



# Irok's Look

## A True FABLE

Story of an inexhaustible friendship between Emilia-Romagna and Chile

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Texts by Carmelo Greco

Illustrations by Giovanni Cavicchi

Translations by Emily Sfriso

- Letter by H.E. Mons. Massimo Camisasca -

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UN'AMICIZIA INESAURIBILE

ISTITUTO DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA E CULTURALE DEL GIUGNO 1988

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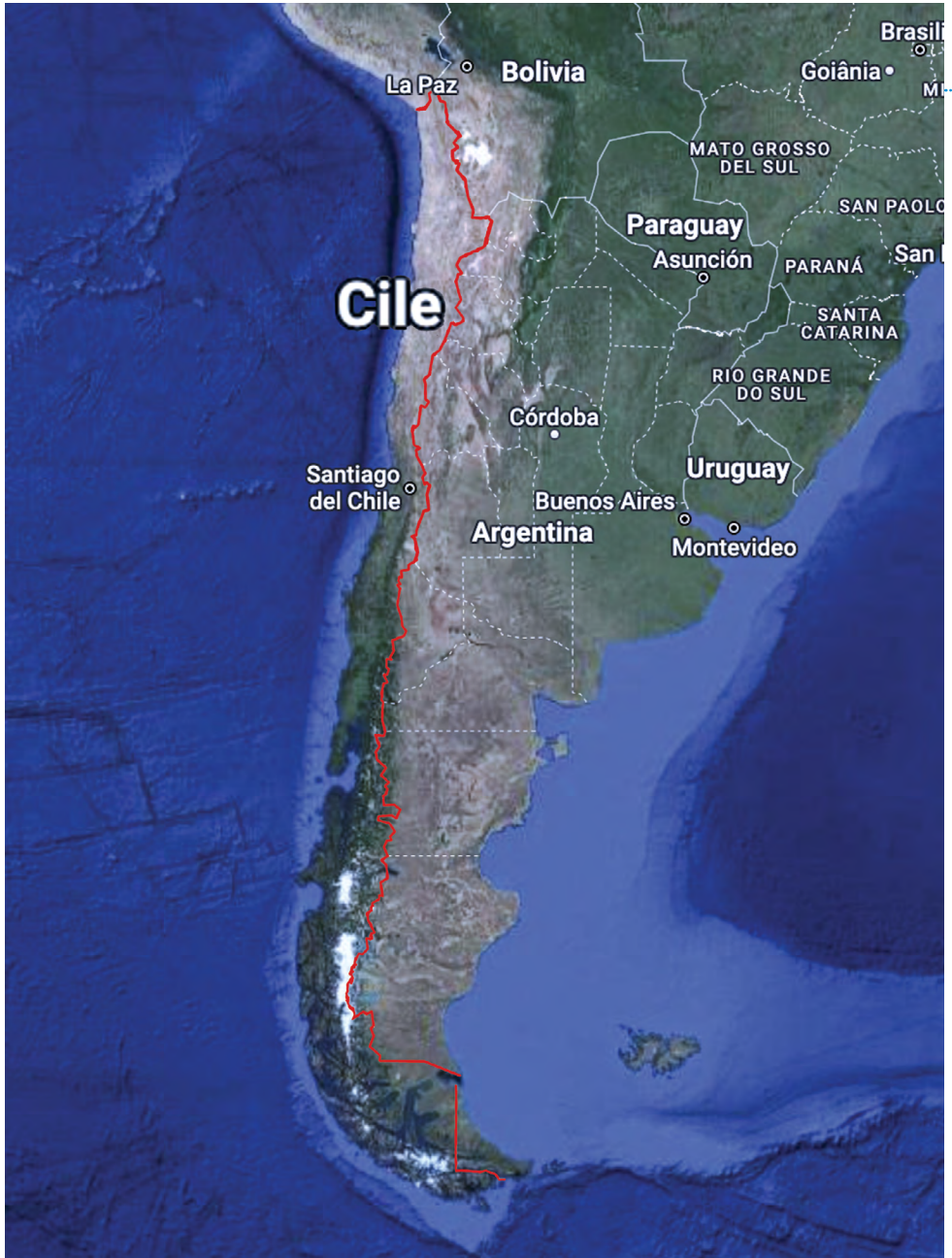
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# Friends' Houses



