close until a few months ago. Probably around the time she moved in with you. But hey, that’s Marisa for you.’</p> <p>‘What do you mean?’</p> <p>‘She gets deep and then she gets out. Hang on a sec, will you?’ Jas goes to turn down music playing in the background.</p> <p>‘That’s better. Wait, I thought she moved in with that guy she was dating? Was it a house-share or something? I thought they got their own place?’</p> <p>Kate stays very still, as if any movement will disrupt the flow of what Jas is saying.</p> <p>‘What was his name? It began with a J – I remember because, you know, mine does too so yeah, I remembered that. Jake, that was it!’</p> <p>‘She did move in with Jake,’ Kate says.</p> <p>‘Is it?’</p> <p>‘But she wasn’t dating Jake. I’m Jake’s girlfriend. Marisa was our surrogate.</p>	<p>bene?»)»</p> <p>«Sì, sta bene, sta bene,» dice Kate. «Ha vissuto con me in questi ultimi mesi, è stata presa da un leggero malessere e volevo contattare i suoi amici e la famiglia per farglielo sapere.»</p> <p>«Cos’ha che non va?»)»</p> <p>«Sei un’amica o...?»)»</p> <p>«Sì, sono un’amica. Eravamo molto unite fino a qualche mese fa. Forse fino al periodo in cui si è trasferita da te. Ma che ci vuoi fare, Marisa è fatta così.»</p> <p>«Cosa vuoi dire?»)»</p> <p>«Si fa prendere troppo e poi se ne tira fuori. Puoi aspettare un secondo?»)» Jas abbassa la musica di sottofondo. «Così va meglio. Aspetta, pensavo che lei fosse andata a convivere con quel tipo con cui usciva? Era una casa condivisa o qualcosa del genere? Pensavo avessero una casa loro.»</p> <p>Kate rimane immobile, come se qualsiasi movimento potesse interrompere il fiume di parole di Jas.</p> <p>«Come si chiamava? Iniziava con la J - me lo ricordo perché, sai, anche il mio nome inizia con la J, quindi sì, me lo ricordavo. Jake, ecco com’era!»)»</p> <p>«Si è trasferita da Jake,») dice Kate.</p> <p>«Davvero?»)»</p> <p>«Ma non usciva con Jake. Sono io la ragazza di Jake. Marisa era la nostra</p>
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<p>That's why she came to live with us. She's carrying our baby.'</p> <p>Jas goes quiet.</p> <p>'I know it's a lot to take in, but I'd really like to talk to you properly if I could. You see, something's happened and it would be helpful to know something of Marisa's recent medical history ... her mental health, I mean.'</p> <p>On the other end of the line, Kate can hear the woman give a low whistle.</p> <p>'What did you say your name was?'</p> <p>'I'm Kate.'</p> <p>'OK, Kate. I'll meet you. In a public place because, let's be real, I don't know who you are or if you are who you say you are, but if this is kosher then, yeah, there is some stuff you should probably know about Marisa.'</p> <p>'I'll bring documentation,' Kate says. 'So that you know I'm telling the truth. You can choose where we meet. I'll come wherever.'</p> <p>'Thanks. Appreciate that.'</p> <p>'No, honestly, I appreciate you doing this. It will be really good to talk.'</p> <p>Jas laughs.</p> <p>'Man, you don't know what I'm going to tell you yet!'</p> <p>'I'm ready,' Kate says, and she means it.</p> <p>They arrange to meet in a cafe near</p>	<p>surrogata. Ecco perché è venuta a vivere con noi. È incinta di nostro figlio.»</p> <p>Jas diventa silenziosa.</p> <p>«So che è tanto da elaborare, ma mi piacerebbe davvero riuscire a parlarti come si deve. Vedi, è successo qualcosa e sarebbe utile saperne di più sui precedenti clinici di Marisa... sulla sua salute mentale, intendo.»</p> <p>Kate sente la donna sospirare all'altro capo della linea.</p> <p>«Come hai detto che ti chiami?»</p> <p>«Kate.»</p> <p>«Ok Kate, ci vedremo. In un posto pubblico perché, parliamoci chiaro, non so chi sei o se sei chi dici di essere, ma se è tutto apposto, allora sì, ci sono alcune cose su Marisa che probabilmente dovresti sapere.»</p> <p>«Porterò della documentazione,» dice Kate. «Così saprai che sto dicendo la verità. Puoi scegliere dove ci vedremo. Verrò ovunque.»</p> <p>«Grazie. Lo apprezzo molto.»</p> <p>«No, onestamente, apprezzo che tu voglia farlo. Sarà davvero bello parlare.»</p> <p>Jas ride.</p> <p>«Cavolo, non hai idea di cosa ti sto per dire!»</p> <p>«Sono pronta,» risponde Kate, e dice sul serio.</p> <p>Decidono di incontrarsi in un bar vicino</p>
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<p>Finsbury Park tube in two hours' time.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>'So,' Jas says. Her nails clack against the handle when she holds it. 'Why don't you tell me what's been going on?'</p> <p>'First off, let me show you I am who I say I am,' Kate says, sliding an envelope across the table. It contains the surrogacy agreement, a recent utility bill, a scan of hers and Jake's passports and some photos of the two of them together. She has also brought the baby scan, but has kept it in her wallet. She isn't sure why.</p> <p>Jas leafs through the documents and nods, satisfied.</p> <p>'I also wanted to bring you this.' Kate hands over Marisa's diary. Jas flicks through it, then looks up.</p> <p>'What is this?'</p> <p>'It's Marisa's diary or notebook or something. I found it in her room. She's been inventing this ... this ... story about how she and Jake are lovers and she's expecting his baby, but—'</p> <p>Kate breaks off, embarrassed by how it sounds.</p> <p>Jas speaks calmly.</p> <p>'But it's not her baby,' Jas says. 'It's</p>	<p>alla metropolitana di Finsbury Park in due ore.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>«Allora,» dice Jas. Le sue unghie picchiettano contro la maniglia quando la afferra. «Perché non mi spieghi cosa sta succedendo?»</p> <p>«Prima di tutto, lascia che ti mostri che sono chi dico di essere,» dice Kate, facendo scivolare una busta sul tavolo. Contiene il contratto di maternità surrogata, una bolletta recente, una scansione del suo passaporto e di quello di Jake e alcune foto di loro due insieme. Ha portato anche l'ecografia del bambino, ma l'ha tenuta nel portafoglio. Non è sicura del perché.</p> <p>Jas sfoglia i documenti e annuisce soddisfatta.</p> <p>«Volevo anche portarti questo.» Kate le passa il diario di Marisa. Jas lo sfoglia, poi alza lo sguardo.</p> <p>«Cos'è?»</p> <p>«È il diario o il quaderno di Marisa o qualcosa del genere. L'ho trovato nella sua stanza. Ha inventato questa... questa... storia su come lei e Jake siano fidanzati e che lei aspetta un bambino da lui, ma...»</p> <p>Kate si interrompe, imbarazzata da come può sembrare.</p> <p>Jas parla con calma.</p> <p>«Ma non è il suo bambino,» dice Jas. «È il</p>
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<p>yours.’</p> <p>‘Yes,’ Kate says, relieved. ‘Yes, that’s it exactly.’</p> <p>‘Oh wow, I’m sorry.’</p> <p>She passes Kate some napkins from the dispenser and Kate presses them to her face, mopping up the tears. She takes a few breaths and then, having collected herself, she tells Jas everything: how they met Marisa, her increasingly odd behaviour, the scene in the hallway and the discovery of her drugs prescription. Jas doesn’t seem fazed by any of it.</p> <p>‘So where is she now?’</p> <p>‘Um, in the countryside,’ Kate says. ‘With Jake and his parents. We thought it was best she got away from me and had time to ... recuperate. Jake’s dad is a GP – well, a retired one, so he’s looking after her.’</p> <p>‘You need to get her back on her meds as quick as you can,’ Jas says. ‘I’ve seen what happens when Ris forgets to take them and it’s not pretty.’</p> <p>Kate stops in her tracks.</p> <p>‘Wait, so this ... has happened before?’</p> <p>Jas signals to Tony for another round of coffees.</p> <p>‘We’re going to be here for a while.’ Jas</p>	<p>vostro.»</p> <p>«Sì,» dice Kate, sollevata. «Sì, è esattamente così.»</p> <p>«Oh cavolo, mi dispiace.»</p> <p>Prende alcuni tovaglioli dal dispenser e li passa a Kate, che li tampona sul viso, asciugandosi le lacrime. Fa qualche respiro e poi, dopo essersi ripresa, racconta tutto a Jas: come hanno conosciuto Marisa, il suo comportamento sempre più strano, la scenata nell’ingresso e la scoperta della sua prescrizione di medicine. Jas non sembra turbata da nulla di tutto ciò.</p> <p>«Quindi ora dov’è?»</p> <p>«Ehm, in campagna,» risponde Kate.</p> <p>«Con Jake e i suoi genitori. Abbiamo pensato che sarebbe stato meglio se si fosse allontanata da me e avesse avuto il tempo di... riprendersi. Il padre di Jake è un medico, beh, è in pensione, quindi si sta prendendo cura di lei.»</p> <p>«Dovete farle riprendere le medicine il più presto possibile,» dice Jas. «Ho visto cosa succede quando Ris si dimentica di prenderle e non è piacevole.»</p> <p>Kate si blocca.</p> <p>«Aspetta, quindi questo ... è già successo prima d’ora?»</p> <p>Jas fa segno a Tony di portare un altro giro di caffè.</p> <p>«Staremo qui un bel po'.» Jas si appoggia</p>
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<p>leans back in her chair, clasping her hands in front of her chest. ‘The first thing you need to know about Ris is that she’s a mistress of her own reinvention. She tells her own story, the way that she likes to believe it. You can’t trust anything she says. A-ny-thing,’ Jas says, drawing out the syllables for emphasis. ‘I love the girl, but she’s damaged. Probably the most damaged person I’ve ever met, to be honest with you. That stuff about her parents she told you? It’s bullshit. Excuse my language. Her mum abandoned her when she was seven years old and she doesn’t talk to her dad any more. She hasn’t seen her sister in over twenty years.’</p> <p>‘What about the miscarriages?’ Kate asks, because this key detail seems of overwhelming importance. It was why they had trusted her.</p> <p>‘I don’t know,’ Jas answers. ‘She never told me anything like that. Most of the time, when she’s on her meds, she’s fine. But she’s got serious mental health issues.’</p> <p>‘Like what?’</p> <p>‘It’s not like I have the exact diagnosis. I mean, Ris and I were cool and that, but we didn’t pry too much into each other’s business. I think maybe she’s a bit bipolar?’</p>	<p>alla sedia, stringendo le mani davanti al petto. «La prima cosa che devi sapere di Ris è che è una maestra nel reinventarsi. Racconta la sua storia, nel modo che più le fa comodo. Non puoi fidarti di niente di quello che dice. Ni-en-te,» dice Jas, scandendo le sillabe per enfasi. «Io la adoro, ma è lesa. Probabilmente la persona più lesa che abbia mai incontrato, ad essere sincera. Quella roba che ti ha detto sui suoi genitori? Stronzate. Scusa il linguaggio. Sua madre l'ha abbandonata quando aveva sette anni e non parla più con suo padre. Non vede sua sorella da più di vent'anni.»</p> <p>«E gli aborti spontanei?» chiede Kate, perché questo dettaglio fondamentale sembra avere un’importanza schiacciante. Era il motivo per cui si erano fidati di lei.</p> <p>«Non lo so,» risponde Jas. «Non mi ha mai detto niente del genere. Quando prende le medicine per la maggior parte del tempo sta bene. Ma ha seri problemi di salute mentale.»</p> <p>«Tipo cosa?»</p> <p>«Non è che ho l’esatta diagnosi. Voglio dire, io e Ris andavamo d’accordo e tutto, ma non ficcavamo mai troppo il naso negli affari dell'altra. Penso che sia un po' bipolare, forse?»</p>
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<p>The coffees are delivered to the table, along with two new wrapped biscuits.</p> <p>‘How did you guys meet?’ Kate asks.</p> <p>‘You sure you want to know this?’</p> <p>Kate nods. Jas leans forward and places her arms on the table. She has a tattoo in roman numerals on the inside of her right wrist.</p> <p>‘We met at a group for survivors of sexual assault.’</p> <p>‘Oh God. Jas. I’m so sorry.’</p> <p>‘Don’t be. It’s not your fault, is it?’ She laughs, a deep chuckle. ‘I’m OK. Ris was raped when she was seventeen.’</p> <p>Kate thinks she might be sick. The caffeine mixes in with her adrenalin and she can feel the whoosh of blood pumping through her veins. She feels at once both very young and very old. She swallows back the feelings.</p> <p>‘That’s horrific,’ she says. ‘Poor Marisa.’</p> <p>‘Yeah.’</p> <p>They are silent for several seconds.</p> <p>Nearby, bacon sizzles in a frying pan and the smell of it fills the air, which becomes thick and foggy with grease.</p> <p>‘She sorted herself out as much as she could,’ Jas says. ‘It wasn’t easy. It’s a fucking miracle she managed to set up that business with the kids’ books and that, but she did. The meds definitely</p>	<p>I caffè vengono serviti al tavolo assieme a due nuovi biscotti confezionati.</p> <p>«Come vi siete conosciute?» chiede Kate.</p> <p>«Sicura di volerlo sapere?»</p> <p>Kate annuisce. Jas si china in avanti e appoggia le braccia sul tavolo. Ha un tatuaggio in numeri romani all'interno del polso destro.</p> <p>«Ci siamo conosciute ad un gruppo per survivors di violenza sessuale.»</p> <p>«Oddio. Jas. Mi dispiace tanto.»</p> <p>«Non dispiacerti. Non è colpa tua, no?»</p> <p>Ride, una risata profonda. «Sto bene. Ris è stata violentata quando aveva diciassette anni.»</p> <p>Kate pensa che potrebbe sentirsi male. La caffeina si mescola alla sua adrenalina e riesce a sentire il sangue che le scorre nelle vene. Si sente allo stesso tempo molto giovane e molto vecchia. Reprime ogni emozione.</p> <p>«È orribile,» dice. «Povera Marisa.»</p> <p>«Già.»</p> <p>Rimangono in silenzio per diversi secondi.</p> <p>Lì accanto della pancetta sfrigola in una padella e il suo odore riempie l'aria, che diventa densa e annebbiata dall'unto.</p> <p>«Si è arrangiata come ha potuto,» dice Jas.</p> <p>«Non è stato facile. È un cazzo di miracolo che sia riuscita a mettere su quell'attività con i libri per bambini e tutto il resto, ma ce l'ha fatta. Le medicine</p>
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<p>helped. But sometimes she forgets to take them or she doesn't think she needs them and I'm guessing with you guys, maybe she worried they would harm the baby or something?</p> <p>There was that, at least, Kate thought. She is clutching on to the idea that Marisa had wanted to do her best for them.</p> <p>'What happens when she doesn't take her medication?'</p> <p>Jas looks as if she is about to say something and then thinks better of it.</p> <p>'Ris isn't a bad person.'</p> <p>'I know,' Kate says.</p> <p>'She'd get these ... obsessions,' Jas says slowly. 'Like, she'd fixate on a man she'd been on a date with and imagine this future with him and it was all a bit too much. She'd text them a lot and sometimes she'd follow them to work and that, and I always told her to chill out, but she never listened and the more I told her to chill out, the less she started telling me.'</p> <p>The cafe is filling up now. Some builders in dusty trousers and hard hats come and sit on the table next to theirs. They talk loudly and roll cigarettes while waiting for their breakfasts. Jas has to raise her voice so that Kate can hear her.</p> <p>'I suppose we kind of fell out? When she</p>	<p>l'hanno sicuramente aiutata. Ma a volte si dimentica di prenderle o non pensa di averne bisogno e immagino che in questo caso, forse temeva che potessero nuocere al bambino o qualcosa del genere?»</p> <p>Poteva essere, pensò Kate, aggrappandosi all'idea che Marisa avesse voluto fare del suo meglio per loro.</p> <p>«Cosa succede quando non prende le sue medicine?»</p> <p>Jas ha l'aria di chi sta per dire qualcosa e poi ci ripensa.</p> <p>«Ris non è una cattiva persona.»</p> <p>«Lo so,» dice Kate.</p> <p>«Iniziava ad avere queste... ossessioni,» dice Jas lentamente. «Tipo, si fissava su un uomo con cui era andata ad un appuntamento, immaginava questo futuro con lui e il tutto era un po' troppo. Mandava loro un sacco di messaggi, a volte li seguiva al lavoro e così via, e io le dicevo sempre di darsi una calmata, ma lei non mi ascoltava mai e più glielo dicevo, meno cose mi raccontava.»</p> <p>Il bar si sta riempiendo ora. Alcuni muratori con pantaloni polverosi ed elmetti entrano e si siedono al tavolo accanto al loro. Parlano ad alta voce e rollano sigarette, mentre aspettano la loro colazione. Jas deve alzare la voce in modo che Kate possa sentirla.</p> <p>«Suppongo che abbiamo litigato? Quando</p>
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<p>told me about Jake, I said she was moving too fast but, you know, there's only so much you can do. She didn't want to hear it. And I had no idea what was actually going on. I had no idea about you.'</p> <p>Jas turns up the corners of her mouth. It is not quite a smile, but it is understanding. For the first time in sixteen hours, Kate unclenches her jaw and relaxes her shoulders. The oppressive sensation in her chest, of an elastic being wound tightly around her ribcage, starts to lessen. She is calmer now, knowing that there is someone else who can bear witness to Marisa's behaviour; who can reassure Kate that she is not the one who's going mad.</p> <p>'Thank you, Jas.'</p> <p>Jas starts putting her jacket back on.</p> <p>'I don't think I've done that much.'</p> <p>'You have, you really have. Is it OK if I keep your number and stay in touch? It's just useful, you know, having someone—'</p> <p>'Sure,' Jas cuts in.</p> <p>'And you don't have any contact details for her family?'</p> <p>Jas sucks air through her teeth.</p> <p>'Nah. And, if you want my opinion, that would be the worst thing you could do.'</p>	<p>mi ha detto di Jake, le ho detto che si stava muovendo troppo in fretta ma, sai, non ci si può fare molto. Lei non voleva saperne. E non avevo idea di cosa stesse realmente accadendo. Non sapevo minimamente di te.»</p> <p>Jas solleva gli angoli della bocca. Non è proprio un sorriso, ma comprensione. Per la prima volta in sedici ore, Kate rilassa la mandibola e le spalle. La sensazione opprimente nel suo petto, come di un elastico stretto intorno alla cassa toracica, comincia a diminuire. È più calma ora, sapendo che c'è qualcun altro che può dare testimonianza del comportamento di Marisa; che può rassicurare Kate che non è lei che sta impazzendo.</p> <p>«Grazie, Jas.»</p> <p>Jas inizia a rimettersi la giacca.</p> <p>«Non credo di aver fatto molto.»</p> <p>«Invece sì, davvero. Va bene se tengo il tuo numero e restiamo in contatto? Sai, è utile avere qualcuno...»</p> <p>«Certo,» interviene Jas.</p> <p>«E non hai nessun recapito della sua famiglia?»</p> <p>Jas aspira l'aria tra i denti.</p> <p>«No. E, se vuoi la mia opinione, questa sarebbe la cosa peggiore che potresti fare.»</p>
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<p>‘OK, OK. So what we’re doing now – keeping her safe and putting her back on her meds – that’s what you think is best?’</p> <p>Jas shrugs.</p> <p>‘I can’t really advise you. I’m not a doctor. But yeah, I guess that’s what I’d do. Look after her. She’ll calm down. You’ll get your baby. And then – what happens next is up to Ris, isn’t it?’</p> <p>‘Do you want to see her?’</p> <p>Jas shakes her head.</p> <p>‘No. I love Ris. Always will. But she won’t want me to know what’s happened. She’ll be humiliated. When she’s better, I’ll give her a call.’</p> <p>Kate stands to say goodbye. This time, she hugs Jas, who is awkward in her embrace. Jas reaches into her pocket and begins to fish out a five-pound note, but Kate says, ‘No, I’ll get these. Least I can do.’</p> <p>She watches Jas leave, a slight yet defiant figure. The sequined ‘Warrior’ on the back of her jacket twinkles as she walks down the street. She turns left and disappears from view.</p> <p>Capitolo 30</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>‘I’m afraid I haven’t made anything</p>	<p>«Ok, Ok. Quindi cosa facciamo ora – la teniamo al sicuro e le facciamo riprendere le medicine – pensi che sia la cosa migliore?»</p> <p>Jas alza le spalle.</p> <p>«Non saprei consigliarti in realtà. Non sono un medico. Ma sì, è quello che farei anch’io. Prendetevi cura di lei. Si calmerà. Avrai il tuo bambino. E poi... quello che succederà dopo dipende da Ris, no?»</p> <p>«Vuoi vederla?»</p> <p>Jas scuote la testa.</p> <p>«No. Io voglio bene a Ris. Gliene vorrò sempre. Ma lei non vuole che io sappia cosa è successo. Ne sarebbe umiliata. Quando starà meglio, la chiamerò.»</p> <p>Kate si alza per salutarla. Questa volta abbraccia Jas, che imbarazzata si fa stringere dalle sue braccia. Jas si fruga nelle tasche e pesca una banconota da cinque sterline, ma Kate dice: «No, ci penso io. È il minimo che possa fare.»</p> <p>Guarda la figura esile ma spavalda di Jas che se ne va. La scritta di lustrini "Warrior" sul retro della sua giacca scintilla mentre si allontana lungo la strada. Gira a sinistra e scompare dalla sua vista.</p> <p>Capitolo 30</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>«Temo di non aver fatto nulla di speciale.</p>
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<p>special. It was such short notice,’ Annabelle says pointedly. ‘So I’ve just got some veg soup on the go.’ There is a burnt orange Le Creuset on the Aga, the lid rattling and emitting a steamy, earthy smell. Annabelle has pinned her hair back and is wearing a high-collared lace shirt underneath a cashmere navy jumper. A pair of reading glasses hangs from a gold chain around her neck. She puts them on as she takes the lid off the saucepan and stirs the contents.</p> <p>‘Delicious,’ Jake says. ‘Exactly what I feel like.’ ‘Lovely,’ Kate adds. ‘Sorry to put you to such trouble.’</p> <p>‘Oh it’s no trouble,’ Annabelle says in a way that suggests the opposite. ‘Chris is off buying some wood for the fire and various bits and pieces. Feeding an extra mouth means we’re running through groceries rather rapidly.’ ‘You must let us know how much we owe you,’ Kate says. Sweat trickles down her neck. She is still in her coat. Annabelle looks at her sharply. ‘It’s not a question of <i>money</i>,’ she says. ‘Oh, I ...’ Jake presses his hand into Kate’s lower</p>	<p>C’è stato così poco preavviso,» dice Annabelle provocatoriamente. «Quindi ho messo su solo una zuppa di verdure.» C’è una casseruola arancione bruciata sulla cucina economica, con il coperchio sbatacchiante che emette un odore di vapore e terra. Annabelle si è raccolta i capelli con un fermaglio e indossa una camicia di pizzo a collo alto sotto ad un maglione di cashmere blu. Un paio di occhiali da lettura pende da una catena d’oro intorno al collo. Li indossa mentre toglie il coperchio dalla casseruola e mescola il contenuto. «Deliziosa,» dice Jake. «Ne ho proprio voglia.» «Buonissima,» aggiunge Kate. «Mi dispiace avervi creato così tanti problemi.» «Oh non è un problema,» dice Annabelle in un modo che suggerisce il contrario. «Chris è fuori a comprare un po’ di legna per il fuoco e altre cose. Avere una bocca in più da sfamare vuol dire finire le scorte piuttosto velocemente.» «Devi farci sapere quanto ti dobbiamo,» dice Kate. Il sudore le cola lungo il collo. Indossa ancora il cappotto. Annabelle la guarda duramente. «Non è una questione di <i>soldi</i>,» dice. «Oh, io...» Jake preme la sua mano sulla parte bassa</p>
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<p>back. She falls silent.</p> <p>‘We really appreciate it, Mum,’ he says.</p> <p>‘Thank you.’</p> <p>Annabelle sighs.</p> <p>‘Nonsense. Family first. That’s always been my motto.’</p> <p>She peers into the saucepan, the steam clouding her glasses. Kate takes off her coat and hangs it in the hallway. She slips her phone reluctantly into the pocket – Annabelle doesn’t like them to have their mobiles at mealtimes but leaving it behind always feels to Kate as though she’s temporarily cut adrift from a world that understands her as a woman in her own right, rather than Jake’s inconvenient appendage.</p> <p>When she returns, Jake and his mother are speaking quietly and quickly. They stop as soon as she walks in.</p> <p>‘What were you talking about?’ Kate asks.</p> <p>‘Oh, nothing,’ Annabelle says, getting a seeded loaf from the bread bin and slicing it with practised ease.</p> <p>‘Can I do anything?’</p> <p>‘No, I’ve done it all now. It’s just soup,’ she repeats.</p> <p>‘Shall I grate some cheese?’ Jake asks.</p> <p>‘Actually that <i>would</i> be helpful.’</p> <p>Annabelle reaches out to squeeze Jake’s shoulder. ‘Thank you, Jakey.’</p>	<p>della schiena di Kate. Lei si ammutolisce.</p> <p>«Lo apprezziamo molto, mamma,» dice lui. «Grazie.»</p> <p>Annabelle sospira.</p> <p>«Sciocchezze. La famiglia prima di tutto. Questo è sempre stato il mio motto.»</p> <p>Sbircia nella casseruola e il vapore le annebbia gli occhiali. Kate si toglie il cappotto e lo appende all’entrata. Infila il suo telefono con riluttanza nella tasca - Annabelle non vuole che abbiano il cellulare durante i pasti, ma lasciarlo lì fa sempre sentire Kate come se fosse temporaneamente tagliata fuori da un mondo che la comprende come una donna a pieno titolo, piuttosto che come una scomoda appendice di Jake.</p> <p>Quando torna, Jake e sua madre stanno parlando velocemente a bassa voce. Smettono non appena lei entra.</p> <p>«Di cosa stavate parlando?» chiede Kate.</p> <p>«Oh, di nulla,» dice Annabelle, prendendo una pagnotta di semi dal cestino del pane e affettandola con maestria.</p> <p>«Posso fare qualcosa?»</p> <p>«No, ho già fatto tutto. È solo una zuppa,» ripete.</p> <p>«Devo grattugiare del formaggio?» chiede Jake.</p> <p>«In realtà <i>sarebbe</i> utile.» Annabelle si allunga per stringere la spalla di Jake.</p> <p>«Grazie, Jakey.»</p>
