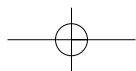
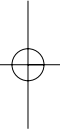
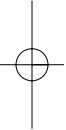
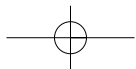
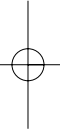
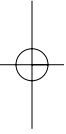
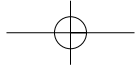
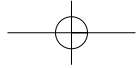


Ilaria Bernardini
The End of Love





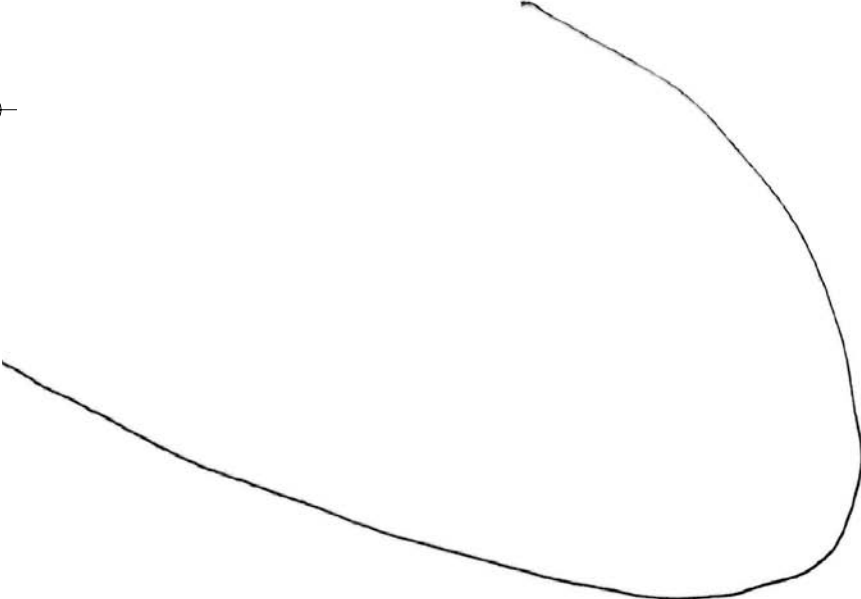


Ilaria Bernardini *The End of Love*

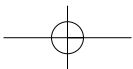
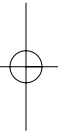
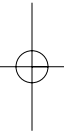
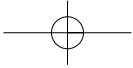
What are we talking about when we talk about love? Is there anything new to say?

This collection of thirteen stories recounts the mortality of fitted kitchens, the disappearance of a lover between the bathroom tiles and the desperate lies of a wayward she-cat. It heads North in discovery of what is needed to want a child and has some strange encounters. There is a swimmer who is addicted to water, another who loves you if you have dirty hair and a serial killer, Paul Maillon.

Ilaria Bernardini uses a precise, intense and original style, the end, but also the beginning and the effort of love. A modern analysis of the most widespread and mysterious need in the world.

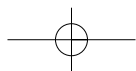
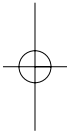
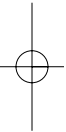
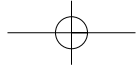


Ilaria Bernardini was born in 1977 in Milan. She has directed two theatre productions and one short film. She writes for *Marie Claire* and *Rolling Stone*. In 2005 she published her first novel: 'Non è niente' [It does not matter].



Index

The end of Love
Knots in the hair
My Mariolina
He and she head North
This morning I lost you
Shut
Everyone returns home
Free style
Do you have something to tell meA day as a blind man.
Water, Water!
Andrea loves Anna even with dirty hair
Paul Maillon



The end of love

The end of love has to do with the bottom of these white cups that, slowly but surely, become dark and stained. It has to do with sets of glasses that used to be six and are now four; and it has to do with the wholesale kitchen that does not last more than a couple of years because it starts to become unstuck and it is obvious that it is made of nothing. All plastic and laminate, and you want to act as if it were made of wood and iron. Now you have come to realize why it was so cheap: it cannot make love last, nor can it make its fake parts last. It cannot stay as it was when it was photographed, while you remember how it used to be, just perfect in the hundred-page catalogue, with the florescent lights and the blue bowls. It was adorable, there was the sun in those pictures and in such a place it looked as if love would last forever. For tranquillity, in such a comfortable kitchen, you only needed the kettle on, a pair of thick socks and washed hair. You would only need music on some Sundays with a clear sky and my legs, shiny with happiness. For when I am also happy, I know if you smile, it can be felt it everywhere.