Italy, Emilia-Romagna region  
Google Earth, 2023



500 km

## Chile

Google Earth, 2023

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### I introduce myself

**M**y name is Irok, I am almost 10 years old and I'm a German shepherd. If it's true what bipeds say, that one year of us dogs corresponds to 7 of those of humans, I should be about 70. Translated: I should be old. And actually I feel them all over my ribs and crooked paws. Especially when my master, Don Simone, who is almost 50, takes me out for a run. Actually, to be honest, he is not the one who takes me. It is I who decided to follow him. And since him, even if he's a priest, has been and remains an athlete since his days enlisted in the air force, he continues to go for his running at least three times a week. He also plays football for that matter, but on football fields I'm not welcome. I have to be happy with jogging. What an effort! But it is the price I am willing to pay to see what he does and where he goes. Because what I know, little or much, I have learnt it from him. Ever since I was brought in his community of confreres, a big and beautiful space, with a garden. Nothing to do with the cubby hole in which I lived before, so small that I used to bite my tail from stress.



Here Don Simone doesn't live alone, but with 6 others like him, namely priests from the Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Carlo Borromeo. They are never separated, except during the day. And this is because, even if the brothers live together, everyone does different things. Some go to school, some to university, some to the hospital. Don Simone loves going to the hospital. So much that some even call him a masochist, as if he likes this place more than healthier other. In one case I heard him reply to those who considered him a masochist that he did not take pleasure in being in front of the suffering of people. "God who sends me has the same face of those who wait for me" he told. I don't know, what figured out what that means. Maybe that the face of the sick looks like God's one? I think however he was telling the truth because when he comes from the hospital I often hear him sobbing. Not always, but often. If one really took pleasure in doing something, he wouldn't cry. Even a dog like me can understand that.





## A bowl sprinkles with tears

**I**n the metropolis where we live there is no shortage of reasons to cry, regardless of whether one goes or doesn't go to his enormous hive-hospital with 800 beds. Santiago of Chile is an extensive city, full of dangers. Very different from Dogato, the village in the province of Ferrara where Don Simone comes from. But he does not seem that he regrets it. I wouldn't know. Apart from the kennel, I have always lived in this terrible trouble of over 7 million bipeds, no counting all my colleagues and other animal species. There is such a mass of houses, buildings, cars and rubbish in a scary manner. That's not all, it's true. The Cordillera of the Andes, with its perennially snow-capped peaks, frames the city. And then there are the sunsets. Certain red skies that look like postcard drawn by the moved painter's hand. Not mentioning the people. Some stop me in the street and pet me while they talk to Don Simone about their problems. He looks at them carefully: he remembers everyone's name. He says he's physiognomist. That's right. I think it's better than masochist. It means that although you have seen someone briefly on some occasion, he doesn't forget their face.

After all, if this someone happens to see him in one of the hospital wards, waiting to find out if one of his relatives is going to make it, it is unlikely to escape his face out of his mind. Especially if the relative in question is a dying child. And unfortunately it happens. When it happens, he doesn't know how to divide the pain he feels between that for the parents and that for the child who is about to leave this world. I have heard his brothers reporting -because I have never been allowed into the hospital- that he closes himself in silence and starts to pray. The mothers cling to him in despair, as if he had the power to bring their children back to life. Lately they even invite him home, to neighbourhoods usually avoided by the rich, to share a meal dipped in tears. There I'm welcome, too. I place myself in a corner, perhaps next to a bowl which is invariably filled especially for me.



## The regretful detained

**H**owever, you have not to think that my master is always dispirited, given the situations he has to face. Sometimes he smiles. Not only when he runs chased by thoughts and me that I struggle with my tongue hanging out. Even when he tells his brothers what he sees behind bars. Yes, because he is not limited to only attend the public hospital of Santiago, but also the jail. A nice bad luck match in which, however, the hospital always wins. It's in prison he met Pepe, a detained sentenced to several years in prison for stabbing a fellow citizen guilty of looking badly at him.

“Father, I don't know why I did it” the detained had told him.

“Maybe because you weren't happy” Don Simone had replied.

“And you, Father, are you happy instead?”