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<p>Kate leans against the wooden dresser, forgetting, as she does so, that it wobbles precariously if any weight is put on it. The plates clatter within. She steps away, standing awkwardly on the flagstones with her arms crossed in front of her as Jake busies himself grating cheddar into big yellow mounds. No matter how much time she has spent in this house or how long she has notionally been a part of this family, Kate always feels so out of place: an interloper from an alien race.</p> <p>She fixes her eyes on the opposite wall which has a calendar hanging on it, every month accompanied by a photograph of a different European city. Annabelle is rigorous about noting down all appointments and visits in black marker pen. The square for today has ‘J&K to visit’ in the top left-hand corner. Tomorrow is ‘Meeting with vicar’. Monday is ‘Cleaner’. Typical of Annabelle not to use the cleaner’s name, Kate thinks. She probably doesn’t even know it.</p> <p>Her eyes scan back towards the beginning of the month and she notices, with surprise, that the letter J is repeated several times. She tries to remember how often she and Jake have been able to visit, but she knows they haven’t been at all this</p>	<p>Kate si appoggia alla cassetiera in legno, dimenticandosi che questa traballa pericolosamente se vi si appoggia un peso. I piatti tintinnano all'interno. Si allontana, rimanendo goffamente in piedi sul pavimento in pietra con le braccia conserte, mentre Jake si tiene occupato grattugiando grandi montagnole gialle di cheddar. Non importa quanto tempo abbia trascorso in questa casa o da quanto a lungo sia parte di questa famiglia, Kate si sente sempre fuori posto: un intruso di razza aliena.</p> <p>Fissa lo sguardo sulla parete di fronte, dove è appeso un calendario, ogni mese accompagnato da una fotografia di una diversa città europea. Annabelle annota rigorosamente tutti gli appuntamenti e le visite con un pennarello nero. Il quadrato di oggi ha “J&K in visita” in alto a sinistra. Domani è “Incontro con il vicario”. Lunedì è “Donna delle pulizie”. Tipico di Annabelle non usare il nome della donna delle pulizie, pensa Kate. Probabilmente non lo sa nemmeno.</p> <p>I suoi occhi scorrono indietro verso l'inizio del mese e nota, con sorpresa, che la lettera J è ripetuta più volte. Cerca di ricordare quanto spesso lei e Jake siano riusciti a venire qui, ma sa che questo mese non ci sono mai venuti. Allora</p>
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<p>month. So why is Jake's initial there?</p> <p>'Right, I think we're almost done,' Annabelle says, lifting the pot away from the stove and onto a woven mat on the table. She catches Kate looking at the calendar and the two women's eyes meet.</p> <p>'Too many Js,' Annabelle says, straightening the butter dish. 'My fault for naming two children Jake and Julia.'</p> <p>'Haha, right,' Kate replies. Doesn't Julia live in Hong Kong, she wants to ask? Unless these were scheduled phone calls, but that seems unlikely. Before she gets the chance to say anything else, there is a gust of cool air from the back of the kitchen and Marisa walks in from the garden.</p> <p>'Hi everyone.'</p> <p>She is pink-cheeked, hair tied back by a velvet scrunchie, belly neatly rounded. There is no other word for it but blooming. The cliché annoys Kate because it is true.</p> <p>'Marisa!' she says, her voice slightly too eager. She goes to hug her, but Marisa steps back and kisses Kate on the cheek instead. Her face is cool and wind-blown. She smells of peanut butter.</p> <p>'It's so good to see you,' Kate says. 'How are you feeling? Is everything OK?'</p> <p>'Let the poor girl get inside,' Annabelle</p>	<p>perché l'iniziale di Jake è lì?</p> <p>«Bene, abbiamo quasi finito,» dice Annabelle, spostando la casseruola dai fornelli al tavolo, sopra ad un sottopentola. Nota che Kate sta guardando il calendario e gli sguardi delle due donne si incontrano.</p> <p>«Troppe J,» dice Annabelle, raddrizzando il piatto da burro. «Colpa mia che ho chiamato due figli Jake e Julia.»</p> <p>«Haha, giusto,» risponde Kate. Voleva chiederle, ma Julia non vive ad Hong Kong? A meno che queste non fossero telefonate programmate, ma sembra improbabile. Prima che riesca a dire qualcos'altro, una folata di aria fresca arriva dal retro della cucina e Marisa rientra dal giardino.</p> <p>«Ciao a tutti.»</p> <p>Ha le guance rosee, i capelli legati da un elastico di velluto, la pancia perfettamente arrotondata. Non c'è altra parola per descriverla se non raggianti. Kate è infastidita dal cliché perché è vero.</p> <p>«Marisa!» esclama con una voce un po' troppo impaziente. Fa per abbracciarla, ma Marisa fa un passo indietro e le dà un bacio sulla guancia. Il suo viso è fresco e sferzato dal vento. Sa di burro d'arachidi.</p> <p>«È così bello vederti,» dice Kate. «Come ti senti? Va tutto bene?»</p> <p>«Lascia che entri, poverina,» dice</p>
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<p>says, ladling soup into small bowls, each one circled with the word 'BOWL' and a pattern of polka-dots.</p> <p>Kate looks at the soup, swampy and lumpen, and is pierced with loathing for Annabelle. She closes the door behind Marisa and the kitchen is sucked back into its own heat.</p> <p>Marisa bends down to remove her wellingtons. Jake rushes to help her, holding her hand for support as she levers off each one using the cast-iron boot remover Annabelle keeps by the back door. Marisa is wearing a high-collared lace shirt underneath a woollen navy top. Other than the gold glasses chain and the lack of cashmere, her outfit looks exactly like Annabelle's.</p> <p>'Righto, everyone come and sit down or the soup'll get cold.'</p> <p><i>This fucking soup</i>, Kate thinks.</p> <p>Jake, satisfied that Marisa's boots have been dealt with, gives Kate a peck on the lips and ushers her towards the table. It is as though Jake is parenting them both, absent-mindedly treating them like toddlers he must get to sit down on time. She takes her usual seat, which is the only one that doesn't match the rest of the furniture – it is an old dining chair, the seat padded with cracked leather, whereas all the others are stripped pine. When</p>	<p>Annabelle, versando la zuppa in piccole scodelle, ognuna delle quali è decorata con la parola 'BOWL' e un motivo a pois. Kate guarda la zuppa paludosa e grumosa, ed è trafitta dal disgusto per Annabelle. Chiude la porta dietro a Marisa e la cucina viene nuovamente risucchiata nel suo stesso calore.</p> <p>Marisa si piega per togliersi gli stivali. Jake si precipita ad aiutarla, tenendole la mano per sostenerla mentre lei se li toglie usando il calzascarpe in ghisa che Annabelle tiene vicino alla porta sul retro. Marisa indossa una camicia di pizzo a collo alto sotto ad un top di lana blu. A parte la catena d'oro per gli occhiali e l'assenza di cashmere, era vestita esattamente come Annabelle.</p> <p>«Bene, venite tutti a sedervi o la zuppa si raffredda.»</p> <p><i>Questa zuppa del cazzo</i>, pensa Kate.</p> <p>Jake, soddisfatto che gli stivali di Marisa siano stati sistemati, dà un bacio sulle labbra a Kate e la guida verso il tavolo. È come se Jake stesse facendo il genitore di entrambe, trattandole distrattamente come bambine che deve far sedere a tavola in tempo. Lei si siede al suo solito posto, l'unico che non si abbina al resto dei mobili: è una vecchia sedia da pranzo, con la seduta imbottita in pelle screpolata, mentre tutte le altre sono in pino levigato.</p>
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<p>Annabelle first allotted Kate the chair, she made a big fuss of how it was ‘the throne’ and reserved for ‘very special guests’. If that were actually true, Kate thinks now, then surely it should be given to Marisa?</p> <p>‘Are we not waiting for Dad?’ Jake asks. Annabelle rolls her eyes.</p> <p>‘He was meant to be back half an hour ago and I’m not waiting any longer. I can heat some up when he finally makes an appearance.’</p> <p>‘This smells so good, Annabelle,’ Marisa says. Her voice is softer than Kate remembers it, more whispering. She turns to Jake. ‘How was the drive?’</p> <p>It’s a meaningless question, one of those politely offered prompts in conversation that no one really cares to answer.</p> <p>‘Fine, fine. Uneventful.’ He smiles at her. ‘Good,’ she says, taking a slice of bread and buttering it slowly. ‘And how is work, Kate?’</p> <p>‘Work? Um. Yeah. Good.’</p> <p>‘Good.’</p> <p>Annabelle is still rushing around the kitchen asking if they have everything they need and fetching the salt and pepper and wondering if anyone wants a glass of wine. No one does. They wait for her to</p>	<p>Quando Annabelle assegnò per la prima volta la sedia a Kate, fece un gran parlare di come fosse "il trono" e riservata ad "ospiti molto speciali". Se fosse effettivamente vero, pensa ora Kate, allora sicuramente dovrebbe essere assegnata a Marisa, no?</p> <p>«Non aspettiamo papà?» chiede Jake. Annabelle alza gli occhi al cielo.</p> <p>«Doveva tornare mezz'ora fa e non voglio più aspettare. Posso riscaldarne un po' quando finalmente si degnerà di farsi vedere.»</p> <p>«Che profumo, Annabelle,» dice Marisa. La sua voce è più morbida di come se la ricorda Kate, più sussurrata. Si rivolge a Jake. «Com'è andato il viaggio?»</p> <p>È una domanda senza senso, uno di quei suggerimenti gentilmente offerti in una conversazione a cui nessuno si preoccupa di rispondere davvero.</p> <p>«Bene, bene. Tranquillo.» Le sorride.</p> <p>«Bene,» dice lei, prendendo una fetta di pane e imburrandola lentamente. «E come va il lavoro, Kate?»</p> <p>«Il lavoro? Ehm. Sì. Bene.»</p> <p>«Bene.»</p> <p>Annabelle sta ancora correndo per la cucina chiedendo se hanno tutto il necessario, recuperando il sale e il pepe e chiedendo se qualcuno vuole un bicchiere di vino. Nessuno lo vuole. Aspettano che</p>
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<p>sit and, when she does so, she exhales loudly to show this has been an extraordinary imposition on her time but she's not one to complain. She wipes her brow with the back of her hand.</p> <p>'Start, start,' Annabelle says, flapping her hands.</p> <p>Marisa seems distant, her gaze vague. Kate imagines it must be the drugs giving her this air of studied tranquility. It is as though she is sitting on the other side of a perspex screen and cannot be reached. Again and again Kate tries to engage her in conversation. Is she feeling tired? How is her appetite? Can she feel the baby kicking? Has she been watching any TV? Is she sleeping well? Marisa smiles and gives monosyllabic answers, inviting no further discussion.</p> <p>'Goodness, Kate,' Annabelle says, her spoon hovering. 'So many questions! Let Marisa eat her lunch before it gets cold.'</p> <p>Kate, stung, pushes her bowl away. She has eaten half of it. The soup, after all the attention paid to it, tasted like stale dishwater. She cannot stand up to Annabelle without creating a scene, and she can't push Marisa further without being accused of 'unsettling' her and being banned from visits for weeks. She</p>	<p>lei si siede e quando lo fa, espira rumorosamente per mostrare che il pranzo è stata una straordinaria imposizione sul suo tempo, ma lei non è una che si lamenta. Si asciuga la fronte con il dorso della mano.</p> <p>«Iniziate, iniziate,» dice Annabelle, sventolando le mani.</p> <p>Marisa sembra distante e il suo sguardo confuso. Kate immagina che siano i farmaci a darle quest'aria di studiata tranquillità. È come se fosse seduta dietro ad una barriera in plexiglas e non potesse essere raggiunta. Kate cerca ripetutamente di coinvolgerla in una conversazione. Si sente stanca? Com'è il suo appetito? Riesce a sentire il bambino scalciare? Ha guardato la TV? Dorme bene? Marisa sorride e dà risposte monosillabiche, evitando ulteriori discussioni.</p> <p>«Oddio, Kate,» dice Annabelle con il cucchiaino a mezz'aria. «Quante domande! Lascia che Marisa mangi prima che si raffreddi.»</p> <p>Kate, ferita, spinge via la sua scodella. Ne ha mangiata metà. La zuppa, dopo tutta l'attenzione prestatale, sapeva di acqua per lavare i piatti stantia. Non può affrontare Annabelle senza fare una scenata, e non può spingersi oltre con Marisa senza essere accusata di "disturbarla" e senza essere bandita dalle</p>
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<p>glares at Jake, wanting him to step in and say something, but he doesn't.</p> <p>'Marisa's been doing some painting, haven't you, Marisa?' Annabelle says. Marisa's face lights up.</p> <p>'Yeah, I've been loving it.' She nods her head gratefully at Annabelle. 'It's so nice to be doing something creative again without it being a work commission, you know?'</p> <p>'That's wonderful,' Kate says. 'What kind of thing?'</p> <p>'Still lifes of flowers, mostly.'</p> <p>'Is it still lifes or still lives?' Jake asks.</p> <p>'I've always wondered.'</p> <p>Marisa laughs, as animated as she has been since she arrived.</p> <p>'That's so funny,' she says, eyes twinkling. 'I don't know. But, honestly, they're nothing special. Just getting my hand in again.'</p> <p>'Yes, I'm sure the work commissions are piling up,' Kate says.</p> <p>'Nonsense,' Annabelle pipes up, ignoring the fact that Kate has spoken. 'They're gorgeous.' To Jake she adds, 'I'm going to get one framed and hang it in the hallway. It'll look perfect there. Just above the umbrella stand.'</p> <p>'You mustn't feel obliged to hang my art</p>	<p>visite per settimane. Guarda Jake, vuole che lui intervenga e dica qualcosa, ma non lo fa.</p> <p>«Marisa ha dipinto un po', vero, Marisa?» dice Annabelle.</p> <p>Il viso di Marisa si illumina.</p> <p>«Sì, mi è piaciuto molto.» Fa un cenno di ringraziamento con la testa ad Annabelle.</p> <p>«È così bello fare di nuovo qualcosa di creativo senza che sia una commissione di lavoro, sapete?»</p> <p>«È meraviglioso,» dice Kate. «Cosa dipingi?»</p> <p>«Natura morte di fiori, per lo più.»</p> <p>«È natura morta o si può dire anche nature morte?» chiede Jake. «Me lo sono sempre chiesto.»</p> <p>Marisa ride, vivace come lo è stata da quando è arrivata.</p> <p>«Davvero divertente,» esclama lei con occhi scintillanti. «Non lo so. Ma, a dire il vero, non sono niente di speciale. Sto solo prendendo di nuovo la mano.»</p> <p>«Sì, sono sicura che le commissioni di lavoro si stanno accumulando,» dice Kate.</p> <p>«Sciocchezze,» interviene Annabelle, ignorando il fatto che Kate avesse parlato.</p> <p>«Sono bellissimi.» Rivolgendosi a Jake aggiunge: «Ne farò incorniciare uno e lo appenderò all'ingresso. Sarà perfetto lì. Proprio sopra al portaombrelli.»</p> <p>«Non devi sentirti obbligata ad appendere</p>
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<p>in your house, Annabelle!’ Marisa says. ‘You’ve been so generous already.’</p> <p>At this point, Annabelle reaches across the table and pats Marisa’s arm. Kate, disbelieving, has to double-check whether she’s seeing things but no, there is Annabelle’s hand, the semi-arthritic fingers sporting familiar thick gold and jewelled rings, resting on top of Marisa’s sleeve. Marisa pats Annabelle’s hand with her own.</p> <p>‘I want your picture on our wall because I happen to think it’s fantastic – no other reason,’ Annabelle says.</p> <p>‘I’d love to see it,’ Jake says finally. ‘We both would.’</p> <p>Marisa shakes her head prettily.</p> <p>‘No, honestly, I’d be too embarrassed. It’s not ready yet.’</p> <p>‘I understand,’ Jake says, leaning back in his chair and stretching out his arms with a groan. ‘It’s artistic prerogative. You must only show your work when it’s ready.’</p> <p>Kate snorts. It’s all such nonsense. She’s fed up of everyone pandering to Marisa’s every whim, as though one misplaced word might send her teetering back into the abyss. It is hurtful, listening to her boyfriend and his mother suck up to Marisa as if Kate weren’t also sitting right</p>	<p>la mia arte in casa tua, Annabelle!» dice Marisa. «Sei già stata così generosa.»</p> <p>A questo punto, Annabelle si allunga attraverso il tavolo e dà un colpetto al braccio di Marisa. Kate, incredula, deve ricontrollare se sta avendo le traveggole, ma no, c’è la mano di Annabelle. Le sue dita semiartritiche, che sfoggiano spessi anelli dorati e gemmati, sono appoggiate sulla manica di Marisa. Marisa accarezza la mano di Annabelle.</p> <p>«Voglio il tuo quadro appeso al nostro muro perché penso che sia fantastico – non c’è nessun altro motivo,» dice Annabelle.</p> <p>«Mi piacerebbe vederlo,» dice infine Jake.</p> <p>«Piacerebbe a entrambi.»</p> <p>Marisa scuote piacevolmente la testa.</p> <p>«No, davvero, ne sarei troppo imbarazzata. Non è ancora pronto.»</p> <p>«Capisco,» dice Jake, appoggiandosi allo schienale della sedia e stirando le braccia con un gemito. «È prerogativa artistica. Devi mostrare il tuo lavoro solo quando è pronto.»</p> <p>Kate sbuffa. Niente ha senso. Non ne può più del fatto che tutti assecondino ogni capriccio di Marisa, come se una parola fuori posto potesse farla crollare nuovamente nell'abisso. Fa male ascoltare il suo ragazzo e sua madre che leccano il culo a Marisa, come se non ci fosse seduta</p>
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<p>there. It's as if she doesn't have any place here. It's as if they'd find it easier if she didn't exist.</p> <p>The thought settles around her shoulders like a harness, buckles tightening themselves across her chest, and she realises her hands are gripping the arms of her chair, fingers curled under the edge of the wood like claws.</p> <p>'Are you OK, Kate?' Marisa asks. When Kate looks up, she is met by Marisa's gaze, a faint frown-line between her eyes. 'You look a bit pale.'</p> <p>'What? No. I'm fine.' She releases her hands and forces herself to breathe.</p> <p>'Sorry, I was miles away. Just thinking about this thing at work that's stressing me out – there's a big PR push next week before the Toronto Film Festival.'</p> <p>The company had taken on too many films at the same time and she and her colleagues were currently besieged by deadlines. The time difference with Toronto didn't help either. It was her fault, as she was the one in charge of shaping their promotional schedule, but she had wanted to prove something. She had wanted to show herself that she had worth outside of the surrogacy; that she</p>	<p>anche Kate proprio lì. È come se non ci fosse posto per lei qui. Come se per loro fosse più facile se lei non esistesse.</p> <p>Il pensiero si assesta sulle sue spalle come un'imbracatura le cui fibbie si stringono al suo petto, e si rende conto che le sue mani stanno afferrando i braccioli della sedia, le dita arricciate sotto il bordo del legno come artigli.</p> <p>«Stai bene, Kate?» chiede Marisa. Quando Kate alza gli occhi, viene accolta dallo sguardo di Marisa e da una leggera ruga di espressione tra i suoi occhi. «Sembri un po' pallida.»</p> <p>«Cosa? No. Sto bene.» libera le mani e si sforza di respirare. «Scusami, avevo la testa da un'altra parte. Stavo solo pensando a questa cosa di lavoro che mi sta stressando – ci sarà una grande campagna pubblicitaria la prossima settimana prima del festival del cinema di Toronto.»</p> <p>L'azienda aveva preso in carico troppi film contemporaneamente e lei e i suoi colleghi al momento erano assediati dalle scadenze. Il fuso orario con Toronto non aiutava. Era colpa sua, dato che era lei che si occupava del loro programma promozionale, ma aveva voluto dimostrare qualcosa. Voleva dimostrare a se stessa che valeva qualcosa al di fuori della maternità surrogata; che era ancora</p>
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<p>was still good at her job.</p> <p>‘There are a lot of premieres to organise apart from anything else, and you know what these high-maintenance types are like,’ she is telling Annabelle now. She doesn’t know why she’s gabbling. She wants to stop talking but can’t. ‘And, well, it’s hectic,’ she concludes, weakly.</p> <p>‘Gracious,’ Annabelle says. ‘I hope you’ll start winding down before the baby comes. You can’t be handling all that with a newborn.’</p> <p>‘Thank you, Annabelle,’ Kate says, with deliberate politeness. ‘I’m sure we’ll be OK.’</p> <p>‘It wasn’t like that in my day. All you working women, with your full-time careers, wanting to have it all ...’</p> <p>Kate offers to make the teas. She turns on the cold water tap and watches it run for longer than she needs to before filling the kettle. Jake comes to help her, gathering mugs from the cupboard and loose-leaf tea from the pantry. He taps her on the elbow and mouths, ‘You OK?’ She nods.</p> <p>‘Right, well I’ll get on with clearing the table then,’ Annabelle says.</p> <p>Jake and Marisa simultaneously protest. ‘Oh no, you mustn’t do that, let me ...’</p>	<p>brava nel suo lavoro.</p> <p>«Ci sono un sacco di premiere da organizzare, oltre a tutto il resto, e si sa come sono quei tipi difficili da accontentare,» dice ora ad Annabelle. Non sa perché sta farfugliando. Vorrebbe smettere di parlare ma non ci riesce. «E, beh, il tutto è caotico,» conclude debolmente.</p> <p>«Santo cielo,» dice Annabelle. «Spero che inizierai a smettere un po’ per volta prima che il bambino arrivi. Non puoi gestire tutto questo con un neonato.»</p> <p>«Grazie, Annabelle,» dice Kate, con ponderata gentilezza. «Sono sicura che ce la caveremo.»</p> <p>«Non era così ai miei tempi. Tutte voi donne in carriera, con i vostri lavori a tempo pieno, volete avere la botte piena e la moglie ubriaca...»</p> <p>Kate si offre per preparare i tè. Apre il rubinetto dell'acqua fredda e la guarda scorrere più a lungo del necessario prima di riempire il bollitore. Jake va ad aiutarla prendendo le tazze dalla credenza e il tè in foglie dalla dispensa. Le tocca il gomito e mima con le labbra: «Stai bene?» Lei annuisce.</p> <p>«Bene, allora mi metto a sparecchiare la tavola,» dice Annabelle.</p> <p>Jake e Marisa protestano all’unisono. «Oh no, non devi farlo tu, lasciami...»</p>
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<p>‘You’ve made the whole lunch, Annabelle – I’ll clear up ...’</p> <p>But Annabelle has already started collecting the empty bowls, stacking each one with a bright, clattering sound that seems specifically designed to draw attention to itself. Marisa, hoisting herself out of her seat, lumbers over to the dishwasher and opens the door, sliding out the cutlery tray in readiness.</p> <p>It is as she is waiting for the kettle to boil that Kate turns around and sees the two women standing side by side in front of the dishwasher. From the back, they look almost identical in their navy tops and their light, pinned-up hair. Both of them are broad-shouldered and strong-limbed, narrow waists curving into wider hips exactly as women are biologically designed to be. The similarity is so pronounced that Kate wonders why she has never properly noticed it until now. She shivers and looks away. Heat from the kettle has steamed the window. Her vision blurs and when she makes the tea, her hand shakes as she pours.</p> <p>Chapter 31 [At the baby shower] Of all the things she imagined might</p>	<p>«Hai preparato l'intero pranzo, Annabelle - sparecchio io...»</p> <p>Ma Annabelle ha già iniziato a raggruppare le scodelle vuote, impilando ognuna con un suono forte e tintinnante che sembra studiato specificamente per attirare l'attenzione su di sé. Marisa, alzandosi a fatica dal suo posto, si muove pesantemente verso la lavastoviglie e apre lo sportello, facendo scivolare fuori con prontezza il portaposate.</p> <p>Mentre aspetta che l’acqua bolla, Kate si gira e vede le due donne in piedi una accanto all'altra davanti alla lavastoviglie. Da dietro sembrano quasi identiche coi loro top blu e i loro leggeri capelli raccolti. Entrambe hanno spalle larghe e braccia forti, la vita stretta che si arrotonda in fianchi più larghi, esattamente come le donne sono biologicamente progettate per essere. La somiglianza è così evidente che Kate si chiede perché non l'avesse mai notato bene fino a quel momento. Rabbrivisce e distoglie lo sguardo. Il calore del bollitore ha appannato la finestra. La sua vista si offusca e quando prepara il tè, la sua mano trema mentre lo versa.</p> <p>Capitolo 31 [Al baby shower] Di tutte le cose che si era immaginata</p>