For example, and I am not exaggerating, when you smile it can be felt beyond shut doors. Because when you smile it is a miracle and I am able to believe that we will be together forever. It is as if a soft, benevolent flow of electricity, which cannot be stopped, runs through the whole house. That electricity is you, when you have chosen your best mood and you get everywhere. It is you when you choose the right place and I do not need to tell you how boring, how wrong or how annoying it is.

Back then, when the rooms were empty and we had simply said we were going to take it. We liked the house and it looked like it had been built for us, we only had to choose who to be. Whether we wanted to be yellow or iron, big drawers or small ones. More space for pasta or for dishes? Cooker on the left and sink at the bottom? I have many clothes, and look what strange shoes you were hiding here. It was enough to trust in what we were going to be once the house was filled, and then to tell you to cook for me in that wok from page seven, I knew you would do it. The answer was always yes; they all seemed to be yeses. It was so easy, before the coffeemaker burnt and my bookshelves were over-packed, to say yes to each other.

It was easy and you wanted me. There were no reasons to say no. It was only smiles and the knowledge that we would always be happy

and that it would be you that picked the fruit. I would say you were so good, because I was happy to say you were good with the fruit and everything else. It was about wanting only this and thinking that agreeing was easy. We were on the same side, together, and why the hell should we part. But today even the bed sheets are not the same anymore, damn sheets, now they feel like paper and I cannot do anything about it. I washed them the wrong way or maybe just too many times and you may as well ask them, they are just sheets and do not speak my language.

Do me a favour, go and ask them what is happening? Some things you cannot reverse, the ruined sheets, the way in which you look at me now. Your eyes are not the same and my cheeks and my lips are aware of it. I would like to do everything and run, simply because the world takes account of this effort, but the sheets come back to mind, I do not know what softener to use, I do not know if maybe in cold water and I do not know if you prefer it. If you really want to go back to where we used to be, with the sheets and us. What is more, if I think of it, I wonder what the point of running is? It is a useless idea, some of my rubbish that has nothing to do with us.

What do *you* want? I ask myself, in this house that got old so quickly, with swollen eyes when I am not pretending I am better and under a ceiling peeling like dry lips. Since those days with trolleys and our first shopping trips I have put too many pictures up and you have smoked too many cigarettes, so now the walls are dark and the house always smells. We smell too, musty, of mothballs and winter soup. The coats smell and you do not say 'yes' to me anymore. I notice the yes is not there anymore and I wonder if it has gone to stay with the people on the third floor, who have just arrived along with the fire-red sofa still wrapped in cellophane and the lamps and all the words they still know how to say. I imagine them with that precious yes in their hands. Everything is easier with that yes, but if you now explain to them that among so many words it is the yes that is important, they would not understand.

But we of few yeses understand, it is as if we had forgotten all words, or maybe it is the words that were tired of always being in the same mouths. They travel and great is he who can convince them to stay, who can tell them that you do not know what is waiting for you, now comes the best part. But I understand them, it is natural they do not like staying here, where we no longer change the light bulbs and we do not even throw away yesterday's newspapers. They do not get the best from us anymore and we keep everything that comes to us, we

accumulate and that is all, without even looking, and you tell me you want your freedom and I look at you. I do not even understand the word because I have even forgotten that. I used to know what freedom was.

I used to be your freedom and it was *me* that you wanted. The freedom to be with me, that was what you wanted. But it was not long before I forgot, because my memory works like that. It needs to be encouraged, helped. I also wanted to, to forget, and I was wrong, I should not have and next time I will write it on my hand, I will write to myself not to forget the word freedom. Don't forget it. You want freedom; do not forget you want it. You must want it, it is important you know it. I will write it and advise myself, and I will do it because I do not trust these warnings I give myself. I am so careless I am Irritating, I know myself well and I could pretend not to notice freedom written on a wrist.

And this also has to do with the end of love. All the things that could not fit in the house and you said to yourself 'OK, I will do without'. Better the new pillows than freedom and better you than other eyes and other words. Better the two of us that can deal with anything, even enclosure. We can bear the loneliness of being just two and you know too our bunker was so beautiful. And when a bunker is beautiful it does not look like a bunker, it looks like a den, with supplies and the holds packed with cans of peas, beans and chick peas, and we can say things like 'you know we will always have enough food' and 'spaghetti does not ever go off' and 'biscuits just need to be closed in the barrel well'. It is cold outside and there is nothing new to see and it really is not out of laziness, it is a matter of how much can be kept in a house and in a heart, at least in mine.