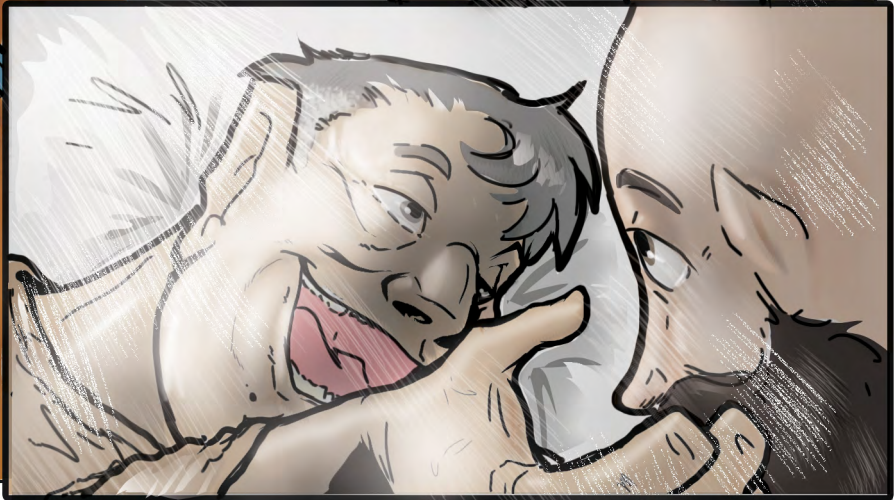
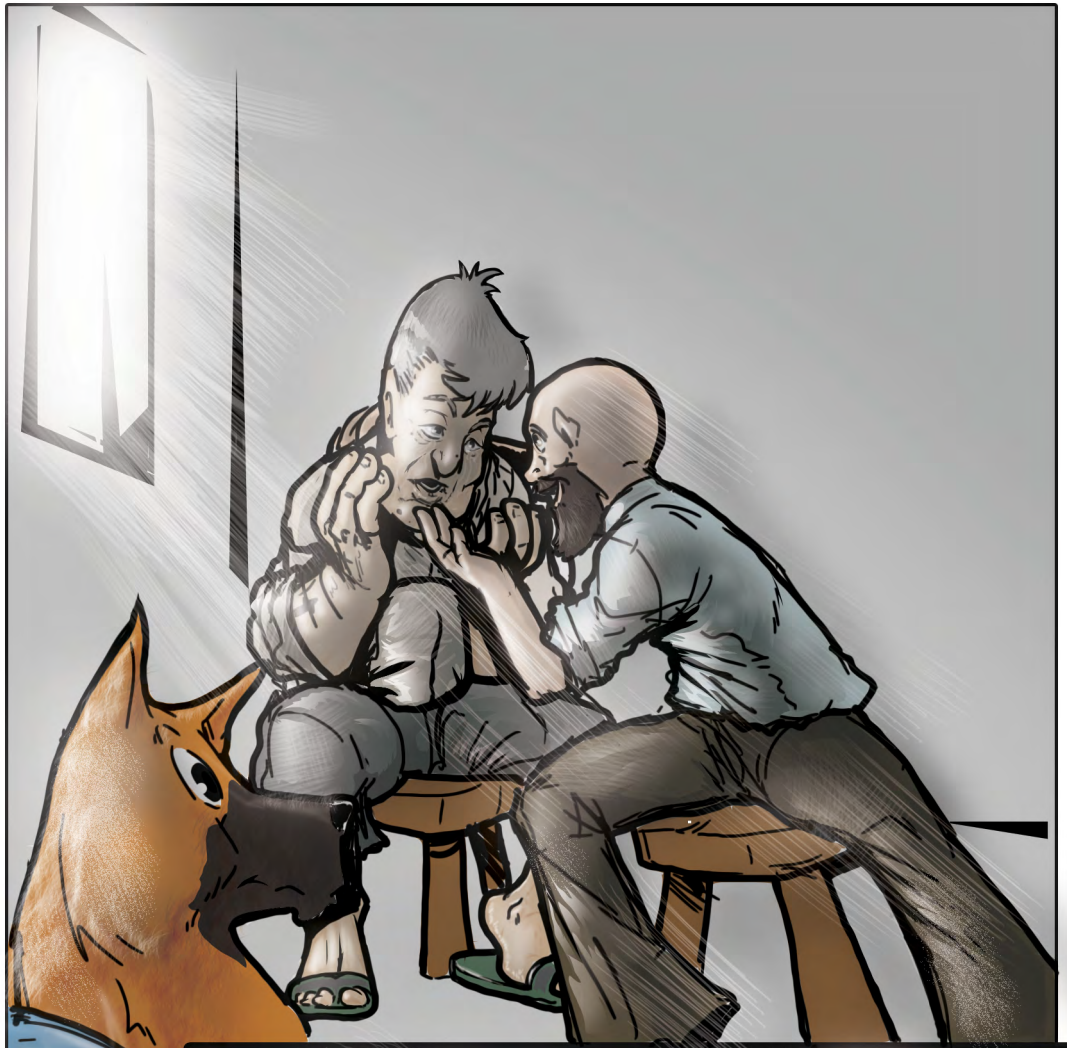
Don Simone had thought about it for a long time, remembering the years of his adolescence when he asked himself this question everyday. To answer it, he had procured a lot of books, but he got nowhere. In the end the answer had come from meeting friends who had the same question. Just like him. It was thanks to this friends that God's face had appeared everywhere he went. Here why he replied to Pepe like this: “Yes, I'm happy because God has called me. And he had called you, too.”