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<p>happen when they asked Marisa to be their surrogate, this is a scenario she could not possibly have anticipated. The fact that Marisa had stopped taking her meds and had deluded herself into believing she was in a relationship with Jake before attacking Kate in the hallway of her own home was almost easier to handle than this charade. Annabelle, the woman who had never fully welcomed Kate into her home, who had always made it clear that she felt her beloved son could do so much better, was now laughing and chatting away so easily with Marisa, it was as though the two of them had known each other for years. Kate watches them communicating with private jokes amid the comfort of their mutual familiarity, and she sees how Marisa seems to come alive under the beam of Annabelle's attention, and how Annabelle, too, is transformed by this interaction, appearing younger and increasingly vital in her movements. And Chris, also, seems more involved – leaning forwards in his chair to hear better, asking Marisa if she's comfortable enough or maybe she needs another cushion?</p> <p>Kate wants to catch Jake's eye and share a conspiratorial glance of horror, but she can tell he is avoiding her. She sees his</p>	<p>potessero succedere quando avevano chiesto a Marisa di essere la loro surrogata, questo era uno scenario che non avrebbe mai potuto prevedere. Il fatto che Marisa avesse smesso di prendere le sue medicine e si fosse illusa di avere una relazione con Jake prima di aggredire Kate nell'ingresso di casa sua era quasi più facile da gestire di questa farsa. Annabelle, la donna che non aveva mai accolto completamente Kate in casa sua, che aveva sempre messo in chiaro che pensava che il suo amato figlio avrebbe potuto fare molto di meglio, ora stava ridendo e chiacchierando così facilmente con Marisa, che era come se le due si conoscessero da anni. Kate le vede comunicare a suon di battutine nella tranquillità della loro reciproca confidenza, e osserva come Marisa sembri prendere vita sotto al fascio di attenzioni di Annabelle, e come anche Annabelle sia trasformata da questa interazione, apparendo più giovane e sempre più vitale nei suoi movimenti. E anche Chris sembra più coinvolto - piegandosi in avanti sulla sedia per sentire meglio, chiedendo a Marisa se è abbastanza comoda o forse ha bisogno di un altro cuscino?</p> <p>Kate vuole attirare l'attenzione di Jake e condividere uno sguardo conspiratorio di orrore, ma capisce che la sta evitando.</p>
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<p>mouth moving and realises he has joined in the conversation but there is a rushing noise in her head and she can't hear what anyone is saying. She tries to steady her breathing but her lungs feel as though they are being wrung out like a sponge.</p> <p>On the wall behind the sofa there is an oil painting of a clifftop, waves crashing against the grey stone, and she focuses on the brushstrokes until the panic subsides. Her legs buckle when she stands. She steadies herself by reaching for the back of the chair.</p> <p>'Goodness, we haven't drunk that much, have we?' Annabelle says, watching her.</p> <p>'Are you all right?' Jake asks.</p> <p>'Yes, fine,' she lies. 'Just going to the loo.'</p> <p>She makes her way out of the room into the welcome coolness of the hallway. In the toilet underneath the stairs, she splashes her face with water and holds her hands under the cold tap. She dries her hands on the monogrammed towel hanging by the basin. Kate opens the lavatory door and she can hear the four of them talking, their voices slipping towards her like skimming stones across water. She feels as she did as a child, when her parents had friends over for dinner and she was meant to be in bed but instead</p>	<p>Vede la sua bocca muoversi e si rende conto che si è unito alla conversazione, ma sente un fruscio nella sua testa e non riesce a capire cosa stanno dicendo. Tenta di calmare il respiro, ma le sembra che qualcuno stia strizzando i suoi polmoni come se fossero spugne.</p> <p>Sulla parete dietro al divano c'è un dipinto a olio di una scogliera, con le onde che si infrangono contro le rocce grigie, e lei si concentra sulle pennellate finché il panico non si placa. Le cedono le gambe quando si alza. Si tiene in piedi afferrando lo schienale della sedia.</p> <p>«Santo cielo, non avremo poi bevuto così tanto, no?» dice Annabelle guardandola.</p> <p>«Va tutto bene?» chiede Jake.</p> <p>«Sì, tutto bene,» mente. «Sto solo andando al bagno.»</p> <p>Esce dalla stanza e incontra la piacevole frescura dell'ingresso. Nel bagno sotto le scale si sciacqua il viso e tiene le mani sotto l'acqua fredda. Se le asciuga con l'asciugamano monogrammato appeso al lavandino. Kate apre la porta del bagno e riesce a sentire i quattro parlare, le loro voci scivolano verso di lei come pietre che sfiorano l'acqua. Si sente come quando era bambina, quando i suoi genitori avevano amici a cena e lei avrebbe dovuto essere a letto, invece strisciava fino al bordo della scala, e ficcava la testa nella ringhiera per</p>
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<p>would creep to the edge of the staircase, poking her head through the banister to see what was happening in the dining room below. Sometimes her mother would find her and pack her off and Kate would pad back to bed in her bare feet and be unable to sleep, tormented by the fact that she was not involved in all the fun happening downstairs and that they were not including her.</p> <p>In the hallway, without warning, is Annabelle.</p> <p>‘There you are,’ Annabelle says. In the half-gloom, she gives the impression of having grown several inches. Kate steps back.</p> <p>‘We were wondering where you’d got to.’ Annabelle is unsmiling, her formidable profile turned to its three-quarter point. The silk of her dress shimmers in the half-light like melting ice.</p> <p>‘Sorry,’ Kate says. ‘I hadn’t realised I’d been so long.’</p> <p>She forces herself to look Annabelle in the face, refusing to show she is cowed by her presence.</p> <p>‘I’m going to get some more elderflower for Marisa,’ Annabelle says. She sweeps past Kate into the kitchen, but Kate follows, unwilling to let her go. She wants to say something but she isn’t sure what. She is so angry at this woman, so repelled</p>	<p>vedere cosa succedeva nella sala da pranzo sottostante. A volte sua madre la trovava e la portava via, Kate tornava a letto a piedi nudi e non riusciva a dormire, tormentata dal fatto che non era coinvolta in tutto il divertimento che accadeva al piano di sotto e che non la stavano includendo.</p> <p>Nell’ingresso, senza annunciarsi, c’è Annabelle.</p> <p>«Eccoti,» dice Annabelle. Nella penombra dà l’impressione di essere cresciuta di parecchi centimetri. Kate fa un passo indietro.</p> <p>«Ci stavamo chiedendo dove fossi finita.» Annabelle non sorride, il suo formidabile profilo è girato a tre quarti. La seta del suo vestito brilla nella penombra come ghiaccio che si scioglie.</p> <p>«Mi dispiace,» dice Kate. «Non pensavo di averci messo così tanto.»</p> <p>Si sforza di guardare Annabelle in faccia, rifiutandosi di mostrare che è intimorita dalla sua presenza.</p> <p>«Vado a prendere altro fiori di sambuco per Marisa,» dice Annabelle. Passa davanti a Kate e si dirige in cucina, ma Kate la segue, poco propensa a lasciarsela sfuggire. Vuole dire qualcosa ma non è sicura di cosa. È così arrabbiata con</p>
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<p>by her interference that she has to cross her arms to stop herself from physically lashing out.</p> <p>Annabelle opens the fridge door and takes out a bottle of San Pellegrino, then reaches to the cupboard for a glass which she fills with ice from the rubber tray. She moves with grace, her arms expanding like wings, and she pays no attention to Kate who stands in the doorway, one foot on the kitchen flagstones, one foot on the hallway tiles. She is not sure what she's going to do or say but then it comes out without Kate having to think.</p> <p>'Annabelle,' Kate starts. 'If you think you can unsettle me with this little power-play you have going on, then you're very much mistaken.'</p> <p>Annabelle stops what she's doing. The half-poured bottle of San Pellegrino hangs from one hand. Her face is immobile, denuded of expression.</p> <p>'I don't know <i>what</i> you're talking about, Kate.'</p> <p>'Marisa. I'm talking about Marisa. You seem very – cosy with her all of a sudden.'</p> <p>Annabelle gives a quiet exhalation of laughter.</p>	<p>questa donna, così disgustata dal suo intromettersi, che deve incrociare le braccia per trattenersi dallo scagliarsi fisicamente contro di lei.</p> <p>Annabelle apre la porta del frigorifero e tira fuori una bottiglia di San Pellegrino, poi va alla credenza per prendere un bicchiere che riempie con del ghiaccio preso dalla vaschetta in gomma. Si muove con grazia, le sue braccia si aprono come ali, e non presta attenzione a Kate che sta sulla porta, un piede sul pavimento in pietra della cucina, un piede sulle piastrelle del corridoio. Non è sicura di quello che sta per fare o dire, ma poi esce fuori senza che Kate ci debba pensare.</p> <p>«Annabelle,» inizia Kate. «Se pensi di potermi turbare con questo giochetto di potere che hai messo in atto, sappi che ti sbagli di grosso.»</p> <p>Annabelle smette di fare quello che sta facendo. La bottiglia mezza vuota di San Pellegrino rimane sospesa nella sua mano. Il suo viso è immobile, privo di espressione.</p> <p>«Non so di <i>cosa</i> tu stia parlando, Kate.»</p> <p>«Marisa. Sto parlando di Marisa. Sembri molto... affettuosa con lei tutto d'un tratto.»</p> <p>Annabelle ride sommessamente.</p>
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<p>‘You seem to have forgotten that she’s been living here for months,’ Annabelle says, her voice level, each word delivered with cool precision. ‘Because you couldn’t cope with the mess you’d got yourself into—’</p> <p>‘That’s not the case—’</p> <p>‘Do me the courtesy of letting me finish.’ Annabelle slams the water bottle onto the table. She is angry, her lips pale and drawn, the veins in her neck sticking out. Kate has never seen her angry, she realises. She has only ever seen Annabelle in a state of controlled passive-aggression, tracking other people’s tender points from the sidelines like a sniper, but never once demeaning herself by showing uncontrolled fury. Until now, that is. Now she is incandescent. And Kate, who finally has her attention, is no longer sure what to do with it.</p> <p>‘Chris and I did everything we could, putting ourselves in God knows what sort of danger, and we nursed that poor girl back to health—’</p> <p>‘That poor girl?’ Kate asks, incredulous.</p> <p>‘Yes. That poor girl. Who you took advantage of because of your <i>demented</i> obsession with having a baby.’</p> <p>Kate, shocked, feels tears begin to form.</p>	<p>«Sembra che tu ti sia dimenticata che lei vive qui da mesi,» dice Annabelle a voce bassa, pronunciando ogni parola con fredda precisione. «Perché non riuscite a far fronte al casino in cui vi siete cacciati...»</p> <p>«Non è il caso...»</p> <p>«Fammi la cortesia di lasciarmi finire.»</p> <p>Annabelle sbatte la bottiglia d'acqua sul tavolo. È arrabbiata, le sue labbra sono pallide e tirate, le vene del collo spuntano fuori. Kate si rende conto di non averla mai vista arrabbiata. Ha sempre e solo visto Annabelle in uno stato passivo-aggressivo controllato, intenta a monitorare i punti deboli delle altre persone dalle retrovie come un cecchino, ma mai una volta l’aveva vista umiliarsi mostrando una furia incontrollata. Fino ad ora, ecco. Ora era incandescente. E Kate, che finalmente ha la sua attenzione, non sa più bene cosa farsene.</p> <p>«Chris e io abbiamo fatto tutto quello che potevamo, mettendoci in Dio solo sa che pericolo, e abbiamo curato quella povera ragazza per farla tornare in salute...»</p> <p>«Quella povera ragazza?» chiede Kate incredula.</p> <p>«Sì. Quella povera ragazza. Di cui ti sei approfittata spinta dalla tua <i>folle</i> ossessione di avere un bambino.»</p> <p>Kate, scioccata, sente le lacrime iniziare a</p>
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<p>‘That’s not true.’</p> <p>‘Yes it is. Jake’s told us how impossible you’ve been, how he doesn’t feel he can ever satisfy you.’ Annabelle is getting into her stride now, the words delivered like the rapid staccato gunshots of a firing squad. ‘It must have been quite obvious Marisa wasn’t in a fit state, but you insisted on moving her in with you to keep an eye on her and then you acted surprised when it all got too much for her. I mean, honestly, Kate. What were you thinking?’</p> <p>Kate hangs her head. Annabelle is right. She should have known. She had pressurised Jake into doing it. She had wanted to believe in Marisa’s perfection so badly that she had ignored any signs that contradicted it.</p> <p>Annabelle does not comfort her. Instead, she takes two long steps towards her so that she is inches away from Kate’s face. Her voice drops to an almost-whisper, which feels far more menacing than shouting.</p> <p>‘That child isn’t yours anyway,’ Annabelle says, the words delivered in a fine spray of spittle. ‘Not biologically. It’s quite clear to everyone else that Marisa and Jake are far better suited than you two</p>	<p>formarsi.</p> <p>«Non è vero.»</p> <p>«Sì, invece. Jake ci ha detto di quanto sei stata impossibile, di come lui sente di non riuscire mai a soddisfarti.» Annabelle sta iniziando a prendere il ritmo ora, pronunciando le parole come rapidi colpi di pistola sparati a intermittenza da un plotone d'esecuzione. «Doveva essere abbastanza ovvio che Marisa non stava bene, ma tu hai insistito per farla trasferire da voi per tenerla d'occhio e poi hai fatto finta di essere sorpresa quando tutto si è rivelato essere troppo per lei. Insomma, onestamente, Kate. Cosa credevi?»</p> <p>Kate china la testa. Annabelle ha ragione. Avrebbe dovuto saperlo. Aveva spinto Jake a farlo. Voleva credere così tanto che Marisa fosse quella perfetta, che aveva ignorato qualsiasi segnale che la contraddicesse.</p> <p>Annabelle non la consola. Al contrario, fa due lunghi passi verso di lei, in modo da trovarsi a pochi centimetri dal viso di Kate. La sua voce si abbassa fino ad essere quasi un sussurro, che sembra molto più minaccioso delle urla.</p> <p>«Quel bambino non è tuo comunque,» dice Annabelle, sputacchiando le parole.</p> <p>«Non biologicamente. È abbastanza evidente per tutti che Marisa e Jake stiano molto meglio insieme di quanto lo siate</p>
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<p>ever were.’</p> <p>‘What ...?’ Kate shakes her head, as if to rid it of the buzzing noise.</p> <p>‘Well just look at them, dear,’ Annabelle says, her lips twisting upwards in a strange little smile. ‘They’re two peas in a pod, aren’t they? You must have noticed!’</p> <p>Kate steps backwards, so dizzy that she is sure the kitchen floor must have dissolved underfoot. Her back thumps against the wall and the impact causes the pages of Annabelle’s calendar to flutter. She remembers seeing the initial J there on multiple different days. She hadn’t allowed herself to think about what it really meant but somewhere, in the unacknowledged grimy pit of her denial, she had known.</p> <p>‘He’s been spending an awful lot of time with her,’ Annabelle says, as if reading Kate’s thoughts. ‘You can’t be that dense, Kate. Come on. He’s been down here most weeks and the two of them have been getting on like a house on fire.’</p> <p>‘What? But I thought she didn’t want us here ...’</p> <p>Annabelle tilts her head in a pose of sympathy.</p> <p>‘She didn’t want <i>you</i> here, Kate. Jake and I had a long chat about it and decided it would be best.’</p>	<p>mai stati voi due.»</p> <p>«Cosa ...?» Kate scuote la testa, come per liberarla dal ronzio.</p> <p>«Beh, basta guardarli, cara,» dice Annabelle, le sue labbra si torcono verso l’alto in uno strano sorrisetto. «Sono pappa e ciccia, vero? Devi averlo notato anche tu!»</p> <p>Kate fa un passo indietro, così stordita da essere sicura che il pavimento della cucina si sia dissolto sotto ai suoi piedi. La sua schiena sbatte contro il muro e l’impatto fa svolazzare le pagine del calendario di Annabelle. Ricorda di aver visto l’iniziale J in più giorni diversi. Non aveva osato pensare a cosa significasse davvero, ma da qualche parte, nella fossa sporca e misconosciuta della sua negazione, lo sapeva.</p> <p>«Ha passato un sacco di tempo con lei ultimamente,» dice Annabelle, come se leggesse nei pensieri di Kate. «Non puoi essere così ottusa, Kate. Suvvia. È stato qui quasi tutte le settimane e loro due si intendevano alla grande.»</p> <p>«Cosa? Ma pensavo che lei non ci volesse qui...»</p> <p>Annabelle inclina la testa in una posa di compassione.</p> <p>«Non voleva <i>te</i> qui, Kate. Io e Jake ne abbiamo parlato a lungo e abbiamo deciso che sarebbe stato meglio così.»</p>
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<p>Kate remembers the spa weekend and Jake's early departure. He must have come here, she realises. All those unexplained absences for work. He was here all along. With Marisa. She presses the palm of each hand against the wall, wanting it to break open and swallow her. Annabelle is still speaking.</p> <p>'... and it's been lovely to see. Marisa is so easy to talk to, don't you find? It's only a matter of time until Jake realises ...'</p> <p>She stops then, as if aware she has gone too far. Annabelle doesn't need to complete the thought. Kate can do it for her. It's only a matter of time until Jake realises he should be with Marisa, the mother of his child. It is only a matter of time until Kate loses everything.</p> <p>Kate turns her head to one side, pressing her cheek against the clamminess of stone. She shuts her eyes, tears leaking out. She wishes she could stop crying, but she can't. She wishes she could drown Annabelle's voice out but she can't. She wishes she had the strength to stand up for herself, but she feels consumed by the truth of what Annabelle is saying. She has never been good enough or bright enough or charming enough or blonde enough or</p>	<p>Kate ricorda il weekend alle terme e la partenza anticipata di Jake. Realizza che deve essere venuto qui. Tutte quelle assenze inspiegabili per lavoro. Lui è sempre stato qui. Con Marisa. Preme i palmi delle mani contro il muro, desiderando che si spacchi e la inghiottisca. Annabelle sta ancora parlando.</p> <p>«... ed è stato bellissimo da vedere. È così facile parlare con Marisa, non trovi? È solo una questione di tempo prima che Jake si renda conto ...»</p> <p>Poi si ferma, come se fosse consapevole di essersi spinta troppo oltre. Non serve che Annabelle completi il pensiero. Kate può farlo per lei. È solo una questione di tempo prima che Jake capisca che dovrebbe stare con Marisa, la madre di suo figlio. È solo una questione di tempo prima che Kate perda tutto.</p> <p>Kate gira la testa di lato, premendo la guancia contro il freddo della pietra. Chiude gli occhi e ne fuoriescono lacrime. Vorrebbe poter smettere di piangere, ma non ci riesce. Vorrebbe soffocare la voce di Annabelle, ma non può. Vorrebbe avere la forza di farsi valere, ma si sente consumata dalla verità di ciò che Annabelle sta dicendo. Non è mai stata abbastanza brava o abbastanza brillante o abbastanza affascinante o abbastanza</p>
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<p>fertile enough or sweet enough to be Jake's equal. Annabelle's words are confirmation: she is not worthy of being Jake's girlfriend and not worthy of being the mother of his child – or, indeed, a mother at all. She is damaged, faulty in some way that she cannot define, and Annabelle has known this from the very beginning, scenting her weakness like blood and chasing it until Kate has nowhere left to run. Yes, she thinks, yes, you're right about it all. I don't belong here. I never have.</p> <p>She slides onto the floor. She has no more energy, she realises. She can't fight this any more. This last year has sapped her of all her dwindling strength and for the briefest of moments, Kate imagines her total erasure. How much simpler everything would be if she ceased to exist. Ignoring her, Annabelle busies herself around the kitchen, calmly finishes preparing Marisa's drink, then smooths her hair behind her ears, a warrior queen readying herself for the final assault. 'Marisa and I have become close because that girl hasn't got a mother,' she says, standing over Kate like a shadow. 'It should be perfectly clear,' Annabelle pauses, checking she has Kate's total attention. 'Or maybe you can only see that</p>	<p>bionda o abbastanza fertile o abbastanza dolce per essere alla pari di Jake. Le parole di Annabelle ne sono la conferma: non è degna di essere la ragazza di Jake e non è degna di essere la madre di suo figlio – o di essere madre, in generale. Lei è danneggiata, difettosa in un modo che non riesce a definire, e Annabelle lo ha saputo fin dall'inizio, annusando la sua debolezza come il sangue e inseguendola finché Kate non avrebbe più avuto dove scappare. Sì, pensa, sì, hai ragione su tutto. Io sono fuori posto qui. Lo sono sempre stata.</p> <p>Scivola sul pavimento. Si rende conto di non avere più energie. Non riesce più a opporsi. Quest'ultimo anno l'ha svuotata di tutte le sue forze e per un brevissimo istante Kate immagina la sua totale cancellazione. Come tutto sarebbe più semplice se lei cessasse di esistere. Ignorandola, Annabelle si dà da fare in cucina, finisce con calma di preparare il drink di Marisa, poi si liscia i capelli dietro le orecchie, come una regina guerriera che si prepara all'assalto finale. «Marisa e io ci siamo avvicinate perché quella ragazza non ha una madre.» dice, sovrastando Kate come un'ombra. «Dovrebbe essere perfettamente chiaro,» Annabelle fa una pausa, assicurandosi di avere la totale attenzione di Kate. «O forse</p>
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<p>kind of thing when you've had a child yourself.'</p> <p>Annabelle takes the glass of elderflower and walks past Kate, her dress swishing as she goes. Kate sits on the floor a moment longer. And then she feels a sharp twinge in the side of her belly. It is a deep, muscular ache and it reminds her of those interminable scans she used to have when going through fertility treatment; the way the consultant would sweep the ultrasound wand from side to side, angling it to get a better view of each ovary. The sensation was unlike anything else she had ever experienced. It was less the presence of pain and more a hollowing out of it.</p> <p>The ache would spread across her stomach and down into her groin, the soreness making her clench her teeth until she felt on the verge of passing out, and then the wand would be removed and the consultant would give her tissue paper to wipe herself down, and the memory of pain faded immediately.</p> <p>Yet she feels it again now. But this time, the throbbing rises upwards, through her stomach and up towards her chest, fizzing into her shoulders and then when it reaches her throat, she finally recognises it</p>	<p>queste cose si riescono a capire solo quando si ha avuto un figlio.»</p> <p>Annabelle prende il bicchiere di fiori di sambuco e passa davanti a Kate, facendo ondeggiare il vestito mentre cammina. Kate resta seduta sul pavimento per un po'. Poi sente una fitta acuta al lato del suo ventre. È un dolore muscolare profondo che le ricorda quelle interminabili ecografie che faceva quando si sottoponeva al trattamento per la fertilità; il modo in cui il consulente faceva scorrere la sonda ecografica da un lato all'altro, angolandola per avere una visione migliore di ogni ovaio. La sensazione era diversa da qualsiasi altra cosa avesse mai provato. Non era tanto la presenza del dolore, quanto il liberarsi da esso.</p> <p>Il dolore si diffondeva attraverso il suo ventre e giù fino all'inguine, le faceva stringere i denti fino a quando si sentiva sul punto di svenire. Poi la sonda veniva rimossa, il consulente le dava dei fazzoletti di carta per pulirsi, e il ricordo del dolore svaniva immediatamente.</p> <p>Eppure ora lo sente di nuovo. Ma questa volta le palpitazioni salgono verso l'alto, attraverso il suo ventre e su verso il suo petto pizzicandole le spalle, e poi, quando raggiungono la gola, finalmente riconosce</p>