You are in mine and you take up so much room that I have to choose you. I would choose you a thousand times over, your eyes and the things you say to me when you choose to speak. I choose to learn your songs and your books. I choose you and I should not, because once in a while I should choose myself, to see what would have become of me, had you never existed. And I do not know what would have become of me, I cannot even imagine. Nor can I imagine what music I would have liked or whether I would wear my hair in this way. That is a mistake and it is major ten on a scale from one to ten, since now we are similar and yet so different. You also like fennel only because I like it. But I can remember you saying how disgusting it was and that it was water-vegetable. And although we have written it on every sheet and letter, together forever and life and all the rest, love has gone nonetheless.

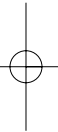
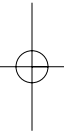
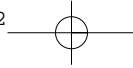
Because you paid hundreds of bills and you packed and emptied the fridge too many times. And then there is the dishwasher that jams more often now, as if it had understood that there is a problem and it no longer cleans the dishes as well now. It rebels and says what the hell, I am not going to keep being silent, it is hard with you two always making those faces. It is like that white machine, but not as white as it once was, lets the bits of broccoli stick to the dishes, all hard and tasteless, just like us. It does it on purpose, to let us know that things are not all right and that soap and water are not enough. And it is true that they are not enough, because broccoli will stay there and when I scrape it away with a nail it irritates me, it makes me shiver, so I give up and I put the plate away as it is and I tell myself I will think of it some other time. I lie on the sofa and I do not care about anything, about the papers on the floor or my fatter legs, I do not care about squinting and saying easy phrases that you will find boring, so that I will fall asleep without an answer. And you will be there by my side, smoking the umpteenth cigarette with those eyes that I could not tell to whom they belong. I can only tell they are not yours.

At the start when I used to fall asleep, on that same sofa we decided to define sexy, we did together. You were with me and I listened to you saying 'sleeping beauty' and 'my love' and you whispered 'let's go to sleep, I'll carry you if you want.' Now you only say 'I'm going'. Or you do not say anything and I wake up in the middle of the night on the dirty fabric. It is not sexy, dirty fabric. It is just dirty and it makes your nose itch. And when I cross the corridor, the night and the cold under my feet, I close the doors of all the rooms. The washing machine is full of lime-scale, the dog's bed is so filthy it is disgusting and my pants are loose around the edges. The elastic is out of shape, the colours are pale and faded. When I put them on and take them off I can feel they are tired, they know they are only there for me, hidden under the skirt and who is ever going to see them? They are right not to care about being nice and they are right to get old with the random, violent and careless washes. I do not love them and they know it, and in turn they have ceased loving me as well, because after a while you know how boring it is following me around. And at night I slip into bed, with a tired body I no longer recognize, and I only ever think of time going by and of death. But I pretend as if nothing happened when I think of death, I say 'Stop, let it go, because it's night and then you get scared', and I start to read whatever I find near the lamp. Tomorrow I will have forgotten everything, so I may as well choose anything. I will forget the lines I read and the

way you used to be when you loved me because it was natural and it was so beautiful, when it was all so different and I was different too. I am worse now than I have ever been. It was easy then not to tell you to remember that you love me, that I am a person to love. Remember that that you wanted to know me, that you wanted to touch me. Remember the kisses and the tongue, the hands and all the words. Remember them. But it is hard to tell you these things now that you have understood that I was not better then you thought and that you could love me and then stop.

Just to tell you two easy things like that when I am tired and you look somewhere else to avoid my eyes. I can tell you that peeing in that half broken loo is not what it used to be and the objects ware out, of course we do too.

But I will tell you a secret. A small thing, nothing particular. For some time now I have been peeing behind cars when I take the dog out and as I pee I think of you who gets so angry at such things and who says if you must pee in the street, then is the toilet not better, even if it is broken? And as I squat and take care to see if anyone is coming, quietly and for my benefit alone, I answer 'No, it's not better. It's much better here.'



Isbn Edizioni
Via Melzo 9
20129 Milan
Italy

T: +39 02 20229835 | F: +39 02 29513061
www.isbnedizioni.it
[mailto: info@isbnedizioni.it](mailto:info@isbnedizioni.it)