Pepe, little confused, had replied “What do you mean he called me?”

“He called you with baptism.”

In fact, Pepe had been baptised, but he didn't even remember it.

Not only he has never attended a church in his life, but he has never made his first communion nor confirmation. He did not know what catechism was. Don Simone had proposed him to do a course together, but he had refused. Until he had fallen ill with Covid. Then, just before the virus took him away, he had sent for my master. He had asked him to confess himself and take all the sacraments. He had gone to heaven, having uttered in a breath “I’m ready”, with an expression that would have remained imprinted in any case, without having to be a physiognomist. Don Simone had told it the brothers, laughing and crying at the same time. That there was something to cry about was obvious. About the laughter, however, I have some perplexity. But what do I know, after all? I have been denied both experiences. On the other hand I can bark, growl, whine, wag my tail. Dogs’ stuff, in short.



## The prize for not running away

**C**ovid had one merit, besides that of making Pepe say he was ready in the face of death. It has gotten Don Simone to win a prize. To be exact, the medal *Cruz Apòstol Santiago* that Archdiocese of the capital city recognises each year to those who have distinguished themselves for witness in the service of people and the community. Not that he is proud of it and brag about it as if he had won the podium in an athletic competition. They assigned it to him and therefore he had to take note of it. They gave him the medal because basically he had not run away when everyone else had. The pandemic – I heard it from a gentleman who was leafing through the newspaper in a bar the other day – has so far caused more than 61 thousand deaths in Chile. Much less than in Italy, where have been other than 190 thousand. At least so a maremmano shepherd told me reporting what he had picked up from his owners from Florence. The “colleague” knew it all. In the world almost 7 million people would be killed by Coronavirus, as many as the inhabitants of Santiago.

Looking back, the days when every State released daily a bulletin with the number of death infected, seem long gone. Even the hospital, which in theory was supposed to be the safest place, had become the epicentre of the infection. With the aggravating circumstance that when doctors and nurses returned to their homes, they took the virus with them, which continued to claim victims among one family members. If before Don Simone had



to deal with normal illnesses or with injured people on the streets, now he was faced with a multitude of suffering and, above all, an uncontrollable wave of fear. Everyone was afraid of contagion. Even him. But he had preferred to stay. If I could speak, I would ask him what kept him from running away, far away. The others might have wanted to, but they couldn't. There were children, wives, husbands, elderly parents.

Don Simone's relatives live at the other side of the world, in Italy. No one forbade him from packing his bags and finding a shelter somewhere. If I could speak, I would really like him to answer why he didn't do it. But perhaps I've already known the answer. I already know he would say that God has the same face everywhere, Covid or no Covid. Such as the one of Pepe who had decided to do what Don Simone had suggested him. One thing is certain. If I were Don Simone, I would have run for the hills. Instead he never stopped running, but not to abandon the infected places and people, but because he is an athlete. Man, how much he runs! And stop a bit, right? I'm tired, I'm old. Give me a break, come on!