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<p>for what it is. Power. She sees with sudden, certain clarity that she is strong precisely because of the pain she has withstood and that she can do this. She levers herself upright.</p> <p>Fuck Annabelle, she thinks. That woman is not going to get away with it. She walks back down the corridor and into the drawing room, where Annabelle is bending to leave the sparkling elderflower on the side-table. Marisa isn't there. The sofa cushion is indented where she was sitting. Jake and Chris turn to look at Kate as she enters. Annabelle keeps her back to her.</p> <p>'Are you all right—?' Jake starts to ask.</p> <p>'Where's Marisa?'</p> <p>'In the bathroom,' he says. 'Are you OK?'</p> <p>He looks worried.</p> <p>Kate ignores him. In her mind's eye, she sees a gun cylinder spinning and clicking and the safety catch sliding off. She imagines lifting the sight up to her eye and pointing the barrel directly at Annabelle's forehead.</p> <p>'Annabelle,' she says. 'I'd like you to tell everyone what you just told me in the kitchen.'</p> <p>Annabelle straightens and sighs audibly.</p> <p>'Oh for goodness' sake, what is it now? I don't know what you're talking about,</p>	<p>il dolore per quello che è. Potere. Vede con chiarezza improvvisa e certa che è forte proprio grazie al dolore che ha sopportato e che può farcela. Si alza in piedi.</p> <p>Fanculo Annabelle, pensa. Quella donna non la passerà liscia. Cammina lungo il corridoio e ritorna in salotto, dove Annabelle si sta piegando per lasciare il fiori di sambuco frizzante sul tavolino. Marisa non c'è. Il cuscino del divano porta i segni di dove era seduta. Jake e Chris si girano a guardare Kate mentre entra.</p> <p>Annabelle le dà le spalle.</p> <p>«Va tutto bene...?» inizia a chiedere Jake.</p> <p>«Dov'è Marisa?»</p> <p>«In bagno.» dice lui. «Stai bene?» Sembra preoccupato.</p> <p>Kate lo ignora. Si immagina il cilindro di una pistola che gira e scatta, e la sicura che scivola via. Immagina di sollevare il mirino fino all'occhio e puntare la canna direttamente alla fronte di Annabelle.</p> <p>«Annabelle,» dice. «Vorrei che dicessi a tutti quello che mi hai appena detto in cucina.»</p> <p>Annabelle si raddrizza e sospira in modo evidente.</p> <p>«Oh per l'amor del cielo, cosa c'è adesso? Non so di cosa tu stia parlando, Kate.»</p>
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<p>Kate.’</p> <p>Annabelle swivels on her heel and faces her, and Kate is astonished by her composure. Annabelle’s face seems to have become younger and less lined, as though the viciousness of a few minutes ago has invigorated her.</p> <p>‘You know exactly what I mean.’</p> <p>Annabelle shrugs and lifts her hands, palms facing upwards in a gesture of supplication.</p> <p>‘I honestly have no idea. I just know that everything I do seems to annoy you in some way and I’m on the verge of giving up altogether. Apparently nothing I do can ever be good enough. You see,’ Annabelle shifts on her feet, directing her next comment to Jake, ‘this is exactly what I’ve been telling you about.’</p> <p>So there have been countless conversations about her behind her back, Kate thinks. Untold opportunities to sow the seeds of suspicion and mistrust. How Annabelle must have enjoyed the manipulation, placing her chips on green baize like a gambler who is cheating the house. She can imagine it all now: how Annabelle, with her evangelical zeal for ‘family’ and the genetic importance of its biology, must have plotted carefully to exclude Kate and bring Marisa into the</p>	<p>Annabelle ruota sui tacchi fino a trovarsi di fronte a lei, e Kate è stupita dalla sua compostezza. Il viso di Annabelle sembra essere diventato più giovane e meno rigato, come se la cattiveria di pochi minuti fa l'avesse rinvigorita.</p> <p>«Sai esattamente a cosa mi riferisco.»</p> <p>Annabelle alza le spalle e solleva le mani, rivolgendo i palmi verso l'alto in un gesto di supplica.</p> <p>«Onestamente non ne ho idea. So solo che tutto quello che faccio sembra in qualche modo infastidirti e sono sul punto di rinunciare del tutto. A quanto pare niente di quello che faccio sarà mai abbastanza. Vedi,» Annabelle si gira verso Jake, indirizzando a lui il commento successivo, «questo è esattamente ciò di cui ti parlavo.»</p> <p>Quindi c'erano state innumerevoli conversazioni su di lei alle sue spalle, pensa Kate. Un'infinità di occasioni per gettare il seme del sospetto e della sfiducia. Quanto deve essersi goduta la manipolazione Annabelle, disponendo le sue fiches sul tavolo come un giocatore d'azzardo che sta barando. Riesce ad immaginarsi tutto ora: come Annabelle, con il suo zelo evangelico per la “famiglia” e l'importanza genetica della sua biologia, debba aver tramato</p>
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<p>fold; how she has probably been telling her son that Kate shouldn't visit, in order to avoid upsetting the surrogate; how she no doubt told Marisa all sorts of things about Kate's unfit mental state.</p> <p>'What's she been telling you?' Kate asks Jake, her chin jutting upwards.</p> <p>He opens his mouth to speak but no words come out. He looks hapless and lost, like the small boy his mother still wishes he was. Annabelle's power over him is more firmly embedded than Kate ever imagined. She sees now that he is scared of her. That he needs Kate to stand up to her for him.</p> <p>'Annabelle,' Kate says. 'It's over. The game's up. You've been found out.'</p> <p>'What nonsense—'</p> <p>'And if I have anything to do with it, you'll never see your grandson.' The words gather and brew with a boiling ferocity. 'I won't let you get near him, you poisonous old witch.'</p> <p>Annabelle takes two steps towards her, hands knotted into fists, teeth bared. For a moment, Kate thinks she's going to punch her but Chris leaps to his feet, knocking his drink to the floor and rests his hand lightly on Annabelle's elbow.</p>	<p>attentamente per escludere Kate e portare Marisa all'ovile; come probabilmente abbia detto a suo figlio che Kate non dovrebbe farle visita, per evitare di turbare la madre surrogata; come senza dubbio ne abbia dette di tutti i colori a Marisa sullo stato mentale inadeguato di Kate.</p> <p>«Cosa ti ha detto?» chiede Kate a Jake, facendo sporgere il mento verso l'alto.</p> <p>Lui apre la bocca per parlare, ma non esce nessuna parola. Sembra miserabile e perso, come il ragazzino che sua madre vorrebbe ancora che fosse. Il potere di Annabelle su di lui è più radicato di quanto Kate avesse immaginato. Capisce ora che lui ha paura di lei. Che ha bisogno che Kate le tenga testa per lui.</p> <p>«Annabelle,» dice Kate. «È finita. Il gioco è finito. Sei stata scoperta.»</p> <p>«Che assurdità...»</p> <p>«E se posso fare delle scelte al riguardo, ti assicuro che non vedrai mai tuo nipote.»</p> <p>Le parole si accumulano e fermentano con una ferocia bollente. «Non ti lascerò avvicinare a lui, vecchia strega velenosa.»</p> <p>Annabelle fa due passi verso di lei, con le mani strette a pugno, digrignando i denti. Per un momento Kate pensa che stia per prenderla a pugni, ma Chris balza in piedi facendo cadere il suo drink sul pavimento, e appoggia lievemente la mano sul gomito di Annabelle.</p>
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<p>‘Come now,’ he says, trying to sit her down as if to avoid an unsightly fracas.</p> <p>Annabelle bats away his hand.</p> <p>‘Leave it,’ she says, spitting out the words. Chris sits back down and his face looks as crumpled as his shirt. He raises his eyebrows at Kate and she knows this is his way of apologising, but it’s not enough. None of it is enough to compensate for how malicious Annabelle has been, how odiously superior and unfriendly since the first day they met.</p> <p>‘You told me, in the kitchen, that Jake and Marisa were better off without me,’ Kate says. ‘That Marisa’s the biological mother. That I’ve been impossible and it’s no wonder Jake’s been spending so much time here behind my back.’</p> <p>A beat of silence. Kate’s cheeks are hot. Chris, lifting the glass from the floor, suspends his arm mid-air. Jake walks towards her, his face pale.</p> <p>‘Kate, I—’</p> <p>‘I don’t want to hear it right now,’ she says.</p> <p>He stands awkwardly in the middle of the room, and she keeps staring at Annabelle, refusing to look away from that blue, blue gaze. Annabelle blinks. Kate thinks she’s</p>	<p>«Andiamo,» dice lui, cercando di farla sedere come per evitare una sgradevole rissa.</p> <p>Annabelle scaccia via la sua mano.</p> <p>«Lasciami stare,» dice, sputando le parole.</p> <p>Chris si siede di nuovo e la sua faccia sembra stropicciata come la sua camicia. Alza le sopracciglia verso Kate e lei sa che questo è il suo modo di scusarsi, ma non è abbastanza. Niente di tutto ciò è sufficiente per compensare la malvagità di Annabelle, quanto sia stata odiosamente superiore e scortese fin dal primo giorno in cui si sono incontrate.</p> <p>«In cucina mi hai detto che Jake e Marisa stavano meglio senza di me,» dice Kate.</p> <p>«Che Marisa è la madre biologica. Che sono stata impossibile e non c’è da stupirsi che Jake abbia passato così tanto tempo qui a mia insaputa.»</p> <p>Cala il silenzio. Le guance di Kate sono calde. Chris sospende il braccio a mezz'aria mentre solleva il bicchiere dal pavimento. Jake, pallido in volto, cammina verso di lei.</p> <p>«Kate, io-»</p> <p>«Non voglio ascoltarti ora,» dice lei.</p> <p>Lui se ne sta goffamente al centro della stanza, e lei continua a fissare Annabelle, rifiutandosi di distogliere lo sguardo da quegli occhi blu intenso. Annabelle sbatte</p>
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<p>going to cry, but then Annabelle tilts her head to one side, showing off the white vulnerability of her neck. She is looking out of the window to the front garden and the driveway and the thinning patch of woodland and then the room is filled with a strange sound, like a rustling of leaves or a rushing of water, and Kate realises with horror that Annabelle is laughing. Her laughter is loud and potent and jarring against the quiet. Annabelle's eyes are unmoving. They are silvery, glinting, dead-fish eyes. She is laughing but the laughter does not reach the rest of her face and this makes her more frightening than she was before.</p> <p>'What utter nonsense,' Annabelle says.</p> <p>'Jake, I've been trying to tell you for some time that I've been worried about Kate's mental health, haven't I? What further proof do you need?'</p> <p>'Mum, that's not—'</p> <p>'I just can't believe that you've invented this ludicrous ... conspiracy,' Annabelle continues. 'And you're lashing out at me — me! I've done so much for you, even if I haven't always understood you. I ... I ... just don't know what more I could have done.' Annabelle's eyes are moist now, welling with self-pity.</p> <p>Oh she's good, Kate thinks, she's very</p>	<p>le palpebre. Kate pensa che stia per piangere, ma poi Annabelle inclina la testa da un lato, mettendo in mostra la bianca vulnerabilità del suo collo. Sta guardando fuori dalla finestra verso il giardino anteriore e il vialetto e la sottile macchia di bosco, e poi la stanza si riempie di uno strano suono, come un fruscio di foglie o uno scroscio d'acqua, e Kate si rende conto con orrore che Annabelle sta ridendo. La sua risata è chiassosa, potente e discordante rispetto al silenzio. Gli occhi di Annabelle sono immobili. Sono argentei, luccicanti, occhi da pesce morto. Sta ridendo, ma la risata non coinvolge il resto del suo viso e questo la rende più spaventosa di prima.</p> <p>«Che completa assurdità,» dice Annabelle.</p> <p>«Jake, è da un po' che cerco di dirti che sono preoccupata per la salute mentale di Kate, vero? Di quali altre prove hai bisogno?»</p> <p>«Mamma, questo non è...»</p> <p>«Non posso credere che tu abbia inventato questa ridicola... cospirazione.» continua Annabelle. «E ti stai scagliando contro di me - me! Ho fatto così tanto per te, anche se non ti ho sempre capito. Io... io... non so proprio cos'altro avrei potuto fare.» Gli occhi di Annabelle sono umidi ora, riempiti dall'autocommiserazione.</p> <p>Oh è brava, pensa Kate, è molto brava.</p>
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<p>good.</p> <p>Annabelle wobbles backwards, as though she is about to faint, but she collects herself just in time to ensure she collapses onto the sofa where she leans against the cushions, pressing the back of her hand against her forehead.</p> <p>‘Mum, please don’t do this,’ Jake says.</p> <p>‘Annabelle, there’s no need to get so upset,’ Chris adds.</p> <p>But neither of them, Kate notices, moves towards her. Kate bends closer to Annabelle so that there can be no escaping what she is about to say.</p> <p>‘I am perfectly sane, Annabelle,’ she says, her voice breaking. ‘How fucking dare you suggest otherwise.’</p> <p>Annabelle is clutching her necklace now, pushing her head further into the sofa cushions, trying to turn away from the intensity of Kate’s face, trying to imply it’s Kate who she needs protection from rather than the other way round.</p> <p>‘Chris,’ Annabelle is whimpering. ‘Help me, please. I don’t know what she’s going to do to me.’</p> <p>Then, out of nowhere, a voice.</p> <p>‘She’s not going to do anything to you,’ the voice says.</p>	<p>Annabelle barcolla all'indietro, come se stesse per svenire, ma si riprende appena in tempo per assicurarsi di crollare sul divano dove si appoggia ai cuscini, premendosi il dorso della mano sulla fronte.</p> <p>«Mamma, per favore non farlo,» dice Jake.</p> <p>«Annabelle, non c'è motivo di arrabbiarsi tanto,» aggiunge Chris.</p> <p>Ma nessuno dei due, nota Kate, si muove verso di lei. Kate si piega tanto da essere vicina ad Annabelle, in modo che non possa sfuggire a ciò che sta per dire.</p> <p>«Io sono perfettamente lucida, Annabelle,» dice con voce rotta. «Come cazzo ti permetti di insinuare il contrario?»</p> <p>Annabelle sta stringendo la sua collana ora, mentre spinge ancora di più la testa fra i cuscini del divano, nel tentativo di allontanarsi dall'intensità del viso di Kate, e cercando di suggerire che è lei che ha bisogno di essere protetta da Kate e non il contrario.</p> <p>«Chris,» piagnucola Annabelle «Aiutami, per favore. Non so cosa mi farà.»</p> <p>Poi, dal nulla, una voce.</p> <p>«Non ti farà niente,» dice la voce.</p>
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<p>Annabelle flinches and her eyes flicker to the left. A shadow passes over her face.</p> <p>When Kate looks in the direction of Annabelle's gaze, she sees Marisa standing in the doorway.</p> <p>'What was that?' Kate asks.</p> <p>'I said that you're not going to do anything to Annabelle,' Marisa repeats.</p> <p>'Because I heard exactly what she said to you back there.'</p> <p>Marisa's face is calm. She is lit up from behind, golden hair glowing.</p> <p>'In the kitchen,' Marisa explains. 'I heard exactly what Annabelle said to you.'</p> <p>On the sofa, Annabelle goes very still.</p> <p>'I came out into the corridor. You can hear everything there. It's why we always close the kitchen door, isn't it, Annabelle? That and to keep the draught out.'</p> <p>Marisa's voice is flat but clear, like a teacher wanting to make herself heard at the back of the class.</p> <p>'And you did say all those things, Annabelle,' Marisa says, mouth twisting.</p> <p>'I'm sorry, but you did.'</p> <p>Annabelle doesn't speak. Her necklace glints in the light.</p> <p>'You said that Jake and I had been getting close and that we were going to be together with the baby. You said the baby</p>	<p>Annabelle trasale e i suoi occhi guizzano verso sinistra. Un'ombra passa sul suo viso. Quando Kate guarda nella direzione dello sguardo di Annabelle, vede Marisa in piedi sulla porta.</p> <p>«Cosa?» chiede Kate.</p> <p>«Ho detto che non farai niente ad Annabelle,» ripete Marisa. «Perché ho sentito esattamente cosa ti ha detto prima.»</p> <p>Il volto di Marisa è calmo. È illuminata dalla lucentezza dei suoi capelli dorati.</p> <p>«In cucina,» spiega Marisa. «Ho sentito esattamente quello che ti ha detto Annabelle.»</p> <p>Annabelle rimane zitta e immobile sul divano.</p> <p>«Sono uscita nel corridoio. Lì si sente tutto. È per questo che chiudiamo sempre la porta della cucina, vero, Annabelle? Per questo e per evitare correnti d'aria.»</p> <p>La voce di Marisa è piatta ma limpida, come quella di un'insegnante che vuole farsi sentire in fondo alla classe.</p> <p>«E tu tutte quelle cose le hai dette, Annabelle,» dice Marisa torcendo la bocca. «Mi dispiace, ma è così.»</p> <p>Annabelle non parla. La sua collana brilla alla luce.</p> <p>«Hai detto che io e Jake ci stavamo avvicinando e che saremmo stati insieme con il bambino. Hai detto che il bambino</p>
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<p>was mine and that I was better suited to Jake.’</p> <p>Annabelle emits a low noise, halfway between a growl and a sob.</p> <p>‘But the truth is, Jake has been coming here on his own because I’ve felt so ashamed of what I did to Kate. I’m the one who hasn’t been able to face her.’</p> <p>Jake reaches for Kate’s hand. She allows him to take it.</p> <p>‘I’m sorry about that, Kate,’ Marisa says, head bowed and still unable to look at her. ‘Annabelle told me it was better that way. She told me you weren’t—’</p> <p>‘It’s OK,’ Kate says. And then again: ‘It’s OK.’</p> <p>Relief surges through Kate like a cold wave. So Jake didn’t betray her. He has been doing it to protect her. She turns to meet his gaze. His face is so stricken that she knows Marisa is telling the truth.</p> <p>Jake shakes his head. ‘I would never ...’ he starts, then stops, then starts again, his voice hoarse. ‘I wouldn’t do that to you ... I was just ... trying to manage it all ...’</p> <p>He lapses into silence. She rests her head against his solid, comforting shoulder and exhales.</p> <p>‘I know,’ she murmurs. ‘I know that now.’</p>	<p>era mio e che io ero più adatta a Jake.»</p> <p>Annabelle emette un rumore basso, a metà tra un brontolio e un singhiozzo.</p> <p>«Ma la verità è che Jake è venuto qui da solo perché mi sono vergognata così tanto di quello che ho fatto a Kate. Sono io quella che non è stata in grado di affrontarla.»</p> <p>Jake cerca la mano di Kate. Lei gli permette di prenderla.</p> <p>«Mi dispiace, Kate,» dice Marisa, con la testa china e ancora incapace di guardarla.</p> <p>«Annabelle mi ha detto che era meglio così. Mi ha detto che tu non eri...»</p> <p>«Va tutto bene,» dice Kate. E poi ancora: «Va tutto bene.»</p> <p>Una fredda ondata di sollievo attraversa Kate. Quindi Jake non l'ha tradita. Lui l'ha fatto per proteggerla. Si gira per incontrare il suo sguardo. Il suo volto è così affranto che lei sa che Marisa sta dicendo la verità.</p> <p>Jake scuote la testa. «Non avrei mai...» inizia, poi si ferma, poi ricomincia, con voce roca. «Non ti farei mai una cosa del genere ... Stavo solo ... cercando di gestire tutto...»</p> <p>Lui sprofonda nel silenzio. Lei appoggia la testa sulla sua spalla solida e confortante ed espira.</p> <p>«Lo so,» mormora lei. «Ora lo so.»</p>
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<p>‘Jakey,’ Annabelle says, ‘don’t listen to this rubbish. She’s talking nonsense. I never said—’</p> <p>‘You can’t dismiss <i>both</i> of us as mad,’ Kate replies. ‘You might just get away with one. But two begins to look a lot like carelessness.’ And then, looking straight at her, she adds, ‘Don’t you think, dear?’</p> <p>On the sofa, Annabelle is withered, her cheeks sunken. Her eyes radiate anger.</p> <p>‘Oh come on,’ Annabelle says, looking at Chris now. ‘Marisa’s drugged up to the eyeballs. She doesn’t know what she’s saying.’</p> <p>Chris says nothing. He looks ashamed.</p> <p>‘I know what I’m saying,’ Marisa says, coming to stand next to Kate. She knocks one of the helium balloons out of the way as she does so, and then this woman who has caused Kate so much angst and sadness, who has also given her so much hope and optimism, who has scared her and mystified her in equal measure, does something wholly unexpected. She takes Kate’s hand in hers.</p> <p>‘What you’ve said about me and Jake, about me being the real mother – none of that’s true, Annabelle,’ Marisa says. ‘You know that, don’t you?’ She talks slowly.</p> <p>‘This is Kate’s baby. It always has been. It</p>	<p>«Jakey,» dice Annabelle, «non ascoltare queste sciocchezze. Sta dicendo delle assurdità. Non ho mai detto...»</p> <p>«Non puoi liquidare <i>entrambe</i> come pazzе,» risponde Kate. «Potresti cavartela con una. Ma due inizia ad essere sconsiderato.» E poi, guardandola dritta negli occhi, aggiunge: «Non credi, cara?»</p> <p>Sul divano, Annabelle è avvizzita, le guance infossate. I suoi occhi irradiano rabbia.</p> <p>«Oh, andiamo,» dice Annabelle, guardando Chris ora. «Marisa è drogata fino alla punta dei capelli. Non sa quello che dice.»</p> <p>Chris non dice nulla. Sembra che si vergogni.</p> <p>«So quello che dico,» dice Marisa, mettendosi in piedi accanto a Kate. Fa scoppiare uno dei palloncini mentre si sposta, e poi questa donna, che ha causato a Kate così tanta angoscia e tristezza, che le ha anche dato tanta speranza e ottimismo, che l'ha spaventata e mistificata in egual misura, fa qualcosa di totalmente inaspettato. Prende la mano di Kate.</p> <p>«Quello che hai detto di me e Jake, che io sono la vera madre - niente di tutto ciò è vero, Annabelle,» dice Marisa. «Lo sai, no?» Parla lentamente. «Questo è il bambino di Kate. Lo è sempre stato. Lo</p>
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<p>always will be. Jake and Kate are the parents.’</p> <p>Kate squeezes Marisa’s hand so strongly it feels as though she might never let go and then Kate begins to cry again. Jake places his arm around her shoulders. Finally he speaks.</p> <p>‘Mum,’ Jake says, his voice tight and throttled. ‘This is outrageous. I came up here without Kate because you told me it was the best way to protect her and protect our baby.’</p> <p>Annabelle turns to her son. Her hands are clasped in her lap and she raises them, palms cupped, beseeching.</p> <p>‘Oh, Jakey,’ she says. ‘I thought that’s what you wanted. You and Marisa were getting on so well, you see, and I ... well, I ...’</p> <p>‘You what? You tried to manipulate us,’ he cries. ‘I’ve always defended you, always done what you wanted.’</p> <p>His voice is cracking. He sounds so helpless that Kate wants to defend him. But this is something Jake has to do for himself.</p> <p>‘You’ve gone too far this time,’ he says.</p> <p>‘Too far. How could you? How could you do this?’</p> <p>‘Now steady on, old chap,’ Chris says, and his mildness is absurd. Kate wants to take Chris by the shoulders and shake him</p>	<p>sarà sempre. Jake e Kate sono i genitori.»</p> <p>Kate stringe la mano di Marisa così forte come se potesse non lasciarla mai andare, e poi comincia a piangere di nuovo. Jake circonda le sua spalle con un braccio.</p> <p>Finalmente parla.</p> <p>«Mamma,» dice Jake, con voce strozzata.</p> <p>«Questo è oltraggioso. Sono venuto qui senza Kate perché mi hai detto che era il modo migliore per proteggerla e proteggere il nostro bambino.»</p> <p>Annabelle si rivolge a suo figlio. Tiene le mani strette in grembo e le alza tenendo i palmi a coppa, implorante.</p> <p>«Oh, Jakey,» dice. «Pensavo che fosse quello che volevi. Tu e Marisa andavate così d’accordo, vedi, e io... beh, io...»</p> <p>«Tu cosa? Hai cercato di manipolarci,» grida lui. «Ti ho sempre difesa, ho sempre fatto quello che volevi.»</p> <p>La sua voce si incrina. Sembra così impotente che Kate vuole difenderlo. Ma questa è una cosa che Jake deve fare da solo.</p> <p>«Stavolta hai esagerato,» dice. «Questo è troppo. Come hai potuto? Come hai potuto farlo?»</p> <p>«Ora calmati, figliolo,» dice Chris, e la sua mitezza è assurda. Kate vorrebbe prendere Chris per le spalle e scuoterlo</p>
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<p>until he is forced to reckon with life as it actually is, rather than choosing to believe in the fabricated reality his wife has created.</p> <p>‘This is why your daughters don’t talk to you,’ Jake is saying to his mother now, his voice rising to a shout. ‘This is why they can’t fucking stand the sight of you. They always said to me I’d see it one day, that you’re a raging narcissist who treats us all like fucking chess pieces.’</p> <p>‘Shush, Jake, shush,’ Chris says. ‘There’s no need to bring all that up. You know how much it hurts your mother.’</p> <p>‘I don’t care!’ he shouts and then he is kicking the coffee table so that it upends and the sickly blue cake lands in a messy gloop on the red-threaded rug. ‘She’s hurt me! She’s hurt us! She’s hurt Kate in the most unimaginable way ...’</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>fino a quando non sarà costretto a fare i conti con la vita reale, invece di scegliere di credere alla finta realtà che sua moglie ha creato.</p> <p>«Ecco perché le tue figlie non ti parlano,» sta dicendo Jake a sua madre ora, alzando la voce fino a urlare. «Questo è il motivo per cui non riescono neanche a vederti, cazzo. Mi hanno sempre detto che un giorno me ne sarei resto conto, che sei una narcisista rabbiosa che ci tratta tutti come delle cazzo di pedine.»</p> <p>«Zitto, Jake, zitto,» dice Chris. «Non c’è bisogno di tirare fuori queste cose. Sai quanto fa male a tua madre.»</p> <p>«Non mi interessa!» grida e poi prende a calci il tavolino da caffè rovesciandolo e la nauseante torta blu cade diventando un pasticcio disordinato sul tappeto a fili rossi. «Mi ha ferito! Ci ha feriti! Ha ferito Kate in modo inimmaginabile...»</p> <p>[...]</p>
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4. The translation of dialogues in *Magpie*

