

PACHO

Written by

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Gorizia, 2024. The story is set in a *casa di ringhiera* building in the historical city center. All the apartments are connected through shared balconies that run on each floor.

1 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CAT'S POV: On a small cabinet we stretch ourselves on the brochure of the nursing home called Heaven's Door.

From the kitchen, laughter and fragments of what may be a family conversation emerge amidst the clinking of cutlery and chewing mouths.

MADDALENA (O.S.)
(animated)
That's it! And then the doctor
said, "Don't worry, ma'am, when he
starts talking, you'll be back
asking me to shut him up!"

ANNA (O.S.)
(laughing)
He had to live up to his name!

Everybody laughs while we scratch ourselves against the corner of a family photo depicting an old good-looking lady and a black cat-- MADDALENA (78) and PACHO (17).

MADDALENA (O.S.)
I still can't believe Macelleria
Parolini closed down...

SABRINA (O.S.)
Which one was it?

We sniff a block paper calendar: "July 15th LOVE BEGINS AT HOME."

GIULIO (O.S.)
(with his mouth full)
Where the vegan co-working-bicycle-
shop-open-space is now.

We jump down onto the floor and softly pad our way to the kitchen.

GIULIO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(with his mouth full)
Maddalena, this quiche... God, it's
good, this quiche.

MADDALENA (O.S.)
 You know, Giulio, that saltshaker
 was your dad's gift. From Austria.

GIULIO (O.S.)
 What kind of cheese did you put in?

MADDALENA (O.S.)
 Gruyère, darling.

We rub against the legs of people seated around a table.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)
 (dreamy)
 There's so much history in this
 house...

Until we arrive at the legs of an old lady.

MADDALENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Here's the birthday boy!

MADDALENA narrows her eyes at us in greeting, and picks us up
 and places us on her lap. She is the nice old lady from the
 picture.

She is sitting at the center of the table like a matriarch.
 Her white hair is tied up in an elegant bun, and she wears
 earrings and a joyful dress.

END OF CAT'S POV.

Beside Maddalena is ANNA (75) with a more understated style.
 SABRINA (33) has a radical chic look, and her baby bump
 suggests she's four months along. GIULIO (33) with a thick
 frame of glasses and messy hair. They all turn toward Pacho.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)
 Anna, could you please get the
 cake?

Anna stands up and goes to the fridge to get the cake. She
 moves around the house as if she lived there herself-- after
 Pacho, Anna is Maddalena's best friend.

ANNA
 I see you're reading a Heaven's
 Door brochure.

MADDALENA
 I keep getting those. I didn't read
 it, that place is a shi--

Maddalena covers Pacho's hears.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

(whispering)

A shithole for old people waiting
to die.

ANNA

It's not a shithole! Fabio says
it's like a holiday resort.

Anna brings the cake to the table. It's a birthday cake with
Pacho's picture and "HAPPY BIRTHDAY PACHO" printed on it.

MADDALENA

Well, of course your son says
that... He's looking forward to
sending you there.

Pointedly ignoring that comment, Anna puts aggressively a 17
shaped birthday candle in the middle of the cake, smudging
Pacho's picture slightly.

SABRINA

I heard it has a 7000 square meter
garden. Can you imagine how much
you could do with that, Maddalena?

MADDALENA

I can do all the gardening I want
on the balcony I've spent decades
building HERE.

From Maddalena's lap, Pacho reaches the saltshaker with his
paws and start pushing it in that annoying cat manner.

ANNA

Sabrina, darling, remind me. When
are you due?

SABRINA

October.

MADDALENA

(to Anna)

What? What does that have to
do with anything?

Pacho keeps pushing the salt shaker closer to the edge of the
table. No one notices, everyone is too focused on the
conversation.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

(to Anna)

But they have a house! Next door!
This is about easy money.

(to Giulio and Sabrina)

Don't you kids have jobs?