## A run in the sunset

I have told you so far because I like be with Don Simone, but I have skipped my canine happening. Yet I believe it may be useful to understand even better the strange friendship that ties me to this strange priest. I confess, it wasn't love at first sight. I had told you it, didn't I? I arrived at the community of San Carlo missionary priests heavily stressed. The impact has been positive: all that space at my disposal where I could wander around happily. However, apart from this impression, the rest had left me shocked. In that house there wasn't television, there weren't female bipeds, there wasn't shouting. If anything, psalms could be heard several times a day in hushed tones as if the occupants feared disturbing someone. I had never seen anything like that.

Besides, they didn't treat me like others. At best, as if I were a bipeds myself to whom one could pour the love one could not give one's counterparts. At worst, telling me off because I don't obey as I should. They treated me for what I was and what I am: a German shepherd who is a bit senile, but no fool. Sometimes Don Simone petted me -he still does- but without expecting me to do anything. He was never insistent about running. He would go, inviting me to follow him. I think he always did this because he didn't want me to get sick from standing still for too long.

Today he changed way and I followed him even if he didn't ask me to. Sometimes he turns to look at the fenced-off houses in which the inhabitants of Santiago are hiding, perhaps fearful that the pandemic will come back to do damage. In front of us, down there at the bottom, I can see mountain summit thinning in the sunset. The sky is turning dark blue and around us the people are turning into evening shadows. Don Simone stopped because a boy in a wheelchair caught his eye. He seemed to know him, perhaps he had seen him in the hospital. He addressed him and I'm grateful, so I can finally sit down and rest. The boy is smiling. He too remembers meeting Don Simone in the hospital. The surgery he underwent seems to have gone well. Don Simone squatted down to stay at his height and asked him where his parents live.

"They are dead. Covid stole them from me" he replied. It would make cry even me, who don't know how to do that.

"Don't worry. They are in the arms of Jesus now" Don Simone answered him.

"And me?"

"You are in His arms, too. As me and as Irok near us".

I don't know why but on hearing this, I barked happily three times in a row.



## Letter from A Friend

Dear Irok,  
I know Santiago of Chile quite well; I came there maybe 7-8 times, long before the house you also live in was born. I know Don Simone well, also because I lived with him for several years, in Rome and Reggio Emilia. Until today I didn't know you and therefore I'm happy to be able to write this letter to you and, therefore, to talk with you, even if thousands of kilometres away.

A man's dialogue with his dog is one of the most fascinating things once can experience on earth. No man can know for sure whether the dog has understood his words; no dog can be sure that his friend has comprehended his intentions. It is therefore a mysterious dialogue that has something of the flavour of a dialogue between time and eternal.

Do you know that I am a great supporter of the presence of dogs in Paradise? Naturally not separated from that of cats, as the prophet Isaiah would also imply...

I also want to tell you that I am very happy, not only with the gift you are for Simone, but also the gift that Simone is for you. Simone is a very generous man, inclined almost by nature to charity, capable of true closeness to people, of true participation in their trials and sufferings.

He is certainly Christ's herald: he, through silence, words, prayers, the sacraments, the simplicity of a handshake or a look, knows how to give a ray of infinity to the indoors of a hospital room, the relief of a presence to the painful loneliness of illness.

I really liked your story and I felt it was very true.

I wonder how much light it will also bring to so many sick people and, more generally, to so many friends, men and women.

Today you're younger than me. If I understand, you're about seventy years old. This means that next year you'll join me because dog's years are worth seven times ours.

We will celebrated from afar.

Goodbye where you know.

H. E. Mons. Massimo Camisasca  
*Bishop Emeritus of Reggio Emilia-Guastalla*  
*Founder of "Fraternità Sacerdotale dei Missionari di San Carlo Borromeo"*

# I PASSI DELLA PACE

## 1 Where there is freedom, friendship flourishes

“[...] he is not the one who takes me. It is I who decided to follow him. [...] What an effort! But it is the price I am willing to pay to see what he does and where he goes. Because what I know, little or much, I have learnt it from him.”







## 2

# Welcoming is ALWAYS "contAGIOUS"

“There I’m welcome, too. I place myself in a corner, perhaps next to a bowl which is invariably filled especially for me.”





