

DEAD MEN AT SEA

Written by

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The silhouette of a child floating on the surface shimmers. It's **Joele** (9), a young dark-haired kid with delicate facial features and a slender build. With his ears underwater and his eyes tightly closed, Joele moves his lips repeatedly as if in prayer until two small hands press on his chest, pushing him underwater.

The body sinks. After a moment of surprise, the child reacts and returns to the surface.

The silent sound of the sea is drowned out by the mocking laughter of **Sebastiano** (10), a robust boy with a foxy face, amused by the prank played on his friend.

JOELE

(coughing)

Seb... are you an idiot?! You're drowning me!

SEBASTIANO

Oh, what a sissy... I've been calling you, what are you doing?

JOELE

Nothing! I was, I was just...

SEBASTIANO

(squirting him)

Whatever... come on! I have to show you something, run!

Sebastiano grabs Joele by the wrist and drags him to shore.

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The two kids reach the beach towels spread out on the sand, where Sebastiano pulls out a crumpled flyer and shows it to his friend. Joele is about to open it, but Sebastiano snatches it from him.

SEBASTIANO

Not here! Are you stupid?

JOELE

Sorry. Where did you find it?

Sebastiano looks around warily, then whispers in Joele's ear.

SEBASTIANO  
In the labyrinth.

Joele jumps back, surprised.

JOELE  
My mom says we shouldn't  
go near that... that there are  
monsters inside.

SEBASTIANO  
(mocking him)  
Do you still believe your  
mom?! Come on, let's go!

Sebastiano picks up the beach towel and starts running. Joele stops for a moment to look at the entrance to the labyrinth: a path through the dunes marked by a mass of bushes.

SEBASTIANO (OFF) (CONT'D)  
Joele! Move!

Joele picks up his towel and joins his friend.

Together, the two kid run smiling across the hot sand; they hold the towels by the edges, letting them flutter in the wind like superhero capes.

3

**INT. JOELE'S BEACH HOUSE/LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY**

3

The roaring engines of the motorcycles reverberate through the living room. Sitting on the couch watching the CRT TV, **Antonio** and **Ettore** (40), the children's fathers, watch the MotoGP championship while downing a couple of beers.

ANTONIO  
Curve! Curve, damn it, you fucking  
fag!

Carrying a whole watermelon in her arms, **Giuliana** (35), Sebastiano's mother, leans over and gives her husband a reprimanding slap; she puts the watermelon on the table and approaches the kitchen where **Teresa** (32), Joele's mother, is throwing the pasta.

GIULIANA  
Goodness Teresa, it's too much...  
you shouldn't have bothered.

TERESA

Uhh, for so little... when will we get another chance? Now that you're moving.

GIULIANA

Come on, don't say that, you'll come and visit us down there, right? Can you imagine the sea in Florida?!

Teresa nods unconvinced. Giuliana checks the time on the clock on the wall.

GIULIANA (CONT'D)

It's almost one o'clock. What do you say, should I go call them?

TERESA

No, they're coming now. Joele knows that if he's late, no one will save him from my hands!

The two women laugh when the sound of the gate opening makes them turn toward the door.

GIULIANA

Oh, here they are!

The children run into the house, dodging Giuliana and running up the stairs.

SEBASTIANO

Hi Mom!

JOELE

Hi Mom! We're going upstairs.

TERESA

Ten minutes and lunch is ready, Joele!

The children disappear upstairs.

4

**INT. JOELE'S BEACH HOUSE/HALLWAY - DAY**

4

The children stop in front of the bedroom door.

JOELE

Seb, wait! What are we doing?



TERESA  
How handsome you are!

JOELE  
Stop it! Night.

Joele leaves the house while Teresa watches him leave.

TERESA  
Say hello to Alice for me!

7 **INT. LANDING - NIGHT**

7

A doorbell rings. The door opens and a boy wearing only his underwear smiles mischievously at Joele, who smiles back.

BOY  
Joele?

Joele nods. The boy invites him in. The door closes behind them.