SABRINA
Of course we do. It's just...
Well, it's not that easy to--

GIULIO
You don't understand today's
economy, Maddalena. Renting
out this place today would
give us four times the price
you're currently paying us.

Pacho is pushing the salt shaker dangerously close to the
verge of the table.

MADDALENA
So I'm just a dollar sign to you?
(irritated)
... I invite you into my home, and
that's what--

ANNA
(calmly)
-- Maddalena, this is their house.

MADDALENA
And this is none of your business,
Anna! I have a contract. This home
is mine until I die--

GIULIO
(to himself)
A contract made in the 70s...

MADDALENA
-- Well guess what, you
little hippy: I'm still
alive. Sorry if that's an
inconvenience to you.

SABRINA
We don't mean it like that!

MADDALENA (CONT'D)
I am not leaving! WE are not
leaving!

As the salt shaker breaks on the floor, silence falls over
the room.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)
(in a mock reproachful
tone)
Oh Pacho! What a trouble
maker you are.

Anna rushes to pick up the shards.

GIULIO
So much history...

Giulio and Sabrina look at Pacho, then exchange an eerie glance. It's clear that Maddalena only cares about her cat.

Anna having cleaned up the mess:

ANNA
Let's light up the candle, shall
we?

Anna with a box of matches in her hands gives an awkward conciliatory smile to the whole room.

2 - EXT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - BALCONY - DAY

Early morning, the next day.

Maddalena's balcony is decorated and used as a garden: gardening tools, a few vegetables plants, some flowers.

Bathed in the morning sun, Pacho dozes on a folding chair.

After a brief moment, something starts to feel off-- Pacho is being watched from the other side of the house.

3 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The block paper calendar shows it's the 16th July, "EVERY DAY IS A GOOD DAY TO SMILE".

4 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

On one side of the table sits Maddalena with a cup of steaming hot coffee in her hands. She doesn't move, trying to contain the laughter that is about to erupt she stares at Pacho.

On the other end of the table, Pacho is at his own place setting, with his bowl of kibbles and a napkin around his neck. He's staring back at her.

The two of them are gazing at each other: it's a competition.

The doorbell rings.

Maddalena jerks at the sound and distracts her gaze from Pacho for a moment.

MADDALENA
(disappointed)
Damn, now I've lost again!

5 - INT./EXT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE - DAY

The door opens to Sabrina, smiling nervously, her gaze down, with big cardboard boxes folded under her arm.

SABRINA
For your gardening stuff...

Maddalena looks at the cardboard boxes.

SABRINA (CONT'D)
Giulio will need the balcony free
for the renovation.

Maddalena takes them without a word and closes the door.

She throws the folded boxes in a corner and bends to give a cuddle to Pacho, who's stroking her legs. She glances at the door feeling hurt, then stands to shake it off.

MADDALENA
Come on, let's finish breakfast.

6 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Later that day.

Loud music echoes in the building from the next door apartment: Giulio and Sabrina's apartment.

Maddalena wearing a gardening hat is crouched down. She's putting liquid with a dropper on the geranium leaves, with the concentration of a surgeon she tries to count the number of drops but is visibly disturbed by the music.

Pacho is still, looking at Maddalena. He knows the plants require perfect stillness and silence.

POP! A confetti popper makes Pacho's ears perk up.

Maddalena flinches and loses count of the drops. Infuriated she looks over next door.

She stands up and walks toward Giulio and Sabrina's apartment. Pacho follows, flanking her for battle.

7 - EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - SABRINA AND GIULIO'S DOOR - DAY

Few seconds later.

Maddalena pounds on the door.

Giulio opens the door, covered in blue confetti. He throws his arms around Maddalena--

GIULIO

It's a boy!

Tension drops from Maddalena, and she hugs him back.

MADDALENA

Congratulations!

Sabrina walks over to her, and they hug.

SABRINA

I hope we weren't disturbing you.

Maddalena peeps in and notices PEOPLE sitting around the house, drinking and laughing. The whole building is gathered, even Anna. She comes toward the door to greet her.

ANNA

Hello my friend!