### 3

## There is something THAT CAN overcome fear

“Everyone was afraid of contagion. Even him. But he had preferred to stay. If I could speak, I would ask him what kept him from running away, far away. The others might have wanted to, but they couldn’t. [...] If I could speak, I would really like him to answer why he didn’t do it. But perhaps I’ve already known the answer. I already know he would say that God has the same face everywhere, Covid or no Covid.”

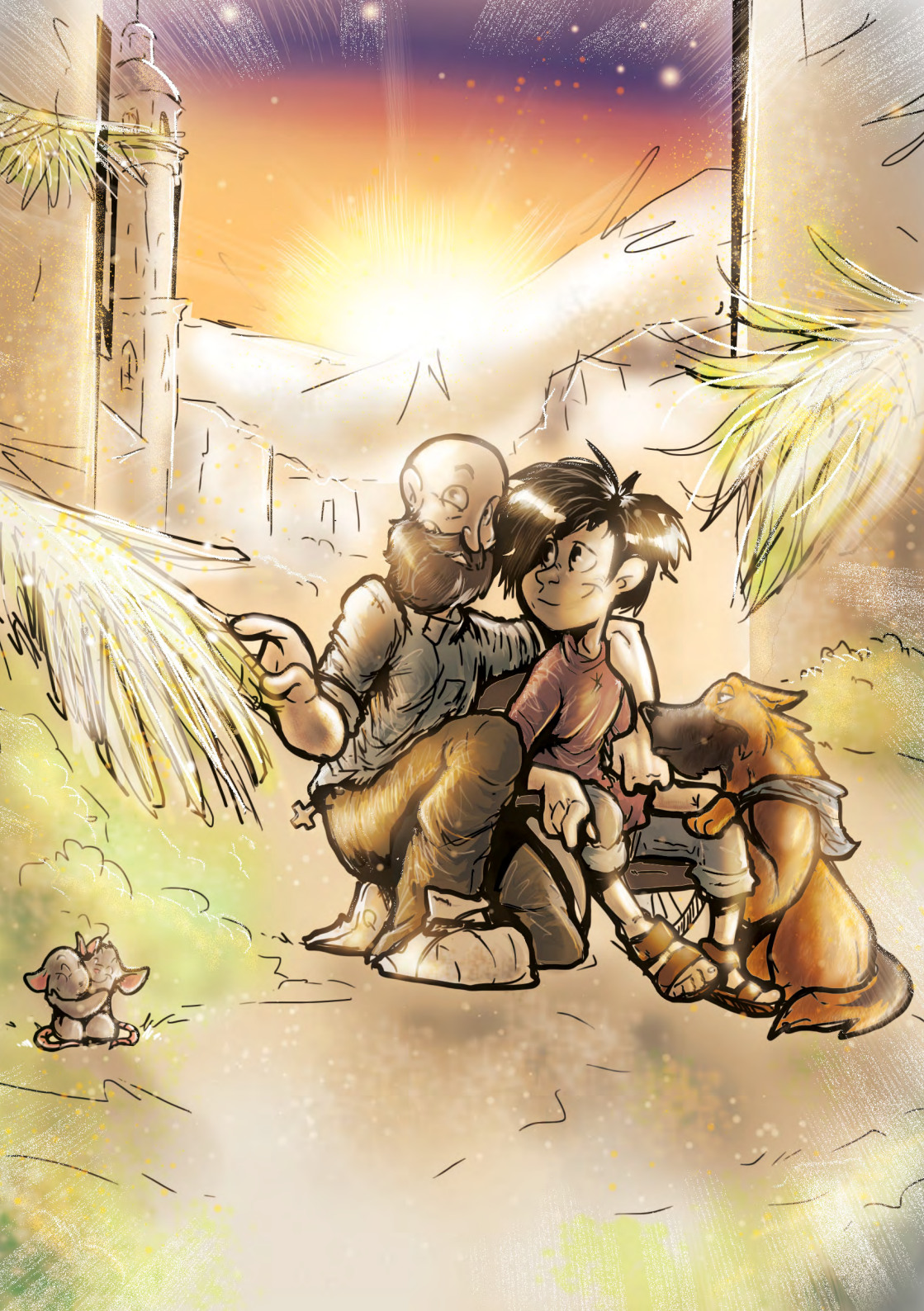




## 4

# STOPPING to notice the other

“Don Simone stopped because a boy in a wheelchair caught his eye. He seemed to know him, perhaps he had seen him in the hospital. He addressed him and I’m grateful, so I can finally sit down and rest. The boy is smiling. He too remembers meeting Don Simone in the hospital.”