8 **INT. JOELE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY**

8

A spray of detergent hits the glass. Teresa cleans the windows.

Joele, dirty and sweaty, grabs the overflowing garbage bags and leaves the house.

9 **EXT. CONSORTIUM ROAD - DAY**

9

Joele heads toward the garbage cans when he notices that the gate of the house across the street is open; he glimpses a figure in the yard.

Joele puts down the trash and approaches the gate to peek inside. Suddenly, a man appears in front of him.

SEBASTIANO  
BOO!!!!

Joele jumps back in fright, trips over the trash, and falls to the ground. The mysterious man, looking down at him, laughs in his face.

SEBASTIANO (CONT'D)  
You're the usual sissy.

Joele, still on the ground, scrutinizes the sturdy, well-dressed man. Joele realizes it's...

TERESA

Sebastiano, is that you? Oh my God,  
how you've grown!

SEBASTIANO

Mrs. Teresa, how are you?

Teresa runs toward him with her arms outstretched. Embarrassed, Joele stands up to quickly clean himself up.

TERESA

Oh don't give me that Mrs. thing,  
c'mon! What are you doing here?

SEBASTIANO

Oh, it's a long story.

TERESA

Then I'll make you a cup of coffee,  
so you can tell us about it. Come  
on, come on, I want to know  
everything!

Teresa leads Sebastiano arm in arm into the house. Sebastiano slips something into his pocket, then exchanges a quick glance with Joele, who is still surprised by his appearance.

10

**EXT. JOELE'S HOUSE/GARDEN - DAY**

10

Sebastiano and Teresa's voices are muffled for Joele, who carefully studies his newfound friend, sitting across the table from him: his hands playing with the dirty coffee cup, his eyes smiling, his lips moving, the golden crucifix hanging from his bulging neck to rest on his hairy chest.

SEBASTIANO

And so now that I'm back, I've been  
thinking I'd enjoy the beach house  
instead of renting it for the  
summer.

TERESA

What great news! And so  
we're neighbours again.

SEBASTIANO

Well, I came to take  
a look and understand the  
situation... but yes.

TERESA

If you're done for today and have nothing else to do, why don't you stay with us?

Teresa's words awaken Joele from his trance.

JOELE

Um, come on, Sebastiano will definitely have to go home for—

SEBASTIANO

(interrupting)  
Why not? Gladly.

Teresa rejoices, unlike Joele who, confused, falls silent. Sebastiano continues to smile at him with impunity.

11 INT. JOELE'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

11

The distant sound of a toilet drain.

Joele enters the bedroom and is surprised to find Sebastiano inside. He's sitting on the bed, looking around and caressing the old blanket.

SEBASTIANO

I remembered it being bigger.

JOELE

Everything seems bigger when we were kids.

Silence. There's a strange tension between the two.

SEBASTIANO

Do you have a swimsuit you can borrow me?

JOELE

Oh... you don't have one at your house?

Sebastiano, with a foxy smile, shakes his head. Joele opens the closet and passes him one of his. Sebastiano undresses in front of Joele who, uncomfortable, looks away.

JOELE (CONT'D)

If you also need a towel—

Sebastiano grabs Joele by the wrist, slams him against the wall and kisses him. Joele, stunned, doesn't respond to the kiss.



The unbuttoned swimsuits touch the floor.

Lying on the bed, Joele and Sebastiano look at each other awkwardly. Joele reaches out and caresses his friend's arm.

JOELE (CONT'D)  
Like this?

SEBASTIANO  
Yes, yes. Do you like it?

Joele nods. Sebastiano also begins to caress him.

JOELE  
Do you?

SEBASTIANO  
(pretending)  
Oh yes!

CUT TO.

Sebastiano's hand touches Joele's side, making him jump.

JOELE  
Careful, you're tickling me!

SEBASTIANO  
Really?

Sebastian takes advantage of this and tickles his friend, who squirms on the mattress, until the laughter gives way to an unusual understanding. The two look into each other's eyes... now they both know.