In this last chapter, I will present how my work as a translator developed and how I dealt with the previously presented linguistic issues. I will apply the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter to my work of translation, and the exploration of the major themes carried out in the second chapter will be applied to the analysis of the main character's language use.

4.1 The translation process

As stated in the first chapter, the translation process usually involves three phases: orientation, drafting and revision. The orientation phase for me consisted in a first reading of the whole book and investigation of its genre and author. In this way, I managed to obtain a clear overview on the psychological thriller and domestic noir and what is expected from these genres, and realised that *Magpie* perfectly respected both canons. I also discovered that Elizabeth Day, the author, is a journalist who had already written seven books, and this is not the first one in which she deals with disturbing family relationships and domestic abuse. After that, I decided to carry out research on infertility and mental health, being these the main topics tackled by the novel. The main protagonist of the story is in fact Kate, a woman who does not manage to conceive naturally, and for this reason she and her husband Jake are forced to consider other options: first she uselessly tries in vitro fertilisation, but, after five cycles of IVF fail, she turns to surrogacy. What I found worthy of further exploration were infertility blogs and the way women facing this situation try to create a sense of community through them because they feel lonely and not fully understood in everyday life. As far as mental health issues are concerned, the ones I explored are schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder. This is due to the fact that two characters of the book present these issues, that is Marisa, the surrogate, and Annabelle, Jake's mother. It was relevant for me as a translator to see how mental conditions also influence the way a person talks, and that is why I decided to focus on the translation of dialogues.

