EVERY MORNING, LEONARDO SPEDICATO GETS ONTO A CLAAS GT8000
By Nico Angiuli

Zelarino Town, Elena's Bar - 5:00 p.m.
My name is Spedicato Leonardo, my mother was a housewife, and my father a farmer. He would give tractors names like people used to do with animals.
I'm married to Sandra Lenzi, a primary school teacher in Mogliano Veneto, and we have two daughters, Giada and Maria.
I was a farmhand in the province of Venice; I was one of those brought back in after the change to the '*Leggero*', or rather law no. 171/52, the one that got us all kicked off the fields.
On 11th July 2053, five years ago to be precise, I almost died.
Prior to my reinstatement, I was well enough. I had started to read and to go out on long walks, which inevitably ended up near my house with an afternoon coffee.
Giada and Maria were pleased, and I would help them with their homework. Only my father wasn't happy: he said that I had to find myself another job.
For 20 years until 2052 I got up every morning at 5 o'clock, being in charge of the storage and monitoring of semi-automatic agricultural machinery: it wasn't a very tiring job because lately the machines did almost everything on their own, and my only real task was to open and close the hangars where the machines were kept, turn on the satellite systems, and at the end of the day I would pull the plugs on all the machinery.
But my colleagues and I knew well enough that sooner or later we would become superfluous.

Fully-Automatic Agricultural Machinery
Around the end of the '40s, a new generation of machines was put on the market, the FULLY AUTOMATICS. "A dream pursued for over 2000 years" they said, the ones who produced the machines.
Many landowners began investing in these machines, and they started sacking us all to pay the instalments on their purchases. I went to see them in action. It was a fairly indescribable sight, and it certainly left me speechless. They were a bit frightening because they were so proudly independent; it was fascinating how they could work without stopping, under the scorching sun or in pitch darkness, tilling the land until the morning light.
The first redundancy letters were sent out, sparking off protests and demonstrations: the trade unions fought to get us our jobs back, demanding that the new machines should be withdrawn from the market, because nobody really wanted to suddenly find themselves with an extra two million unemployed on their hands, least of all central government.
The protests came to an end with an agreement between the government and the trade unions: an agricultural compensation fund was established, with 80% of our wages guaranteed from 2050 until 2052, and a clause that by the end of these two years we were supposed to find ourselves new jobs.
At the start, a lot of farmhands set out looking for work, even accepting tiring and underpaid jobs, because they were scared of ending up penniless once the two years were up.
But as time went by, a different idea came to the fore: the idea that unemployment was in actual fact an opportunity, our chance never to work again.
And this, it must be said, was a private theory, a desire that insinuated itself, growing silently under our skin, just as we silently made the beds at home,

cooked for our wives and helped our children grow up. We even started changing channel: the Wednesday evening football match began to be replaced by documentaries and discussion programmes.
We had been told since the 19th century that machines would free us of the fatigue of labour, but they had only ended up freeing the bosses of their workers. If anything we had waited too long, and so the time was ripe to call in those promises.

It was at that time that I had started reading a book written by Gillo Dorfles in the last century: *"Nuovi riti nuovi miti"*. At a certain point, there was a passage that struck me, which said:
"At the beginning, every scientific discovery, every technical, technological and artistic invention has a cathartic function. It frees man from a state of servitude, of subjugation and submission. But as times goes on, that selfsame principle that had led to the discovery or invention of that particular technique may end up turning against man. It often happens that freedom from one form of slavery then leads to the establishment of equally coercive situations."

These words frightened me, but we believed in those promises even though the machines were fully operative.
The two years of compensation fund came to an end, but of the two million farm workers, only 15% had been looking for a job and less than half of them had managed to find one.
And so between '52 and '53 the situation degenerated. Though the government carried on paying our handouts for six more months, in the meantime they started looking for a way to get us back to work. they had two million on the dole to be re-positioned, and at the same time the trade unions no longer understood what role they were supposed to be playing, whether to defend the right to work or the opposite, the right not to work at all.
What people had called a historical watershed had turned out to be something of a mixed blessing.
There were new protests, a great number of housewives wrote letters to ask for their husbands to be re-employed. My wife Sandra wrote to the trade unions, saying it was unacceptable for these workers to be left on the dole. But we the workers wanted to savour the taste of freedom.
What the government wanted was for the workers to be gainfully employed, but of course they could not contemplate scrapping the fully-automatics.
In the end it was in fact the trade unions that presented a proposal to change the *Leggero*. The proposal was discussed, voted and approved in parliament before we knew it. In the first half of '53 teams of technicians were set up, and they developed a set of ergonomic directives designed to substitute the mechanical parts in contact with the ground. Basically, we were supposed to imitate the movements made by the machinery.
In less than six months, the modifications were ready, and the norms were approved for those who wanted to take advantage of them.
On 23rd August 2053, I presented my application to Zelarino Town Council; by now you could cut the atmosphere at home with a knife.
My father and Sandra found it hard to hide their satisfaction; my daughters didn't understand but I know they would have preferred me to stay with them and help them with their homework.

Elias the volunteer

Two weeks later I was sent the combine-harvesting sector in the Venice countryside.

It was a devilish solution. The Claas GT8000 had its electronic drum mowers removed, and we had been made to go on a training course. They showed us how to hook ourselves up to the machine, they kitted us out with reinforced gloves and overalls, the scythe to hitch onto our hips with an elastic cable so that it wouldn't get lost while on the job. We were to work lying flat, our knees bent, our feet in the air and arms on the ground. We were told that it was a comfortable position, but after the first few months of work, our knees were seriously starting to give way. – those union guys should have tried out those comfortable positions to see what they were really like!

But I was good. I'd found a system of my own to hang on in there, to fight back, imagining that there was an enemy in front of me and I had to hit out faster than him. It was a system that worked for me, that convinced me that I had to be faster and stronger than him, otherwise he would do me in.

Then the dreadful deed happened.

Elias was a volunteer, the son of a rich family who had decided to come and work in the fields. He wanted to see what the fatigues of hard labour really were, and he was tired of his bourgeois existence.

But he left loads of uncut stalks, and at the beginning he was forced to stay behind. When we got off the machine and would walk back through the fields to cut the wheat that he had left behind by hand.

That morning the machine was going particularly fast. Elias hooked himself up next to me. I was left-handed and nobody – me included – had noticed that he was right-handed. We started working. The wheat was very high and keeping up with the machine was very heavy-going. I reaped and reaped, keeping to my own rhythm, but Elias was falling behind. He was sweating, the scythe weighing heavy in his hands, he seemed ever more regretful with every stroke, but for crying out loud – it had been his choice, nobody had forced him.

It was a quarter to twelve when Elias drew back the scythe but let it drop too soon, sending the heavy blade off at an angle and piercing my arm. I didn't even realise immediately, I kept on reaping, reaping and reaping. I had my enemy in front of me, I couldn't let myself be killed. I must be the one who kills him! I am fast, I am strong, I am a machine!

Then he shouts out, because when he tries to draw the scythe back, it remains stuck in my arm. It was only then that I realised...then the sound of the ambulance sirens.

Elena's Bar - 5:20 p.m.

Five years have gone by since then. I've got a disability pension – 80% of my old wages – and one arm missing. And the others?

They're all still hooked.