15      **INT. JOELE'S BEACH HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY**      15

Just like then, Joele and Sebastiano hold each other close, naked and happy.

16      **EXT. PEDAL BOAT - DAY**      16

Anchored to the buoy, Joele and Sebastiano sunbathe lying on the pedal boat.

JOELE  
Do you remember when you pushed me  
underwater? That last day?

SEBASTIANO  
So?

JOELE

It's stupid... but as a kid,  
I used to do this. When I had a  
secret and felt I couldn't tell  
anyone, not even you, I'd float and  
tell it to the sea.

SEBASTIANO

(jokingly)

You're right... it's stupid.

Joele, feigning offense, splashes him with water. Sebastiano jumps up to avoid the blow.

JOELE

(laughing)

Fuck you!

Sebastiano remains standing, looking at the horizon.

JOELE (CONT'D)

...I didn't want you to leave, I  
was telling this to the sea. So, do  
you remember?

Sebastiano continues to stare at the horizon but his gaze is restless.

17 **EXT. SEA - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

17

Little Joele, floating, confesses his secret to the sea. With his eyes closed, he doesn't notice Sebastiano, standing beside him, listening to his friend's revelation.

Worried, Sebastiano pushes him under the water.

18 **EXT. PEDAL BOAT - DAY**

18

Sebastiano's gaze is lost in thought.

SEBASTIANO

...no.

Joele, disappointed, stands up.

JOELE

Oh well, never mind.

Joele dives into the water, disappearing.

Recalled by his dive, Sebastiano turns to look at the spot where Joele had dived. Gently, Sebastiano places his hand on the surface of the water.

19

**EXT. BEACH - DAY**

19

Teresa and Joele sunbathe on the loungers. Sitting on the deckchair, Sebastiano can't stop looking at Joele. He smiles at him, happy and serene until...

MICHELA (OFF)  
Sebastiano!!! Sebastiano!!!

Sebastiano recognizes that voice; his smile instantly fades.

All three turn toward the wooden platform where **Michela** (30) is coming down: a young and attractive girl who, as soon as she sees Sebastiano, runs toward him, smiling.

MICHELA (CONT'D)  
There you were! You made me so worried.

SEBASTIANO  
Michela, what are you doing here?

MICHELA  
Well, you weren't answering the phone, so I thought I'd come over.

SEBASTIANO  
My cell phone is dead, I couldn't call you but-  
(looking at Joele and Teresa)  
Okay, sorry... Teresa, Joele, this is Michela.

Michela leans first toward Teresa and then Joele to shake his hand.

SEBASTIANO (CONT'D)  
... my wife.

Teresa clasps her hands together and brings them to her mouth. She jumps up and hugs Michela. Joele grieves the news but forces a smile.

TERESA  
What wonderful news today, my goodness!  
This fox hadn't told us anything.  
(MORE)

TERESA (CONT'D)

(to Michela)

But you have to stay for dinner, I insist, I want to know everything!

MICHELA

Oh... how kind of you, thank you!

As the two women begin to tell each other, Sebastiano looks displeasedly at Joele, who remains composed.

20

**EXT. CONSORTIUM ROAD - DAY**

20

Teresa and Michela walk briskly home, busy chatting.

TERESA (OFF)

So is it a boy or a girl?

MICHELA (OFF)

Still don't know! We realized it as soon as we got back from our honeymoon.

TERESA (OFF)

What a beautiful couple you are! Joele never brings a beautiful girl home to me, he's so reserved.

Joele follows them when Sebastiano, with the tail between his legs, joins him.

SEBASTIANO

Joele... can we talk?

JOELE

Tell me everything, Daddy.

SEBASTIANO

Joe, listen... I didn't know how-

JOELE

Oh God, will you calm down? You think you're the first married man I've fucked? It's ok, trust me.

SEBASTIANO

... so, are we okay?

Joele nods. Sebastiano, with newfound serenity, walks briskly forward, leaving Joele behind.

21

**INT. JOELE'S BEACH HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT**

21

Joele joins his mother in the kitchen, opens the cabinet, and takes out the plates to set the table.