The drafting phase was quite straightforward, but sometimes I was stuck on a word or expression I could not render properly in Italian. I used external resources, mostly online dictionaries and corpora to choose the best possible translation. As far as corpora

is concerned, I used the British National Corpus (BNC) because it contains 100 million words of text from a wide range of genres (e.g. fiction, magazine, academic, newspaper and spoken). This helped me understanding better the context in which certain words were used, so that I could find the most suitable translation into Italian. In this phase I also decided on the linguistic focus of my research, that is the translation of dialogues and all the difficulties that might be found in them, such as colloquial language, cultural references, verbal humour and suspense.

The revision phase was a time consuming one. My usual way to proceed was a comparison between each paragraph I translated and its original counterpart. This was useful in order to identify problems of language or style, such as grammar or punctuation, unsuitable language or excessive verbiage. In the meantime, I also tried to imagine how the translated text would impress an Italian readership.

4.2 Overall translating strategies and choices

While translating, my aim was to produce a comprehensible fluently readable text that could be easily understood by all target readers, in this case adults, young adults and whoever can follow the storyline of this complex yet engaging book. In the following section, I will outline the most relevant translation strategies I adopted in order to obtain a fluent translation, while in the meantime trying to lose as few original elements as possible. On the whole, I tried to normalize the source text and adapt it to the target readers, adapting some elements of syntax and style to gain more transparency and make it closer to the target language system. For instance, I reordered some syntactic units or reversed the position of some linguistic elements, or, again, rearranged some of the punctuation. The main strategies I based myself upon are the ones suggested by Taylor (1998), that is substitution, divergence and convergence, amplification and reduction, diffusion and condensation, reordering.

<p><u>Gradually</u>, the rope loosens and Kate can feel the blood rushing back to her feet.</p>	<p>La corda si allenta <u>gradualmente</u> e Kate sente il sangue affluire di nuovo ai suoi piedi.</p>
<p>Marisa slides down to sit next to Kate, <u>her</u></p>	<p>Marisa scivola a terra <u>tenendo la schiena</u></p>

<p><u>back against the wall.</u></p> <p>She passes Kate some napkins from the dispenser and Kate presses them to her face, mopping up the tears.</p> <p>«[...] <u>Most of the time</u>, when she's on her meds, she's fine. But she's got serious mental health issues.»</p> <p>She watches Jas leave, a slight yet defiant figure.</p> <p>She peers into the saucepan, the steam clouding her glasses.</p> <p>Doesn't Julia live in Hong Kong, <u>she wants to ask?</u></p> <p>Kate, disbelieving, has to double-check whether she's seeing things but no, there is Annabelle's hand, the semi-arthritic fingers sporting familiar thick gold and jewelled rings, resting on top of Marisa's sleeve. Marisa pats Annabelle's hand with her own.</p> <p>Kate has never seen her angry, <u>she realises.</u></p>	<p><u>contro al muro</u> e si siede accanto a Kate.</p> <p>Prende alcuni tovaglioli dal dispenser e li passa a Kate, che li tampona sul viso asciugandosi le lacrime.</p> <p>«[...] Quando prende le medicine <u>per la maggior parte del tempo</u> sta bene. Ma ha seri problemi di salute mentale.»</p> <p>Guarda la figura esile ma spavalda di Jas che se ne va.</p> <p>Sbirchia nella casseruola e il vapore le annebbia gli occhiali.</p> <p><u>Voleva chiederle</u>, ma Julia non vive ad Hong Kong?</p> <p>Kate, incredula, deve ricontrollare se sta avendo le traveggole, ma no, c'è la mano di Annabelle. Le sue dita semiartriche, che sfoggiano spessi anelli dorati e gemmati, sono appoggiate sulla manica di Marisa, che a sua volta accarezza la mano di Annabelle.</p> <p><u>Kate si rende conto di</u> non averla mai vista arrabbiata.</p>
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As one can see in these examples, the main technique I used is reordering, which means that I rearranged some elements of the sentences. As Taylor maintains: "It is often necessary for whole phrases or clauses to be re-ordered. Meaning is first carried in semantic units rather than in syntagmatic patterns, and thus a certain grammatical 'skewing', or rearranging, is often required" (Taylor 1998: 61).

The cliché annoys Kate because it is true.	Kate è infastidita dal cliché perché è la verità.
She tries to steady her breathing but her lungs feel as though they are being wrung out like a sponge.	Tenta di calmare il respiro, ma le sembra che qualcuno stia strizzando i suoi polmoni come se fossero spugne.

In some cases I also changed the diathesis of the sentence, from active to passive and viceversa.

Hearing Marisa speak to her now, and understanding the depth of her mental imbalance, Kate feels her <u>tummy flip</u> again, except this time it doesn't return to normal. This time, the car never makes it to the other side. Instead, it flies through the air, <u>somersaulting</u> into the tarmac with crashing, fatal force.	Sentendo Marisa parlarle ora, e comprendendo la profondità del suo squilibrio mentale, Kate sente di nuovo <u>quella sensazione di vuoto allo stomaco</u> , solo che questa volta non torna alla normalità. Questa volta la macchina non arriva mai dall'altra parte. Vola in aria invece, <u>facendo un salto mortale sull'asfalto</u> con una forza letale.
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In this paragraph instead I used two different techniques: amplification and diffusion. The translation of “tummy flip” in Italian is *avere le farfalle nella pancia* (to have butterflies in your stomach), but I preferred not to use it in this sentence, since it is quite a childish expression (in fact, I used it for the translation of how Kate describes this sensation when she was little) and is mostly used to describe the feeling you have when you see a person you like. I preferred adding some elements and amplifying the original, specifying what the exact sensation is. In the case of “somersaulting”, the only possibility to translate it into Italian is using the periphrasis *fare un salto mortale*, and therefore the target text became linguistically more elaborate. As Taylor (1998:56) explains, these two strategies can often be confused, but amplification refers to the adding of elements in order to achieve greater comprehensibility, while diffusion refers to the slackening of source text expressions in the target text.

<u>Marisa's chest is heaving now and she is slumped in the chair</u> , the tears streaming down	<u>Marisa crolla sulla sedia ansimando</u> con le guance rigate di lacrime.
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her cheeks.	
‘But ... what ... Marisa ...’ She stumbles over the words.	«Ma... cosa... Marisa...» Balbetta.

In the first case I mixed two techniques: reordering and reduction. I anticipated a piece of information given further on in the sentence and reduced everything to two verbs, *crollare* and *ansimare*. In the second example, I reduced the sentence to the single verb *balbettare*. I chose reduction among the strategies proposed by Taylor (1998) because it consists in subtracting superfluous elements. If I had translated the sentence word for word, it would have resulted in a syntactically unnatural Italian sentence with unnecessary repetitions.

‘Well just look at them, dear,’ Annabelle says, her lips twisting upwards in a strange little smile. ‘ <u>They’re two peas in a pod, aren’t they?</u> You must have noticed!’	«Beh, basta guardarli, cara,» dice Annabelle, le sue labbra si torcono verso l’alto in uno strano sorrisetto. « <u>Sono pappa e ciccia, vero?</u> Devi averlo notato anche tu!»
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In the case of idioms, I adopted the technique of substitution. The translation has little in common with the source text, but the meaning to the target language readers is exactly the same (Taylor 1998:52). Being “two peas in a pod” means being very similar in appearance, but also having much in common. I chose the Italian idiom *essere pappa e ciccia* because it not only means you have much in common with someone, but also that you get along easily.

4.3 How speech is conditioned by the speakers’ mental state

The mental health issues *Magpie* deals with are schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Schizophrenia is a worldwide present severe psychotic illness, characterized by an overall debilitation of the patients affected by this condition: they lose touch with reality, and their minds create delusions and hallucinations. Their intellectual and social functions appear to be totally deteriorated, meaning that they become unable to take care of themselves. On the other hand, the NPD is a mental condition in which people feel more important than anyone else and constantly seek

some kind of admiration they believe they deserve. People suffering from this condition completely lack empathy for others and normally exploit other people to achieve their own goals.

Many patients affected by mental health issues present abnormalities of language. The most well known conditions are the different types of aphasia, like Broca's aphasia or Wernicke's aphasia. As reported in Andreoli (2012:46), other types of language disorders, in particular speech impairments, concern language expression (articulation disorders and disturbances of the language proper, such as anomie, word deformation, word substitution and syntax errors) and language comprehension (the patient is not able to understand the meaning of what he hears, in the most severe cases not even of single words). One can therefore safely state that linguistic behaviour is inseparable from the psychological condition, in the sense that the mental state of a person inevitably influences its use. As Andreoli (2012) states:

It is impossible to separate the personality of a subject from the environment in which he or she is placed. It is therefore difficult to carry out a linguistic analysis that is not psycho- and sociolinguistic as well. A communicative relationship is affected by the type of inter-human relations and therefore by the social context. As a consequence, any interpretation of a mental disorder as a disorder of inter-human communication necessarily becomes altered language too, in the sense that it "correctly" expresses a pathological existential situation.⁸ (Andreoli 2012:53, my translation)

According to Covington et al. (2005) pragmatics, that is the relationship between language and context, is the most disordered level of language in patients affected by schizophrenia. Even when their pronunciation and grammar seem perfectly normal, they say strange things at strange times (Covington et al. 2005:92). In particular,

⁸ The Italian original: "È impossibile scindere la personalità di un soggetto dall'ambiente in cui è inserito ed è pertanto difficile un'analisi linguistica che non sia anche psico- e socio-linguistica. Un rapporto comunicativo risente del tipo di relazioni interumane e quindi del contesto sociale. Come conseguenza ogni interpretazione del disturbo mentale come disturbo di comunicazione interumana diventa necessariamente anche linguaggio alterato, nel senso che esprime «correttamente» una situazione esistenziale patologica."

schizophrenic speech is often described as incoherent, meaning that it does not hold together. In addition to this, De Decker and Van de Craen (1987) noticed that schizophrenic patients do not follow Grice's maxims when producing speech, thus their answers to questions are off-topic, rambling, and uncooperative.

In the book, Marisa keeps her mental condition hidden, but it is clear that she has severe issues when she attacks Kate while she is pregnant with her baby. I believe language abnormalities are clearly visible in Marisa's way of speaking, especially during the assault scene: her speech is disordered, in the sense that she says strange things that only make sense to her and, all in all, what she says does not hold together. Furthermore, when Kate asks her even simple questions, she is unable to answer, and when she does, she repeats the same things all over again.

As stated in Chapter Two, people affected by narcissistic personality disorder often disregard social norms of politeness, in particular they are more likely to behave aggressively towards others and use derogatory language. In particular, DeWall et al. (2011) theorised that narcissists tend to use offensive language as a means of grabbing attention. Another possibility is that narcissists use this type of language more often because they perceive it as less offensive than it actually is: given the fact that they lack empathy and cannot take the receiver's perspective, they might be less aware of people's offended reactions and therefore underestimate the harshness of the language they use (Adams et al. 2014:27). Other studies, such as the one by Collins and Stukas (2008), suggest that narcissists may become insensitive and underplay the effect of their utterances, as this could facilitate their search for admiration.

These traits are clearly visible in Annabelle: she is constantly trying to diminish and offend Kate, but she does it in a subtle way, so that what she is doing can pass unobserved to the eyes of other people, and she still gets the admiration and attention she desperately needs. It is evident that she absolutely wants to be admired for taking care of Marisa and be thought of as a good woman who managed to get her back to health, while Kate is the mad woman who took advantage of a sick person for her "demented obsession with having a baby" (Day 2021:283). Her willingness to exclude

Kate is palpable, especially when she intervenes pretending that she has not spoken or when she hits her with passive-aggressive remarks, so that apparently nothing of what Kate does (not even asking Marisa how she is doing) seems to be permitted.

4.4 Colloquial language and its translation

As stated in the first chapter, colloquial language is characteristic of an informal register (Wales 1990:361). Instances of colloquial language are very much present in the book: every character uses at least one, but they are especially present in the dialogues involving Jas. She is Marisa’s friend and the person Kate turns to when she needs to know more about Marisa’s health state. One of the first things we learn about her in the first part of the book is that she is Marisa’s housemate and that she is black. In the second part of the book however, during her conversation with Kate, we learn that she is a strong independent woman who survived sexual assault and really cares about Marisa’s condition, even if she cannot do anything about it. Day’s linguistic choice for this character is mainly meant to define her personality: in fact, we are not given information about her job or social status, so we do not know if she belongs to a lower social class compared to Kate and Jake. I will now report the colloquial expressions I stumbled upon in Kate and Jas’ dialogue:

‘Yeah, I’m a friend. We were really close until a few months ago. Probably around the time she moved in with you. But hey, <u>that’s Marisa for you.</u> ’	«Sì, sono un’amica. Eravamo molto unite fino a qualche mese fa. Forse fino al periodo in cui si è trasferita da te. Ma che ci vuoi fare, <u>Marisa è fatta così.</u> »
‘What do you mean?’	«Cosa vuoi dire?»
‘ <u>She gets deep and then she gets out.</u> Hang on a sec, will you?’	« <u>Si fa prendere troppo e poi se ne tira fuori.</u> Puoi aspettare un secondo?»

The idiom “that’s (someone) for you” refers to the fact that specific traits or behaviours are typical of the way someone usually acts. In this case Jas has not heard from Marisa for months and explains that suddenly disappearing for some time is typical of her. I found an equivalent in the Italian expression *È fatto/a così*, used when someone constantly enacts specific behaviours that the speaker cannot really understand and believes it is too late to change.

It was much more difficult to find a suitable translation for “to get deep and get out”. In this case, the BNC was very helpful to see the contexts in which “get deep” could be used. I learnt that one of these was relationships and concluded that this must have been the context of the present dialogue too, and that it was likely that “get deep” meant “get too involved” and “get out” meant “to leave”. For these reasons, I chose the Italian expressions *farsi prendere troppo* (get too involved in a relationship) and *tirarsene fuori* (try to escape from a relationship or situation).

<p>‘OK, Kate. I’ll meet you. In a public place because, <u>let’s be real</u>, I don’t know who you are or if you are who you say you are, but <u>if this is kosher</u> then, yeah, there is some stuff you should probably know about Marisa.’</p>	<p>«Ok Kate, ci vedremo. In un posto pubblico perché, <u>parliamoci chiaro</u>, non so chi sei o se sei chi dici di essere, ma <u>se è tutto apposto</u>, allora sì, ci sono alcune cose su Marisa che probabilmente dovresti sapere.»</p>
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The phrase “Let’s be real” is often said to others when the intended meaning is to be honest and truthful about a situation. In this case, Jas is looking at things realistically: Kate is a stranger who is looking for her help, it is risky to trust her. The Italian expression *parliamoci chiaro* has the same function, that is making things clear and handle the situation objectively.

By contrast, it was very hard for me to translate the expression “if this is kosher”, mainly because an Italian equivalent does not exist, so I focused on finding a similar expression that could substitute the meaning. Italian speakers are in fact mostly used to the Jewish meaning of the word, which means ‘fit’ or ‘legal’, as in ‘kosher food’. However, the common usage of the word in English speaking countries changed and the word came to be used to remark whether something is proper, good, or correct. So commonly, people will remark that something is “kosher” (all correct and proper) or “not kosher” (e.g. *That rental agreement wasn’t kosher at all*). Asking if ‘something is kosher’ with someone is a variation on that theme, checking in to make sure everything is good. The Italian expression that resembled the meaning the most to me is *se è tutto apposto*, so I substituted it to the original one.

'Man, you don't know what I'm going to tell you yet!'	«Cavolo, non hai idea di cosa ti sto per dire!»
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'Man' in this context represents an interjection used in situations of surprise or disappointment. I substituted it with *cavolo*, as the original is not as vulgar as other expressions like 'damn' or 'fuck', but it still cannot be used in a formal context.

'I love the girl, but <u>she's damaged</u> . Probably the most damaged person I've ever met, to be honest with you. That stuff about her parents she told you? <u>It's bullshit</u> . Excuse my language. Her mum abandoned her when she was seven years old and she doesn't talk to her dad any more. She hasn't seen her sister in over twenty years.'	«Io la adoro, ma <u>è lesa</u> . Probabilmente la persona più lesa che abbia mai incontrato, ad essere sincera. Quella roba che ti ha detto sui suoi genitori? <u>Stronzate</u> . Scusa il linguaggio. Sua madre l'ha abbandonata quando aveva sette anni e non parla più con suo padre. Non vede sua sorella da più di vent'anni.»
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Here, Jas states that Marisa is 'damaged'; in particular, it belongs to single words used as colloquialism, as outlined by Partridge (1990), and can be perceived as a quite offensive remark. I think the Italian counterpart for this insult is *lesa*: normally it is used in juridical or medical language, but recently it spread among young people to indicate that someone is not so smart or is perceived as having mental problems. It is therefore an informal word that is considered to be offensive.

As far as 'It's bullshit' is concerned, I tried to find an equivalent expression that possibly contained a swearword and I chose *stronzate*, since it is a vulgar synonym of *bugie* ('lies'). What is meant here in fact is that nothing of what Marisa told Kate on her family is true, and therefore this translation was the only one that seemed appropriate.