# Carmelo Greco

## Journalist AND writer

He was born in Catania in 1966, he graduated in Modern Literature with a thesis on Guido Morselli, a writer published almost entirely after his death in 1973.

He's a professional journalist, he has collaborated with various newspaper covering economics, culture, society and issues related to the no-profit world. Currently, he mainly follows the new frontiers of digital transformation on behalf of several online megazines dealing with the impact generated by technological changes on business models and organisational processes of companies.

He has written several plays performed in the *Syracuse Penitentiary Institute*, three of which were included in the collection *L'Italia e altre commedie* (Edizioni di Pagina, 2016). He's author of the novels *Le stagioni di Cavabella* (Libromania, 2016), *Focara di Sangue* (Fogliodivia, 2020), *La strada di Miriam* (Scatole Parlanti, 2023) and *Sui Banchi del Salento* (Rubettino, 2019).

He lives constantly travelling between Milan, Salento and Sicily.



## Giovanni CAVICCHI

### CARTOONIST AND ILLUSTRATOR

The images accompanying the story are the work of Giovanni Cavicchi, a young cartoonist from Ferrara who likes to put his talent at the service of educational and cultural activities.

While at primary school, Giovanni was fascinated by the drawings of a friend and decided to set to work, initially self-taught, then studying advertising graphics and finally attending the International School of Comics in Padua.

A skillful character designer, he has produced several illustrations for the *Gruppo del Tasso*, illustrated Silvana Minia's book '*Su e giù per la Storia*', collaborated with several school institutes in Ferrara and is also carrying out personal projects in parallel, from the script to the finished project.

Since 2021, he has been working with *Santa Caterina da Siena ETS* and its associates, giving contours and colours to educational proposals for minors, literary exhibitions and small publications to be donated to those we meet. Giovanni observes reality with a keen eye, speaks little with words but knows how to sing with his drawings.

## Afterword

# LIBRETTI DA VISITA: SO THAT FRIENDSHIP HAS NO END

The series of illustrated short stories 'An Inexhaustible Friendship - The Forces that change history are the same as those that change the Heart of a Man' stems from the living relationships that St Catherine of Siena ETS and its associates have forged and nurtured over the years. In these pages, writers and illustrators have portrayed the testimonies of six communities from complex and/or conflicting contexts to tell what allows them to live positively even where it would not seem possible, and to discover that the forces that change the Heart of a Man are the same ones that also change history...

We like to call these publications 'libretti da visita', images and fictional stories freely drawn from real friendships, stories of friends of friends, friends not to be missed.

But what is the small contribution each of us can make to build Peace? We have discovered that preserving relationships and relations is a real business: friendships met 'by chance' but which determine our history, friendships that do not leave us alone, friendships that force us to come to terms with our human stature, in a work that becomes an adventure and a responsibility to commit to ourselves every day, because the one who tells us 'Be with me' is the Only One capable of this inexhaustible fidelity.

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<sup>1</sup> In Italian, intended as booklets used in a way that a meeting becomes an opportunity, an opportunity to see each other again and forge a long-lasting relationship.



# UN'AMICIZIA INESAURIBILE

LE FORZE CHE CAMBIANO LA STORIA SONO LE STESSA CHE CAMBIANO IL CUORE DELL'UOMO

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Voghera (PV)

in collaboration with



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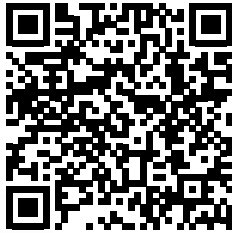
Translations by Emily Sfriso

*original title:*

Lo sguardo di Irok

Una favola vera

*Storia di un'amicizia inesauribile tra Emilia-Romagna e Chile*



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of an inexhaustible friendship...



UN'AMICIZIA INESAURIBILE

UN'OPERA DEL CENTRO ITALIANO DI STUDI SU SANTA CATERINA DA SIENA

in collaboration with



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