JOELE

I'll put the soup plates in, right?

Teresa, busy cooking, stops to gaze at her son, washed and well-dressed. Joele notices.

JOELE (CONT'D)

What's up?

TERESA

You're so handsome.

JOELE

Oh my God, Mom... enough of this story!

Joele heads toward the table with the plates. Teresa, frustrated, replies to her son.

TERESA

Next time, just say thank you and shut your mouth. What the hell!

JOELE

(surprised)  
What's wrong, Mom?

Teresa stares at her son. She seems to be struggling with whether to speak or not.

TERESA

It's just that... I'm your mother, and if I want to pay you a compliment, you have to let me.

JOELE

But why do you feel this need to tell me I'm handsome?

Teresa finds the courage and lets it all out.

TERESA

Because I always see you sad, Joe! You're always sulking and I don't know why, you never say anything to me, but you can talk to me... You can talk to me about everything.

Joele, surprised by his mother's outburst, remains silent.



SEBASTIANO (CONT'D)  
Come on, let's go.

JOELE  
Can we look for another place?

SEBASTIANO  
Don't be such a sissy. This is  
fine, come on!

Sebastiano grabs him by the wrist and drags him, but this time Joele resists and breaks free.

JOELE  
I said NO!

SEBASTIANO  
What's wrong with you? What's the  
problem?

JOELE  
That place is for voyeurs and  
desperate people. I'm not going in  
there.

Offended, Sebastiano approaches him threateningly. The two are face to face.

SEBASTIANO  
Who did you call desperate? Have  
you seen yourself? You still live  
with your mother.  
(mimicking him)  
"Joele never brings a beautiful  
girl home to me, he's so reserved."

JOELE  
We're not kids anymore, Seb.  
Teasing me won't get you anywhere.

Sebastiano calms down and tries to take Joele's hand again, but he pulls away. Sebastiano loses his temper.

SEBASTIANO  
You think you're better than me?  
You and I are the same.

JOELE  
I didn't start a fake family and  
then go fuck in the bushes. I may  
be a sissy, but I'll never be like  
you.

Sebastiano loses his temper and jumps on him. The two begin rolling in the sand. Joele tries to defend himself from Sebastiano, who towers over him. He's about to win when suddenly Joele punches him in the groin. Sebastiano falls to the ground as Joele gets to his feet. Joele stand up and looks at him in pain.

JOELE (CONT'D)

When we were kids, you left me  
alone on that bed, I waited for  
you... but that's enough now. I'm  
tired.

Joele walks away.

SEBASTIANO

But now I'm here. Haven't you  
understood yet that I've come back  
for you? Joele, wait... Joele!

Joele doesn't listen and continues on his way.

24      **EXT. MARKET - DAY**

24

Sebastiano's car is parked in front of a market where Michela is buying some magazines.

Sebastiano is sitting in the car. His expression reveals deep distress.

Sebastiano gets out of the car and walks away towards the sea.

25      **EXT. BEACH - DAY**

25

Teresa sunbathes on the lounge. Joele, on the deckchair, stares at her with unusual calm.

JOELE

Mom... let's take a bath, shall we?

Teresa turns her head toward her son.

26      **EXT. LABYRINTH - DAY (ONIRIC)**

26

Sebastiano, staring into space and with tears in his eyes, walks through the tunnels of the labyrinth. As he does so, he passes a slimy old man with a swollen belly, a trio of young prostitutes splitting money, and a boy smiling at him while adjusting his package: for a moment, he thinks he's Joele.

Hidden in the bushes, watching his progress are Teresa and Michela, Giuliana with Ettore, and Antonio with little Joele.

Sebastiano slowly advances through the undergrowth of the labyrinth until he disappears into it. Little Sebastiano follows shortly after.

27

**EXT. SEA - DAY**

27

Joele, floating in the water, confesses to his mother, standing beside him.

Teresa lovingly places her hand on her son's cheek. Joele, with his eyes closed, finally smiles.