MADDALENA

I didn't realise you were having a party.

SABRINA

It was last-minute. Nothing special.

She closes the door slightly, trying to block the view inside the apartment. But not before Maddalena sees the whole apartment is decorated with blue and pink ribbons, bottles of wine, cake-- not very last minute.

MADDALENA

(irritated)

Well, tone it down a notch, will you? You're disturbing the animals in the building.

Anna looks down at Pacho, who sits patiently at Maddalena's feet, licking himself.

ANNA

He seems fine...

(to Pacho)

Aren't you?

She reaches down to pet him, but he pulls away.

MADDALENA

No, dear, he's not FINE. Just lower the music, okay?

GIULIO

(condescending)

Of course, Maddalena, of course. Thanks for stopping by.

He shuts the door in her face.

Maddalena and Pacho look at each other.

MADDALENA

They didn't even invite us...

8 - EXT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - BALCONY - DAY

Two days after.

Pacho rests on a the doormat, laying on the growing pile of Heaven's Door brochures.

Again, Pacho reacts like he is being watched through the bars of the balcony's fence, as if any moment something is going to happen.

9 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The calendar informs us that is July 19th "TO LOVE IS TO COMPROMISE".

10 - EXT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - STAIRS - DAY

Few hours later.

The loud clamor of construction work fills the air-- machines buzzing, hammers pounding. Maddalena and Anna climb the last few steps to Maddalena's floor, grocery bags weighing heavily in their hands. Maddalena is visibly tired, beads of sweat on her brow, while Anna is cheerful, catching her breath easily.

ANNA

I'm just saying, at Heaven's Door they have elevators...

MADDALENA

(short of breath)

Darling, I love you, but could you pleas--

She stops mid-sentence as Pacho appears at the top of the stairs, meowing loudly and pacing to make them follow him.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

(to Pacho)

Lovely, what is upsetting you?

ANNA

(looking at the balcony)

Oh, finally we change those rusty things!

Anna's voice fades, as Maddalena glances up at her balcony. Her face falls in horror: soil, shards of ceramic, and toppled plants are strewn everywhere. Construction tools, buckets of cement, and scaffolding clutter the area. Giulio is drilling a screw in the balcony's structure around her ruined garden.

11 - EXT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - BALCONY - DAY

Maddalena hurries to the mess. She crouches, carefully picking up broken pieces of a treasured vase.

The door is opened and Anna takes the groceries inside, as Maddalena collects the pieces, though the damage is all around her. A construction worker approaches, wiping his hands on his pants.

GIULIO

Oh that... I'm so sorry Maddalena.
We DID tell you to move your stuff.
Paolo could come to help only tod-

Anna rejoins, and Maddalena resigns with a sigh.

MADDALENA

(shouting)

How many times do I have to tell
you that his balcony doesn't need
any renovation? This structure was
designed by the famous Gorizian
arch-

She freezes. Her eyes dart around frantically.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

Where's Pacho?

GIULIO

He was here chilling around.

Maddalena stands, looking everywhere.

MADDALENA

Did he go inside with you?

Anna shakes her head.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

Pacho!

Maddalena hears the faint sound of a *thud*-- the bucket in PAOLO's hand swings lightly as the hand carries it toward the stairs. Maddalena spots Pacho's tail hanging over the edge.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

You! Stop!

The hand and the bucket stop. Maddalena runs over and picks up Pacho, curled inside, fast asleep. She hugs him, burying tears of relief in his fur.

PAOLO (O.S.)

(laughing)

That's why it was so heavy! Sneaky little guy.

Maddalena turns, clutching Pacho protectively. Her face is flushed with a mix of panic and anger. She gathers the remaining shards from the balcony with one arm and balances Pacho with the other.

Without a word, she walks to her door and disappears inside, three locks audibly clicking into place.

Anna and the Giulio exchange awkward glances. Giulio shrugs, and goes back to his drilling.

