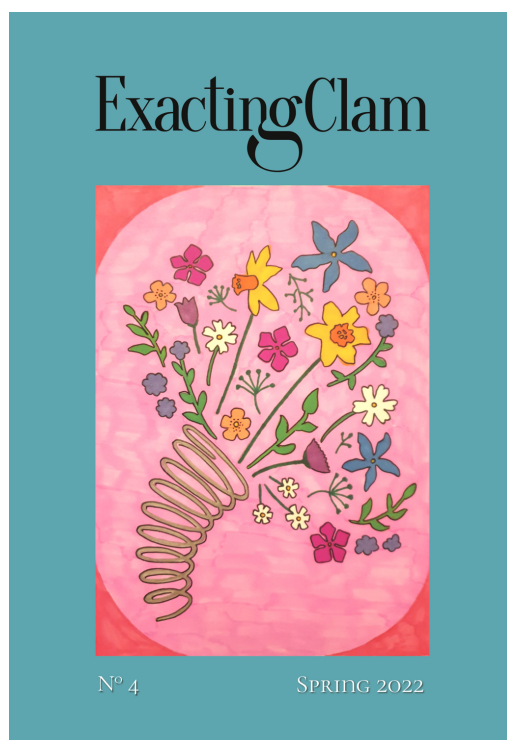


Paolo Albani
THE POST OFFICE BOX



I have a Post Office box at the Central Post Office in Pistoia, in via Roma.

It's PO box number 313. Someone pointed out to me that it's the license plate number of Donald Duck's car.

I find it convenient to have a PO box because when I didn't have one and I wasn't at home, what happened was that the postman had the bad habit of leaving my mail at my door step. As a consequence, in case of rain, I regularly found the mail wet, or, even worse, he would slip it, all crumpled up, in the crack between the two front doors.

None of this has happened anymore, from the moment I got my PO box. If I receive parcels or large envelopes, the Post Office clerk leaves me a note, usually a yellow card, and I collect the mail whenever I want. Most importantly, it's not wrinkled or ruined by the rain.

Therefore, I'm glad I have a PO box. It's too bad that couriers don't deliver packages to PO boxes, which would be a great convenience since the Post Office in Pistoia is open from 8:20 am to 7:05 pm and the couriers would have no delivery problems. Instead, every time I order books or other products, I am forced to stay at home, waiting for the courier to arrive, which is a nuisance (the tracking of the shipment does not give you the time of delivery).

At any rate, I just can't stress enough how having a PO box is a great convenience, even if it costs me a fee (years ago, the rental of a PO box was free).

Every day, or almost every day, I pay a visit to the Post Office since it's not far from my house.

This morning, when I got there, a strange thing happened which I didn't expect. I was stunned, I almost couldn't believe my eyes.

I open the box and lean down slightly to see if anything has arrived. Inside, instead of the usual envelopes, free books, bills or stuff like that, I see a guy, a skinny guy, long brown hair and a barely hinted beard, who is lying on the bottom of my mailbox. He's wearing a light-blue cotton shirt with short sleeves. I see him from behind, with his jeans pulled down to his knees, screwing a black girl, a beautiful girl with typical African braids.

The girl has her eyes closed and doesn't notice me.

- Hey, guys, sorry - I tell them - this is kind of my mailbox. What the fuck are you doing in here?

The two don't seem to care, they keep screwing as if I hadn't said a thing.

I don't have the guts to reach into my mailbox (measuring 4 x 5 x 16 inches), and touch the guy's back with my finger or tap him on the shoulder, to warn him of my presence. I'm embarrassed. I don't know what to do. They screw like crazy, I restrain from interrupting their erotic game, although it's taking place, without my knowledge, inside the rectangular space of my mailbox. This, as far as I know, is not a public space, but has other functions related to non-carnal types of communication.

- Sorry guys - I insist, raising my voice a little to make myself heard - can you stop for a moment, please?

At this point the girl opens her eyes and lets out a startled cry, more of surprise and annoyance at the sudden interruption rather than the real anger of an indignant person.

- Hey - the girl says to me as she quickly recomposes herself - what are you doing, watching? you dirty old man!

In the meantime, the guy has turned towards the opening of the PO box, pulled up his jeans and looks at me with a pissed-off expression, the grim look of a thug.

- No, no, wait a minute - I say - I'm not a freakin' voyeur. I'm the owner, that is, the tenant, of this PO box and I was just checking to see if there was mail for me.

- Yeah, sure - says the guy - to check the mail? Sure, sure. I don't think so, I think you were spying on us while we were making love. Who knows how long you've been there for, you son of a bitch!

- No, look, there is a misunderstanding ... - I stammer.

- Do we know each other? - the guy interrupts me.

- I don't think so - I reply.

- Then you should call me sir.

This whole story is taking a bad turn.

Unfortunately there is nobody in PO box room. I have no witnesses to appeal to, so I can't report the two intruders who have taken possession of my mailbox to do their dirty business and fornicate. I could just let it go, slam the flap of the mailbox in their faces and lock them in. However, the fact remains that the box is open in the back by the mail sorting office and the two of them could easily slip out and get away with it.

I don't want them to have it their way.

- Listen dear friend - I resume in an attempt to calm him down.

- Dear friend, my ass- the bully says. He is now standing in my mailbox, his hands on his hips in an aggressive, defiant stance.

- OK, I apologize. I just wanted to tell you, Sir, if you have the patience to listen to me, that there's no need to get angry. I come here most days to check my mail and to tell the truth I never noticed you before.

The bully keeps staring at me with a strange look on this face, but seems almost willing to have a reasonable conversation.

- We've been here for at least three months - he says without losing his contemptuous tone-

Three months? - I ask.

- Yes, three months - he replies.

- If we have never met, it must be by coincidence - continues the bully, and, throwing a mocking smile at his partner, adds: - The other day, just for fun, we pissed on a postcard of yours. It was bothering us, it hindered our movements.

And they burst out laughing, the assholes, doubling over.

Pissing on my mail, big deal, must have been satisfying.

In fact, now that I think about it, some time ago I found a postcard from my friend Franco Giovanetti, sent from Belluno. The postcard had a photo of Dino Buzzati printed on one side, where the writer from Belluno was looking down sadly and had a black hat on his head. It seemed a bit damp, soggy, but then

and there I blamed the rain. It had been a period of heavy rain, and I thought the post card had gotten wet due to the post office's carelessness.

The detail of the discovery of the "wet" postcard and finding out how it got wet piss me off. I can't take it anymore, I lose my patience and burst out:

- You know what? Go fuck yourselves, you assholes! - and I slam the door of my mailbox without even bothering to turn the key in the lock.

I storm out of the room. Without realizing it, I almost crash into a woman with a baby in a stroller. I'm mad. I head towards the post office entrance. I ask for the manager. He receives me immediately. He seems nice. He tells me to sit and after hearing my grievances about the story of the two fuckers who are having a good time in my mailbox, he gets up and closes the office door so that no one can hear us.

Speaking quietly, the director tells me that he is mortified. He apologizes on behalf of the Italian Post Office for the inconvenience I have suffered and informs me that I am not the only "user of numbered PO boxes for lease" (that exactly how he phrased it, the bureaucrat) to have complained about these illegal behaviors. He informs me that the scourge of the people who illegally occupy the post office boxes - mostly young stragglers, migrants, precarious workers, tramps, but also some retirees who can't make ends meet - is spreading in a worrying way throughout the nation. And anyway, the director adds, keeping his voice down, you don't have to worry because the Italian Post Office has already taken measures, they have drawn up an emergency plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of the Interior. Don't you worry, the problem will be solved in a few months.

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