'It's not like I have the exact diagnosis. I mean, <u>Ris and I were cool and that, but we didn't pry too much into each other's business</u> . I think maybe she's a bit bipolar?'	«Non è che ho l'esatta diagnosi. Voglio dire, <u>io e Ris andavamo d'accordo e tutto, ma non ficcavamo mai troppo il naso negli affari dell'altra</u> . Penso che sia un po' bipolare, forse?»
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Here, ‘to be cool’ could be considered as a more informal synonym of ‘to get along’, hence the Italian equivalent is *andare d’accordo*.

On the other hand, ‘to pry into (something)’ is an idiom that indicates the act of inquiring impertinently into something, especially private or secret things. The Italian language offers an idiom with the same meaning, which is *ficcare il naso*.

<p>‘[...] She’d text them a lot and sometimes she’d follow them to work and that, and I always told her to <u>chill out</u>, but she never listened and the more I told her to chill out, the less she started telling me.’</p>	<p>«[...] Mandava loro un sacco di messaggi, a volte li seguiva al lavoro e così via, e io le dicevo sempre di <u>darsi una calmata</u>, ma lei non mi ascoltava mai e più glielo dicevo, meno cose mi raccontava.»</p>
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‘Chill out’ is a more informal way to express the exhortation to relax or calm down and is mainly used among young people. *Darsi una calmata* is probably not as informal as ‘chill out’, but conveys the same meaning.

Also Annabelle uses a few instances of informal language:

<p>‘Don’t you like the house then?’ Jake asked. ‘Oh no, no I didn’t say that. It’s lovely. And how you’ve done it up is very ... well, it’s very sweet. I just wondered if you ever felt like <u>you rattled around</u> a bit, that’s all.’</p>	<p>«Quindi la casa non ti piace?» chiese Jake. «Oh no, non ho detto questo. È adorabile. E il modo in cui l'avete arredata è molto... beh, è molto dolce. Mi chiedevo solo se non vi foste mai sentiti come <u>se fosse un po’ troppo grande per voi</u>, tutto qui.’</p>
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It was very difficult for me to translate this expression, mostly because I had never heard it or read it in all my years spent studying the English language. I eventually discovered that ‘to rattle around’ is a phrasal verb, meaning “to live in a place that is very big”. The only way to translate this expression into Italian was using a periphrasis, as the Italian language does not offer a single verb with an equivalent meaning. Therefore, I changed the whole sentence: I chose the house as the subject and translated

the rest as *se fosse un po' troppo grande per voi* (back translation: *I just wondered if you ever felt like the house was a little too big for you, that's all*).

<p>'It wasn't like that in my day. All you working women, with your full-time careers, <u>wanting to have it all ...</u>'</p>	<p>«Non era così ai miei tempi. Tutte voi donne in carriera, con i vostri lavori a tempo pieno, <u>volete avere la botte piena e la moglie ubriaca...</u>»</p>
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Finding an equivalent of 'wanting to have it all' was quite hard as well. At first, I thought this expression only meant 'wanting to have everything you can possibly desire', but I found that its meaning is different and possibly more subtle than I believed. The message it conveys in fact is 'to take two contradictory positions or actions simultaneously', so it indicates that something is unrealistic or impossible. This can be understood by the context in which this utterance is placed, that is Annabelle telling Kate that she hopes she will gradually stop working, because managing to do everything with a newborn would be impossible for her. In Italian the same message can be conveyed with an idiom which is *volere la botte piena e la moglie ubriaca* (similar to 'wanting to have your cake and eat it too'). Therefore, according to Taylor's (1998) suggested strategies, I decided to use this idiom for the translation and substitute it to the original because I think it represents the only way in which the same meaning can be recreated.

<p>'You can't be that dense, Kate. Come on. He's been down here most weeks and <u>the two of them have been getting on like a house on fire.</u>'</p>	<p>«Non puoi essere così ottusa, Kate. Suvvia. È stato qui quasi tutte le settimane e <u>loro due si intendevano alla grande.</u>»</p>
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As reported on the online version of the Cambridge Dictionary⁹, this informal expression means that two people like each other very much and become friends very quickly. The Italian expression *intendersi alla grande* has the same meaning and is as informal as the English counterpart.

⁹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/get-on-like-a-house-on-fire> (last visited 25.02.22)

Kate uses instances of colloquialisms too:

<p>‘Sorry, <u>I was miles away</u>. Just thinking about this thing at work that’s stressing me out – there’s a big PR push next week before the Toronto Film Festival.’</p>	<p>«Scusami, <u>avevo la testa da un’altra parte</u>. Stavo solo pensando a questa cosa di lavoro che mi sta stressando – ci sarà una grande campagna pubblicitaria la prossima settimana prima del Toronto Film Festival.»</p>
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The meaning of this expression does not refer to a physical distance, but to a mental one: it indicates someone who is lost in his/her own thoughts and is unaware of what is happening around him/her. The Italian expression *avere la testa da un’altra parte* has the same meaning.

<p>‘Are you all right?’ Jake asks. ‘Yes, fine,’ she lies. ‘Just going to the <u>loo</u>.’</p>	<p>«Va tutto bene?» chiede Jake. «Sì, tutto bene,» mente. «Sto solo andando al <u>bagno</u>.»</p>
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The word ‘loo’ is informal for ‘toilet’. However, in Italian an informal version of *bagno* is not present without being vulgar too. Therefore, I used *bagno* anyway, even if it is not as informal as the original.

Chris, Annabelle’s husband, has very few lines in the whole book, and this is one of them:

<p>‘<u>Now steady on, old chap</u>,’ Chris says, and his mildness is absurd.</p>	<p>«<u>Ora calmati, figliolo</u>,» dice Chris, e la sua mitezza è assurda.</p>
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‘Steady on’ has the same level of informality and meaning of ‘chill out’, therefore I translated it into *calmati*. ‘Old chap’ is a quite old expression used to address directly to a man of any age. In this case, I decided to substitute it with *figliolo* because he is addressing his son, Jake, and he is trying to calm him down and stop the fight with his mother.

4.5 Cultural references and how I dealt with them

Cultural references are everything that is connected to a culture, including brands or events, as is the case of *Magpie*. These references may cause a problem when they are distant from the target culture and can be barely understood by target readers (Mailhac 1996:133-134). In the text in fact, references to famous brands, journals, places, events or food can be found.

4.5.1 References to brands

As far as famous brands are concerned, they regard mainly beverages, perfumes and kitchen tools. In particular:

Beverages:	Peroni San Pellegrino
Perfumes:	Christian Dior
Kitchen tools:	Le Creuset Aga

Peroni and San Pellegrino are Italian brands of beverages, beer and soft drinks respectively. I left them unchanged, since these elements belong to the potential target readers' culture. Christian Dior is a worldwide renowned perfume brand and needs no further specifications, since it should be well known in the target culture too. As far as the kitchen tools brands are concerned, I discovered that Le Creuset is a French cookware manufacturer, well known for its colourful casseroles, while Aga is a Swedish oven and cooker. These brands are totally unknown in Italy, and therefore in the translation I took the unfamiliarity of the target culture into account. I had two possibilities: either keeping the references in the Italian translation too and explain what they refer to with a couple of footnotes, or deleting them. In this specific case, I decided to eliminate them because firstly, it is irrelevant for the reader to know the brand of the casserole and the cooker in order to understand the scene, and secondly, I believe it would have been impossible for an Italian reader to understand what these two brands could be referring to. In addition, a native British reader can appreciate the image of this

vibrant casserole leaning against an old fashioned cooker created by the author, while for an Italian reader it would be completely lost in all cases. For these reasons, I used one of the solutions proposed by Díaz Cintas and Ramael (2007), in particular I blended the strategies of elimination and substitution. I decided to eliminate the reference and to substitute the brands with the names of the tools themselves, that is *casseruola* (casserole) and *cucina economica* (stove). In this way, any reader could easily understand what the author means and will not wonder what the two brands might be referring to.

4.5.2 Social and intertextual references

The only newspaper mentioned is *The Economist*. It is an international weekly newspaper based in London that focuses on current affairs, international business, politics, technology, and culture. I decided to leave it unchanged in the translation because it is a well known newspaper in Italy too and even if some readers might not know it, one can easily understand by the context that it is a newspaper. In addition, it gives the reader further proof that they are reading a book set in a foreign country, precisely in the city of London. It would have made no sense to change it to something like *Il Sole 24 Ore* or *Italia Oggi*, as it would have been completely unrealistic, given the fact that the foreign setting of the book is made clear from the very beginning.

Regarding references to events, the Toronto Film Festival is mentioned here. It is one of the largest film festivals in the world, and it takes place in Toronto, in Canada. I chose to translate it into *festival del cinema di Toronto*, thus obtaining a calque, as it perfectly respects the aim of the event. In addition it will probably recall the Italian *festival del cinema di Venezia* in the minds of the readers, so it will be easier for them to realise that it is almost the same event only located in a different area.

4.5.3 Geographical references

<p>There was that time, a few weeks ago, that she found Marisa following her in the tube station at <u>Oxford Circus</u>.</p>	<p>C'era stata quella volta in cui, qualche settimana fa, aveva beccato Marisa a pedinarla nella stazione della metropolitana di <u>Oxford Circus</u>.</p>
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They arrange to meet in a café near <u>Finsbury Park</u> tube in two hours' time.	Decidono di incontrarsi due ore dopo, in un bar vicino alla metropolitana di <u>Finsbury Park</u> .
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The only references to a place in the excerpt I translated are Oxford Circus and Finsbury Park. As far as Oxford Circus is concerned, readers can easily understand from context that the author is referring to one of London's underground stations, while Finsbury Park is an area towards the northern edge of Inner London. It is centred on Finsbury Park Station, a major bus, rail and tube interchange situated near the public park of the same name. Both toponyms should be familiar to the target readers and they are not difficult to read or pronounce. Furthermore, according to the parameter of centrality of reference proposed by Pedersen (2005), Finsbury Park is an important reference in the text because the main protagonist Kate is going to meet Jas in a café of this area. In addition, the two women will eventually keep meeting in the same café to catch up, therefore it could be considered as quite central to the plot.

4.5.4 Food references

As Newmark (1988:97) writes, food is probably the most important expression of a culture, and the translation of food terms presents a variety of procedures. In the chapters I translated, the references to food were 'cheddar', meaning of course the famous English cheese, and 'seeded loaf'.

Cheddar is a hard, off-white, sometimes sharp-tasting cheese. In the context of the book, Jake is grating some cheddar cheese for Annabelle, who wants to sprinkle it on the soup. In Italy, there is no equivalent cheese type, and in addition, it would have been simplistic to translate it into *formaggio*, as a native Italian would probably think of parmigiano reggiano or grana padano, given the context in which it is placed. For these reasons I decided to keep 'cheddar' in the translation, also because it is a well known type of cheese in Italy too, to the point that it can be found in a few supermarkets.

As far as ‘seeded loaf’ is concerned, I translated it into *pagnotta ai semi*. It is a very common type of bread in Italy too, so it should not be difficult for the reader to understand what the author is referring to.

4.6 The translation of verbal humour

In the chapters I translated, I only had to deal with one instance of verbal humour located in a dialogue between Jake and Marisa. Everyone is at Annabelle’s, sitting at the table eating soup while talking about Marisa’s art, since she started painting again:

‘That’s wonderful,’ Kate says. ‘What kind of thing?’	«È meraviglioso,» dice Kate. «Cosa dipingi?»
‘Still lifes of flowers, mostly.’	«Natura morte di fiori, per lo più.»
‘Is it still lifes or still lives?’ Jake asks. ‘I’ve always wondered.’	«È natura morta o si può dire anche nature morte?» chiede Jake. «Me lo sono sempre chiesto.»

The original version presents a pun concerning the irregular plural form of the noun *life* which is *lives*. In the artistic field however, both forms can be found, that is *still lives* and *still lifes*, but *still lives* is considerably more frequent. In this case, we could consider Marisa’s *lives* as a mistake in the formation of the plural in her speech. For the Italian version, I decided to maintain the mistake in Marisa’s line, but I transformed it into a mistake on the concordance between a singular noun and a plural adjective. In this way, Jake’s line becomes a joke on the Italian language per se: he uses the right concordances (singular noun + singular adjective and plural noun + plural adjective) and asks whether one can only say *natura morta* or *nature morte* is also possible. In Italian in fact *nature morte* is an acceptable form, but it is hardly ever used; for someone who knows very little of the artistic field, this is a legitimate question that might elicit hilarity.

4.7 The creation of suspense in *Magpie* and its translation

Being a psychological thriller blended with a domestic noir, suspense is a key element in *Magpie*. However, suspense in this book is not only created through dialogues. The main feature that conveys it is in fact Day’s style: she uses some specific techniques, for

example she uses flashbacks or finishes a chapter with a cliffhanger, so that readers are compelled to turn the page to know what is going to happen next. In this case, the main protagonist, Kate, comes face-to-face with emotionally damaging and potentially life-threatening situations. In addition, she carefully describes what Kate feels or thinks in order to heighten tension: we could indeed state that anything that worries her, worries the reader too because her thoughts and emotions can create apprehension and set a mood of anticipation. She also gives the characters, especially Marisa, complicated life histories so that the reader continues to discover new details and builds the puzzle a little at a time.

What also helps in creating suspense is the punctuation she uses: punctuation in fact is not only grammatical, but also rhetorical, in the sense that it can be used to shape the reader's experience (Lingard and Watling 2021:134). Day relies on short sentences, with simple, but impact-filled words. I would say that suspense is silent and heavy, a moment frozen in anticipation. Through this method, she manages to convey moments of fear, paranoia and panic.

What Day also does majestically is isolating the protagonist, which is clearly visible in the last chapter I translated: she renders everyone apparently indisposed towards her, to the point that Kate always feels excluded when she is with Jake and his family and Marisa. Kate's loneliness creates a moment of growth and revelation that her real enemy is Annabelle, and she decides that she has to face her, preparing the reader for the climax.

The structure of the book itself is designed to create suspense. It is divided into two parts, and the reader witnesses the story from two different points of view: first Marisa's and then Kate's. Suspense is slowly built in the first part by placing Kate as new unwelcome lodger in Marisa and Jake's home, therefore the reader is led to think that what he is reading in the first part is the truth. At the beginning of the second part, the real initiating event takes place: the point of view changes, we see things the way Kate does, and we experience that Kate is being assaulted by Marisa. As a consequence, there is a huge plot twist in which the reader discovers that the opposite is true, creating also a

surprise effect: Jake and Kate have been a couple for six years and Marisa is their surrogate who moved in with them. In the second part of the book, suspense is maintained also thanks to the flashback structure which provides insights on the past story of the characters and allows the reader to better understand the situation. Thus, Elizabeth Day builds two parallel structures, the temporal frame called “Now” and the one called “Then” that complement each other and create the feeling of suspense that makes the reader crave for answers.

What is interesting to notice is that repetition, which, as suggested by Johnstone (1996), is one of the techniques adopted to create suspense in dialogues, also corresponds to one of schizophrenia’s language abnormalities. Day uses this technique to create suspense in the assault scene, in particular there are three sentences that Marisa repeats several times (even if they are placed in two different chapters, and maybe this can be considered another on-point strategy to create suspense): ‘I feel like I’m going mad’, ‘I just want to talk’ and ‘How long have you and Jake been sleeping together?’. I translated these sentences into *Mi sembra di impazzire*, *Voglio solo parlare* and *Da quanto tu e Jake andate a letto insieme?* and the translation is always the same in order to recreate the sense of anxiety as the original. Another technique that is frequently used to create suspense is the use of obscene expressions. In the case of *Magpie*, obscene expressions are not used, but what the reader can find is an extremely offensive language used by Annabelle, which is a language deviation proper of the narcissistic personality disorder. Even though obscene expressions and derogatory language are not the same thing, suspense is still obtained because the reader keeps wondering what is going to happen to Kate in those moments, especially whether Annabelle is going to hurt her or not.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I tried to describe how the translation process developed for me and the techniques I used the most in the actual making of the translation. Precisely, my main focus were dialogues. After discussing how a person’s mental state can influence speech, I analysed the issues that I found more present in the dialogues of this book, that is colloquial language, cultural references, verbal humour and suspense. As one can see, the book presented a high number of the aforementioned issues and it was not always

easy to find a corresponding expression in Italian. I tried to remain as faithful to the source text as possible because, as Paruolo (2010) states, “there is no point in translating a book if it loses all trace of the country where it comes from”. Therefore, I tried to limit adaptation to the cases in which it was extremely necessary to help the reader understanding better and possibly arouse the same effect of the source readers in the target audience. To conclude, it was challenging, but also extremely interesting to deal with all the problems this translation put me through and managing to convey the same meaning in Italian filled me with satisfaction.

Conclusion

A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies.

The man who never reads lives only one.

Jojen in *A Dance with Dragons* by George R. R. Martin

I strongly believe that many people do not really recognise the power that lies in books. More specifically, I think they cannot see that they are portals to other worlds and sometimes they allow you to live the life of other (real or imaginary) people. When you start reading, you see the world through the eyes of the author who pushes you into that world. Sometimes it is a roller-coaster ride, sometimes a simple stroll through the fields. Sometimes you realise what is written on those pages is making you reflect on life, sometimes you just get completely lost in a character, and you see the world through this character, to the point that his/her thoughts become your own.

Now that you are reading the final pages of this work, you may wonder why I chose to work on this specific book. When I first started think about the topic of my final dissertation, I had many ideas, but I absolutely wanted to combine two of my passions, that is translation and psychological thrillers. I have always been an avid reader and the thriller genre has always been my favourite, probably because I enjoyed the sensation of experiencing the adrenaline created by extraordinary situations in my extra-ordinary life. A book could take me on a perilous journey and expose me to any danger without risk of harm. As I grew older, I became fond of the human mind, and trying to understand what happens in the minds of criminals or people with mental disturbs and alike started fascinating me.

In particular, I chose *Magpie* because it deals with something I feel very close to me, that is mental health issues and especially schizophrenia. I would say that the fact that I experienced what it means to live with someone who had this type of psychotic illness deeply influenced my choice and I decided to investigate more about it. While reading the whole book I saw it was told by the perspective of a woman, and I found the story extremely engaging. I could not stop turning the page, I just kept reading, constantly wondering what was going to happen next. For some months I experienced the world

through Kate's eyes, imagining how things that I have never experienced firsthand, like infertility, could be like. A world of sorrow opened up in front of my eyes and in my mind, a world that luckily turned out to be one of exceptional female solidarity.

The aim of this dissertation was not only to analyse the difficulties a translator has to face while dealing with dialogues in suspense novels, but also to analyse the major themes of infertility and mental health issues, and how these influence the language used.

The translating process lies at the core of the present work. The structure and order of the chapters mirror the path I followed first as a reader and then as a translator, who needed to focus on the most challenging aspects of a text. *Magpie's* themes are actually extremely relevant for today's society and I retraced all the translating strategies I adopted while working on the Italian target text. I started from the theoretical background, presented in the first chapter: thanks to theory, I managed to find interesting issues to focus on, and to analyse and research some features in greater detail. It was challenging, mainly because despite the high volume of translation in thriller and crime fiction, research has focused almost exclusively on canonical literature. As Saego (2014) reports, until recently, there has been very little research on crime fiction translation and existing studies have used a corpus of crime texts to analyse translation issues which are not specific to the genre as such. In fact, I only found a collection of essays on the translation of thrillers, and very few articles on the translation of dialogues in thrillers. However, I was not surprised when I found a good deal of elements to underline, from suspense to humour.

The second chapter represents what I needed to do in order to fully understand the text I was dealing with. I got into the text through an analysis of its thematic and stylistic features. This helped me being emotionally involved in the project and make more sense of each choice I was making in my translation, so that I could produce a target text that could be enjoyable for readers.

The last chapter reports a summary of how the translation process developed for me, as well as the analysis of the translation strategies I adopted. It was not always easy to

produce an equivalent translation into Italian, but however I tried to remain faithful to the original and foreignized my translation, so that the fact that the book was a foreign production would be clearly visible. In some cases, I had to adapt the text to the target culture to help the reader make more sense of the text and possibly arise the same feelings a source reader would experience.