12 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Pacho, safe in Maddalena's arms, stares out from behind the window as the sounds of construction resume. Maddalena goes to the window and brings the shutters down. They are not safe anymore.

13 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Two weeks later.

Early in the morning. The calendar informs us that it's now August 2nd "KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE AND YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER".

Pacho is laying on the kitchen floor.

He is being watched through the window. He flicks his head up, as if someone might break in any minute.

14 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Later that day.

Maddalena has now reconstructed her garden inside and is tending her vegetables. The living room is filled with Sabrina's boxes used as vases, gardening tools lying around.

Pacho is watching her, judging her work, worried for her.

Someone rings the bell. Maddalena checks the peep hole and sees it's Anna before opening.

ANNA

I've been trying to call.

Maddalena goes back to her gardening. Anna steps in the living room and looks around the house in disbelief.

MADDALENA

About what, my friend?

ANNA

You haven't left the house in days.
I was worried about you.

MADDALENA

I'm doing just fine, dear.

Pacho scratches on the door. His cat entrance has been taped shut, and he wants to get out. Anna is shocked.

ANNA

Look at yourself!

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

(to Pacho)

No, Pacho, you stay in!

ANNA (CONT'D)

You see? Pacho is going insane! You
both need to get out of here.

Maddalena stabs a small shovel into a box of soil.

MADDALENA

You think I don't know what's best
for him?

Anna looks at Maddalena's stubborn work for a long moment.

ANNA
I actually came to say goodbye. I'm
leaving tomorrow.

MADDALENA
(sarcastic)
To Heaven's Door?

ANNA
That's right.

MADDALENA
Oh, Anna.

ANNA
My kids need the apartment-- it's
the best solution for both of us.

MADDALENA
When did you become such a people
pleaser?

ANNA
When did you get so bitter?

Maddalena bitterly ignores her. Anna looks at Pacho, then
goes to the window and opens it.

ANNA (CONT'D)
At least let some air in.

Maddalena shrugs, focusing on her gardening, and only glances
at Anna when she is leaving.

15 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - WINDOW - EARLY MORNING

Pacho wakes up from sleep and stretches on the inner
windowsill of the open window.

He is being watched, but this time the observer seems to get
closer.

CUT TO BLACK.

A desperate meow.

MADDALENA
Pacho?

16 - EXT. BUILDING - BALCONY - EARLY MORNING

Maddalena, still in her pajamas and slippers, her hair disheveled, steps next door and knocks. She looks shaken, worry etched on her face.

Sabrina, drowsy, her baby bump larger than ever, gives a small, regretful gesture—wordlessly saying no. Compassion softens her sleepy expression.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Maddalena knocks on another door. As it opens, her hopeful expression fades into disappointment— they haven't seen Pacho.

The same exchange happens three more times at different doors, on different floors.

CUT TO:

DETAIL - PRINTER

A printer hums as it prints several posters featuring Pacho's picture (the same one from the cake), with the word "MISSING" and a phone number underneath.

INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The calendar still reads August 2nd, the night Pacho disappeared.

EXT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - BALCONY - DAY

The balcony is empty, with remnants of broken vases scattered across the floor. The doormat, once where Pacho used to sunbathe, is now bare, save for a few dusty *Heaven's Door* brochures.

CUT TO:

DETAIL - LAMP POST

A pair of old hands affix a "Pacho Missing" poster to a lamp post.

INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The calendar still reads August 2nd, the night Pacho disappeared.

INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Maddalena sits at the kitchen table, drinking her coffee, staring blankly ahead.

On the opposite side of the table, Pacho's bowl sits untouched, filled with kibbles. His seat remains empty.

INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maddalena tends to the plants in the boxes around the house, using a dropper to apply liquid to the geraniums. But the liquid runs out. She glances to the side, where Pacho would usually be. She sighs and stops, her hand dropping the dropper.

CUT TO:

DETAIL - LAMP POST

The "Missing" poster on the lamp post flutters and falls to the pavement.

END MONTAGE.