To conclude, what this project really helped me doing is becoming more aware of what being a translator means, in particular I faced the complexities of this profession and experienced the deep knowledge of language and creativity it requires. Through the analysis of the inedited translation of some dialogue excerpts from this book, I showed how the theory of translation could be applied to the translation of dialogues, and how an effective translation is relevant in order to maintain the narrative device of suspense in a novel of this genre.

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Italian Summary

Lo scopo della presente tesi è dimostrare come sono state trattate le difficoltà traduttive che si possono riscontrare nei romanzi di suspense, in particolare nei thriller. Nello specifico ciò che offro è una traduzione personale del libro *Magpie* della giornalista e scrittrice inglese Elizabeth Day e la conseguente analisi linguistica che ne è derivata, con focus particolare sui dialoghi. La struttura della tesi tenta di ricreare i vari stadi che si sono succeduti nel mio avvicinarmi al processo traduttivo, dalla fase teorica iniziale, fondamentale per lineare un quadro di riferimento generale, a quella più pratica in cui applico e dimostro le scelte traduttive compiute. Nel primo capitolo viene presentato l'inquadramento teorico, quindi la traduzione letteraria come campo talvolta problematico, i dialoghi come elemento fondamentale del testo narrativo uniti alla suspense, elemento centrale del genere thriller, e infine le varie sfide che questi presentano, come la traduzione del linguaggio colloquiale informale, dei riferimenti culturali, dell'umorismo e infine della suspense. Il secondo capitolo presenta un'analisi del libro oggetto della traduzione, contestualizzandone il genere e investigando le tematiche principali che esso affronta, che a mio avviso si rivelano essere molto attuali, cioè l'infertilità e le malattie mentali. Per sviluppare quest'ultimo punto viene presentata un'analisi delle tre donne presenti nel romanzo: Kate, Marisa e Annabelle. Il terzo capitolo presenta la traduzione dell'opera, mentre il quarto e ultimo capitolo si concentra sull'analisi delle strategie traduttive che sono state impiegate per far fronte al processo di traduzione, con attenzione particolare alle questioni precedentemente menzionate.

Gli scopi principali dei testi letterari sono intrattenere, suscitare emozioni, trasmettere messaggi o esperienze, e il loro significato è diversamente interpretabile. Solitamente sono testi di finzione, ma possono essere basati anche su fatti realmente accaduti. L'obiettivo del traduttore è rendere il testo originale accessibile ai lettori per cui stanno traducendo e mediare tra il testo stesso e i lettori. Nel campo della teoria della traduzione c'è ancora molto su cui dibattere per quanto riguarda questo tipo di testi. Solitamente la traduzione è definita come un processo attraverso il quale la catena di significanti che costituisce il testo di partenza viene sostituita da una catena di

significanti nella lingua di arrivo, che il traduttore fornisce sulla base di un'interpretazione. Tuttavia, tradurre non significa solo tradurre letteralmente da una lingua all'altra: è una materia molto più complessa, specialmente quando si va a trattare il concetto di equivalenza. Nonostante questa nozione stia alla base del concetto stesso di traduzione, ci sono molte controversie sulla sua natura, al punto che alcuni studiosi ne contestano l'utilità, in quanto una perfetta equivalenza di significato sembrerebbe non essere possibile. La traduzione può quindi essere ulteriormente definita come un atto comunicativo che coinvolge vari partecipanti, cioè il mittente, il traduttore e i lettori. La traduzione diventa perciò una pratica globale per cui un'intera cultura dovrebbe essere trasmessa attraverso la parola scritta. Il traduttore dovrebbe quindi interpretare ciò che l'autore ha scritto nella propria lingua, riportarlo nella sua lingua il più fedelmente possibile e cercare di camuffare il più possibile la diversità linguistica, in modo che il suo operato diventi invisibile. Nonostante anche il concetto di invisibilità del traduttore possa sembrare fondamentale, è stato criticato duramente poichè descrive la situazione di traduttori inglesi e americani nella società contemporanea. L'invisibilità è legata in questo senso alla fluidità, cioè al fatto che un testo è giudicato accettabile dagli editori quando si legge in modo scorrevole, dando l'impressione di riflettere la personalità e l'intenzione dello scrittore straniero o il significato del testo di partenza, dando quindi l'impressione che la traduzione non sia, in realtà, una traduzione, ma il testo originale. Il processo di traduzione vero e proprio si articola solitamente in tre fasi: orientamento, stesura e revisione. Il traduttore utilizza varie tecniche e strategie, quali sostituzione, divergenza e convergenza, amplificazione, diffusione e condensazione e riordinamento. La parte più controversa del processo traduttivo riguarda forse due approcci a esso, cioè l'addomesticamento e lo straniamento. Il primo consiste in un adattamento del testo originale alla lingua di arrivo, mentre il secondo sottolinea che l'originale è in realtà una produzione straniera. L'invisibilità è spesso associata all'addomesticamento, in quanto tenta di nascondere il lavoro del traduttore e di conseguenza anche il fatto che l'originale sia in lingua straniera.

Quando si parla di testo narrativo, i dialoghi sono sicuramente strumenti importanti nelle mani dell'autore, in quanto cercano di riprodurre l'oralità nella scrittura. Riportano infatti conversazioni fra due o più personaggi, ma offrono anche ai lettori accesso

diretto a ciò che questi pensano e alle loro emozioni. I dialoghi si distinguono facilmente dal resto della narrazione, in quanto sono marcati da segni di punteggiatura ben precisi. Nonostante il processo interpretativo messo in atto da parte del lettore sia simile a quello usato in una conversazione reale, i dialoghi nella finzione sono estremamente diversi dalla conversazione naturale. Mancano infatti di ciò che rende una conversazione tale, come ad esempio esitazioni, ripensamenti o conversazioni che si sovrappongono. In merito alla suspense, i dialoghi sono uno degli strumenti narrativi attraverso cui viene trasmessa. Questa sensazione di ansia data dall'anticipazione di ciò che sta per succedere è creata attraverso tecniche ben precise, tra cui l'uso di ripetizioni, di un linguaggio osceno o tramite la creazione di un forte contrasto tra il carattere di un personaggio e ciò che dice in un dato momento. Un esempio di questo potrebbe essere Jules Winnfield in *Pulp Fiction* o Alexander DeLarge in *Arancia meccanica*.

Tra le difficoltà che si possono ritrovare nella traduzione dei dialoghi spiccano il linguaggio informale, i riferimenti culturali, lo humour e la suspense stessa.

Il linguaggio informale ha a che vedere con il registro, cioè con il tipo di linguaggio che un parlante ritiene appropriato usare a seconda della situazione in cui si trova, che dipende principalmente da tre variabili: l'argomento del discorso, la relazione tra il parlante e l'ascoltatore, e la modalità in cui il testo è costruito, cioè se è scritto o orale. Il linguaggio però può variare anche a seconda di variabili sociali, quali l'età, il genere, la classe sociale, l'occupazione, l'istruzione ricevuta o il luogo in cui si vive. Il traduttore in questo caso dovrà attenersi al registro utilizzato nel testo di partenza e compiere le sue scelte in quel determinato ambito.

I riferimenti culturali sono tutti quei riferimenti a luoghi, usanze, festività o cibi tipici di una cultura che si possono ritrovare in un testo letterario e che possono risultare di difficile comprensione per il lettore. Questi riferimenti rappresentano quindi un problema perché la loro interpretazione è soggettiva e non ci sono strategie univoche per la loro traduzione. Inoltre quest'ultima può essere problematica perché alcuni particolari elementi potrebbero non essere presenti nella cultura d'arrivo.

Per quanto riguarda lo humour, è risaputo che la sua resa sia un annoso problema, in quanto il traduttore incontra due barriere: lingue diverse e culture diverse. Oltre a questo, lo humour va a toccare due delle questioni più scottanti nella teoria della

traduzione, cioè l'equivalenza e la traducibilità. In molti casi, soprattutto con i giochi di parole che sono notoriamente intraducibili, il traduttore deve trovare un compromesso e far sì che anche nel testo d'arrivo venga mantenuta la funzione del testo di partenza, cioè suscitare ilarità. Ovviamente anche in questo caso il traduttore può adottare varie strategie, come ad esempio sostituire la battuta umoristica con un'altra nella lingua di arrivo o ignorarla del tutto.

La suspense invece è uno strumento narrativo che nel caso dei thriller deve assolutamente essere mantenuto anche nel testo d'arrivo. In questo caso la strategia migliore sembra essere quella di lasciare il testo il più possibile invariato, in modo da rispettare le tecniche usate per crearla nell'originale.

Il romanzo in questione è un thriller psicologico, cioè un thriller i cui personaggi sono spesso psicopatici o individui affetti da disturbi mentali specifici. Questi disturbi possono causare seri problemi relazionali che spesso si riversano su altri personaggi. Questo genere rispetta delle caratteristiche ben precise, come la presenza di killer, bambini in pericolo di vita, narratori non attendibili affetti da psicosi, persone presumibilmente innocenti che si scoprono essere psicotiche o ancora un personaggio principale con malattia mentale grave. Le opere letterarie passate che prefigurano il thriller psicologico sono principalmente i romanzi gotici e gialli. In particolare ricorda molto la soggettività esplorata nel romanzo gotico. È un genere che cerca quindi di combinare sensazioni forti con l'investigazione della mente umana. Un altro aspetto del genere che si riconduce al romanzo gotico è la scoperta della potenziale pericolosità dell'ambiente domestico: spesso infatti le cose più terribili accadono in ambienti familiari. Il thriller psicologico si avvale inoltre di tecniche narrative specifiche quali colpi di scena, la presenza di narratori non attendibili o di altre storie riguardanti altri personaggi, le quali approfondiscono l'aspetto psicologico della storia. Un aspetto che si nota recentemente nei romanzi appartenenti a questo genere è la figura principale spesso rappresentata da una donna caratterizzata in modo complesso. Anche questo può essere ricondotto al romanzo gotico, che spesso ha creato donne forti e non convenzionali, ma sempre più spesso le vicende sono narrate dal punto di vista femminile.

Il domestic noir è un genere letterario disturbante pressoché contemporaneo che si intreccia con il thriller psicologico. Infatti libri come *La ragazza del treno* (2015) di Paula Hawkins o *L'amore bugiardo* (2012) di Gillian Flynn hanno dato inizio a una tendenza ben precisa, cioè quella del thriller psicologico con protagoniste femminili. Il domestic noir è quindi un sottogenere ibrido, che unisce la violenza e i misteri dei thriller con gli indizi da ricostruire dei gialli. L'autrice Julia Crouch ritiene di aver identificato il genere per prima, nel 2013. Romanzi di questo genere sono ambientati a casa o sul posto di lavoro, si concentrano in gran parte sull'esperienza femminile, e l'ambiente domestico è rappresentato come pericoloso e pieno di sfide. In particolare, la novità di questo genere è l'aperta sfiducia che esprime verso l'uomo contemporaneo. Le storie sono prevalentemente incentrate su relazioni di potere, in cui l'uomo abusa fisicamente e psicologicamente di una donna, spesso isolata e a cui nessuno crede. Queste storie presentano un crimine ben preciso, cioè il controllo coercitivo ai danni della donna, prima ancora che questo fosse considerato un reato.

Magpie racconta la storia di una coppia londinese, Jake e Kate, che cercano disperatamente di diventare genitori. Kate non riesce a concepire in modo naturale, quindi decide di intraprendere un percorso di fecondazione in vitro con il compagno. Tutti i cicli fatti però risultano essere inutili, e decidono quindi di considerare la maternità surrogata. Grazie ad un'organizzazione trovano Marisa, che sembra essere la ragazza perfetta per loro. Appena Marisa rimane incinta tramite inseminazione artificiale, Kate le propone di andare a vivere con loro, così da riuscire a prendersi cura di lei in modo adeguato. Dopo poco tempo l'instabilità mentale di Marisa diventa evidente, in particolare, dopo l'aggressione nei confronti di Kate, scoprono che soffre di schizofrenia. Marisa però non è l'unico ostacolo che Kate dovrà affrontare: dovrà vedersela con Annabelle, la madre di Jake, che soffre del disturbo narcisistico di personalità.

I temi principali del libro, cioè l'infertilità e la salute mentale, sono stati trattati attraverso l'analisi delle tre protagoniste principali, cioè Kate, Marisa e Annabelle. L'infertilità è definita dall'Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità come una malattia del sistema riproduttivo, che si stabilisce dopo 12 mesi o più di rapporti sessuali non protetti

che non portano ad alcuna gravidanza. Un'esperienza di questo tipo è destabilizzante, di conseguenza molte donne provano dolore, rabbia, ansia, fino ad arrivare ad incolparsi perché il loro corpo non funziona come dovrebbe, come se avessero potuto evitare questa condizione del tutto involontaria e non prevedibile. Oltre a un potenziale stato depressivo, altri sentimenti comunemente provati dalle donne affette da questa condizione sono gelosia ed ingiustizia, perché ai loro occhi tutte riescono a raggiungere facilmente l'obiettivo della gravidanza tranne loro. Di conseguenza si sentono isolate, tanto da mettere in atto comportamenti specifici per evitare determinate situazioni (es. attraversare improvvisamente la strada per evitare di ritrovarsi a camminare con dei bambini). Tra i metodi alternativi di concepimento vi sono la fecondazione in vitro e la maternità surrogata. La fecondazione in vitro, nonostante sia considerato il metodo più efficace, sembra essere anche il più stressante, stando a quanto dicono le donne che lo hanno provato. Basti pensare che ogni volta che un ciclo fallisce per la donna è come perdere il bambino. Affrontare il tutto è difficile, quindi col tempo si sono creati dei blog, delle vere e proprie comunità online in cui le donne possono condividere le loro esperienze e sentirsi meno sole. Nei blog possono trovare il conforto che raramente ricevono e diventano così un modo per sfuggire lo stigma sociale. La maternità surrogata invece è vista come l'ultima spiaggia fra i percorsi alternativi per diventare genitori perché problematica dal punto di vista legale, ma non solo. Spesso infatti ci sono difficoltà nello stabilire quali dovrebbero essere i rapporti tra i futuri genitori del bambino e la madre surrogata. Oltre a questo, altri aspetti potrebbero essere discussi, come ad esempio: cosa succederebbe se la madre surrogata volesse tenere il bambino o abortire? O se i genitori rifiutassero il bambino? La situazione diventa ancora più ostica se la madre surrogata è anche mentalmente instabile, come nel caso presentato dal libro.

La schizofrenia è una malattia psicotica grave; il paziente che ne è affetto perde il contatto con la realtà e vive in un mondo di illusioni (crede in cose che non sono vere) e allucinazioni (vede cose che non esistono). Inoltre i pazienti vanno incontro a un deterioramento delle funzioni intellettuali e sociali, nel senso che diventano incapaci di lavorare o prendersi cura di sé stessi. È difficile per i familiari rendersi conto della malattia inizialmente, in quanto l'unica cosa che solitamente si nota è un comportamento strano, come se il soggetto fosse cambiato profondamente in modo

repentino. A oggi è considerata una malattia misteriosa che può insorgere in chiunque, quindi è complicato anche risalire alla sua origine o alle cause in un paziente. Ciò che è certo è che ci sono fattori biologici e ambientali che possono influenzare profondamente la vita di una persona. Marisa in questo caso aveva vissuto due eventi traumatici: prima l'abbandono della madre quando era ancora una bambina, e poi una violenza sessuale a 17 anni, subita in un giorno in cui non era andata a scuola proprio per cercare la madre.

Il disturbo narcisistico di personalità invece è una condizione in cui il paziente ha un elevato senso del proprio ego, un bisogno costante di attenzioni e ammirazione, e una generale mancanza di empatia verso il prossimo che porta ad avere relazioni complicate. Chi soffre di questa condizione arriva a essere infelice e deluso quando non ottiene l'ammirazione che crede di meritare. L'aspetto più rilevante è che sfruttano gli altri per raggiungere i propri scopi. Nel libro, Annabelle chiaramente non prova felicità per la vita che si stanno costruendo Kate e Jake e non mostra empatia per le difficoltà che Kate sta riscontrando nell'aver un bambino. I narcisisti spesso usano la tecnica del gaslighting, che consiste nel manipolare la vittima destabilizzandola, in particolare negando di aver detto o fatto qualcosa di cui la vittima è consapevole. In questo gioco di potere il narcisista alterna momenti in cui lusinga l'altro a momenti in cui lo aggredisce, in modo che la vittima non si renda conto di essere manipolata.

Nel mio approccio alla traduzione ho cercato di produrre un testo comprensibile, che potesse essere compreso facilmente da ogni tipo di lettore potenzialmente interessato a questo libro. Da un punto di vista più generico, ho cercato di adattare il testo di partenza ai lettori italiani in modo da ottenere una traduzione fluente, cercando però di perdere meno elementi originali possibile. In particolare ho adattato alcuni elementi della sintassi, avvicinandomi così al sistema linguistico italiano. Una delle strategie che ho usato di più fra quelle proposte da Taylor (1998) è il riordinamento, in cui si spostano alcuni elementi della frase per avvicinarla alla sintassi della lingua di arrivo. In alcuni casi ho dovuto amplificare, come ad esempio per *tummy flip*, che ho specificato con "quella sensazione di vuoto allo stomaco", in modo da non perdere il riferimento a quell'effetto che tutti conosciamo, ma che in italiano non ha una parola precisa per essere definito. Dal punto di vista stilistico, *Magpie* ha presentato varie sfide, come ad

esempio espressioni informali, che rendono più verosimili le esperienze vissute dai vari personaggi. Anche qui ho scelto di perdere meno riferimenti possibili o di compensarli in qualche modo, o di sostituire alcune espressioni con altre usate frequentemente in Italia, badando quindi al contesto e al contenuto. Ad esempio, quando Jas parlando della condizione di Marisa si riferisce a lei con “She’s damaged” l’ho sostituito con “È lesa”: in questo modo non ho perso il riferimento a un qualcosa di difettoso, ma ho sostituito l’espressione con una molto sfruttata in italiano. Oltre a questo la ricchezza stilistica del libro è visibile anche nei riferimenti culturali, che ho cercato di mantenere il più possibile ed eliminare solo se strettamente necessario, in particolare nel caso in cui ostacolasse la comprensione del testo stesso, e nella presenza, seppur ridotta, dello humour. Per quanto riguarda l’aspetto della suspense, questa è realizzata nel testo di partenza non solo attraverso un certo tipo di dialoghi, ma anche con l’uso di tecniche ben precise da parte dell’autrice, come la presenza di flashback e cliffhanger. Anche la sintassi è sfruttata a questo scopo, con frasi brevi e dalle parole semplici ma impattanti.

Approfondire l’aspetto delle malattie mentali mi ha dato anche la possibilità di capire come queste possano influenzare l’uso del linguaggio. In particolare è stato per me interessante osservare come una delle tecniche usate per creare la suspense nei dialoghi sia anche una delle anomalie riscontrate nel linguaggio della schizofrenia, cioè la ripetizione. I pazienti affetti da questa condizione infatti fanno discorsi inconsistenti, anche se sembrano perfetti dal punto di vista grammaticale, dando ad esempio risposte ripetitive e non coerenti con le domande poste. Il linguaggio offensivo e aggressivo, talvolta osceno, altra caratteristica della suspense, è invece usato da Annabelle: le persone affette da disturbo narcisistico della personalità infatti si comportano in modo aggressivo verso gli altri, usando un linguaggio offensivo perché non lo percepiscono come tale. Mancando di empatia, sono insensibili alle reazioni che potrebbe avere il ricevente di tali offese, in modo da facilitare la loro disperata ricerca di ammirazione.

In conclusione, la realizzazione di questo progetto mi ha aiutata a sperimentare le complessità della professione del traduttore, in particolare la profonda conoscenza della lingua e la creatività che richiede. Attraverso l’analisi dei dialoghi di questa traduzione originale, è stato dimostrato come la teoria più basilare della traduzione potesse essere

applicata alla traduzione dei dialoghi, e come una traduzione efficace sia importante anche per mantenere intatta la suspense nei romanzi appartenenti a questo genere.