17 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Although days have passed, the calendar still shows "August 2nd", the night Pacho disappeared.

18 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Moments later. In the kitchen, the sink is filled with dirty dishes. Her gaze blank, her hair disheveled, wearing the same clothes since the night Pacho disappeared, Maddalena makes coffee.

She picks up Pacho's bowl. She extends her arm, about to pour the kibble, but then stops, staring blankly.

The coffee rises and spills over the flame. Maddalena wrinkles her nose, suddenly jumps up to turn off the stove.

The smoke alarm is going off, and the stove is covered in burnt-on coffee. She tries to clean it but burns herself.

MADDALENA

Fine!

She no longer resembles the matriarch from the beginning of the film; now, she is an elderly woman who doesn't wear earrings and likely hasn't bathed in weeks. She falters.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

... You win.

As Maddalena leaves the kitchen, we see a Heaven's Door brochure was on the counter in front of her.

19 - INT. MADDALENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maddalena is wearing a black long gown. She has showered, and looks a bit more put-together. Yet her gaze remains distant, her movements slow: each action now seeming to require double the effort. She's in mourning.

With a travel bag under her arm, she gazes at the framed picture of herself and Pacho on top of the cabinet, beside the calendar still marking August 2nd.

She picks up the picture. It's time to go.

At the door, she takes one last look around her house. Everything is still. The flower boxes, the newspaper, the knitting kit, the porcelain. Nothing has moved since Pacho disappeared.

She opens the door and leaves.

20 - EXT. BUILDING - COURTYARD - DAY

Maddalena is crossing the courtyard to leave the building.

From his balcony, Giulio shouts at Maddalena--

GIULIO

Maddalena, are you going already?

With a hazy look in her eyes, Maddalena gazes toward the balcony. Her voice is resigned, yet gentle and gracefull.

MADDALENA

Yes, darling. Please, ring me when the baby comes.

GIULIO

Who's helping you with the moving?

MADDALENA

Myself, dear, I don't need all that junk. I've got everything I need.

Maddalena clenches to the picture and slowly walks toward the gate. She has no desire to stay there and make small talk.

GIULIO

What about all your memories? The furniture? The porcelain!

Something lights up in Maddalena's gaze. She looks ahead, not turning, but smiling the way one smiles at a cynical and bitter remark.

MADDALENA

(whispering)

You can keep it, dear.

She opens the gate and leaves.

21 - INT. HEAVEN'S DOOR NURSING HOME - DAY

Maddalena knocks on a door.

Opening the door is a young NURSE with a bright smile.

NURSE

Ms. Maddalena, we were waiting for you! Welcome to Heaven's Door.

Maddalena follows the nurse into a bright room, flooded with sunlight from a large window.

In front of the window, Anna is stroking Pacho, who sits on her lap. She's seated in an armchair, with a small table and a chess set beside her.

MADDALENA

Pacho?

NURSE

Mr. Parolini! I told you so many times to leave Mrs. Menegatti alone!

The nurses rushes to another room.

Maddalena throws her bag and the framed picture to the ground, shattering it into pieces. She runs toward her beloved Pacho, who leaps from Anna's lap and bounds toward her, meowing.

She picks him up. The happiest we have seen either of them.

MADDALENA

Oh, darling! Oh, what happened to you?

With Pacho in her arms, Maddalena scrubs her face on his. Anna walks toward her.

ANNA

I told you we could be happy here.

She turns on Anna, shocked by the realization.

MADDALENA

What is wrong with you?

ANNA

You needed to be reminded that home is not the walls you live in--

MADDALENA

(sarcastically)

-- But the people?

Maddalena scoffs.

ANNA

Exactly.

MADDALENA

I never forgot, Anna.

Maddalena, with Pacho in her arms, looks around the room. Aside from the sofa and the table, the room is empty.

MADDALENA (CONT'D)

The people are exactly the problem.

Pacho rubs his face against Maddalena. She looks at him, the only living creature she ever has and ever will trust.

THE END.