

# It takes a great master to stir the pasta

FEDERICO FELLINI

*In September 1984, after receiving a request to direct an advertising spot for the Parma company, Federico Fellini sent Pietro Barilla a sober folder containing seven pages with a red cardboard cover bearing the title «Hints, preliminary ideas, suggestions, proposals for an advertising film on Barilla pasta». This contained eleven possible screenplays for the pasta spot, from which the staff at Barilla and the agency selected number 10, “High Society”, which then went on to be directed by Fellini and came to be affectionately known to all who saw it as Rigatoni.*

*The contents of the folder – today kept in the company’s Historic Archive – are reproduced here, word for word, as they give us some kind of idea, to the extent that this is possible, of the world as conceived by the Rimini-born director, and a unique view of his way of working. It takes a great master to stir the pasta, and there can be no doubt that Fellini was that master.*

## 1) WHO’S THAT FINE LADY?

Let’s take a desperate situation, such as:

Survivor of a shipwreck, all alone in the immensity of the ocean, surrounded by sharks.

Or: an astronaut, abandoned on the moon, with no hope of ever returning to the Earth.

Or again: a mountaineer, hanging on to a bush that is about to give way, and down there in the abyss, a lion awaits, its jaws open.

Just as the catastrophe is about to occur, a regal, beautiful woman, calm, confident, loving, appears on the scene to save the unfortunate victim.

At this point, the man wakes up all of a sudden (it turned out to be a dream all the time) and sits up on the bed, gasping and staring wildly, feeling his mouth with his hand, where he gets the impression that he can still feel

the warmth of that languid kiss. And he asks himself, who was that beautiful mystery woman who saved him from disaster?

A warm, inviting voice replies from the depths of his unconscious to tell him that the beautiful saviour was Barilla pasta, which nourishes, protects and offers us reassuring comfort amidst the dangers of everyday life.

## 2) ARIADNE’S THREAD

The Minotaur falls to the ground, killed by Theseus, who now has to find a way out of the maze, an impossible series of ladders on the way down, others going back up, corridors, narrow passages, roads blocked by brick walls, no entry signs, manhole covers and obstacles of every conceivable kind.

But Theseus has Ariadne’s thread with him, and, following it along the infinite stages in the labyrinth, he finally reaches the clearing from which he entered.

The joy of finding himself free is made even stronger when he discovers that Ariadne’s thread was nothing less than a soft, golden strand of spaghetti, that leads him to an enormous dish of hot pasta, over which the beautiful Ariadne sprinkles a shower of parmesan cheese.

## 3) THE REAL STORY OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

From behind a tree in the woods, we see the ugly muzzle of the wolf emerging, and we see him looking towards granny’s house with greedy eyes. With long, silent strides, he reaches the little house and knocks on the door. “Who’s there?” asks the old woman from within.

“Little Red Riding Hood!” says the big bad wolf.

“Come in”, says granny.

The gluttonous beast throws open the door and, just as he is about to leap on top of the old woman, he stops in his tracks and licks his whiskers as he starts to drool. Fascinated, he looks on as the sprightly old lady takes a pot full of pasta off the stove, drains it and puts it in a great big bowl on the table already set.

At that instant Little Red Riding Hood arrives, and instead of eating each other, these three legendary charac-

*Federico Fellini photographed by Edgardo Antonucci in the Campidoglio, Rome, in 1986, on the occasion of the award of the Alcide De Gasperi prize to Pietro Barilla (ASB, BAR I Aa, 1986/1).*



ters, the grandmother, the big bad wolf, and Little Red Riding Hood, plunge their forks into the glorious, flavoursome Barilla pasta.

#### 4) THE BARILLA ORCHESTRA

An orchestra in which each instrument is in some way connected with pasta, either in its shape, colour or by way of fantastic analogies.

For example, the strings of the harp are spaghetti, the tuba is a golden rigatoni, the flutes, clarinets and oboe are penne, bucatini and cannolicchi. The xylophone is made up of rectangles of pappardelle... in short, with the right will credible similarities can be found.

When all the musicians and their instruments are seated behind their scores, the conductor steps up onto the podium with his baton raised, and the orchestra plays that musical phrase that sings the praises of Barilla pasta.

#### 5) WINDMILLS

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza see the rotating blades of a giant windmill appear on the background of a desolate landscape. Believing it to be a giant, Don Quixote gets ready to charge at it with his lance, but when he reaches the building on his breathless, worn-out Rocinante, he discovers that it's not only a windmill but the white windmill (mulino bianco) of Barilla. The knight of the sad countenance and the faithful Sancho Panza then dismount and get ready to taste the fine products that the beautiful Dulcinea is placing on the brilliant white tablecloth under the sun. The blades of the windmill turn lazily in the clear air, playing the tune of the music box.

#### 6) THE TRIAL

Pasta is on trial in the courthouse, accused of making

people put on weight, increasing cholesterol levels, and causing hypertension and diabetes. “The proof is overwhelming”, thunders counsel for the prosecution, “Pasta is a true criminal, that has to be removed from society!”

The court, the jury and the public listen in a silence that presages a guilty verdict.

The judge looks at the clock. Just past one o’clock. The trial is adjourned for an hour, and will resume at two. The bench and the jury get up and go off for lunch. In the room alongside the courthouse, there’s a long table where elegant waiters and pretty waitresses are serving pasta in every shape and form. Even counsel for the prosecution plunges his fork into his dish of vermicelli, with obvious satisfaction. *Buon appetito* to everybody! Back in the deserted courthouse, the accused, Mrs. Pasta, a pleasant, likeable woman with a certain fascination, sits alone between two policemen, and looks at us with an affectionate, rather ironic smile.

#### 7) THE TREASURES OF THE CORSAIRS

Along the deserted beach of an uncharted island, washed by a sea that stretches away to infinity, walks Robinson Crusoe, bending down every so often to collect something from the shoreline – starfish, blades of grass, polished stones, seashells. Then he comes across an unusual little object, the same shape as a seashell, but not a seashell. It’s a golden yellow colour, solid and delicate at the same time. Out to sea, a large sailing ship has run aground a few hundred metres from the shore.

The man goes into the sea, swims towards the large vessel lying on one side, reaches it and climbs on board. A quick glance is all it takes for him to realise the ship belongs to the corsairs. Corsairs mean treasure, and Robinson leaps down into the hold, which is stashed full of strongboxes, chests and trunks.

When he pulls away the covers, he finds the most extraordinary treasure he could have ever hoped for – the chests are full of spaghetti, pasta shells, vermicelli, macaroni and all the other precious pastas from Barilla.

#### 8) THE PICNIC

Lunch on the lawn for a group of friends of both sexes,

all in cheerful, festive mood. The sky is clear, the view enchanting and the lawn soft and fragrant.

The happy group has gathered around the large tablecloth spread on the ground and, with joyous laughter and applause, greets the arrival of the huge dish heaped full of pasta.

But all of a sudden a violent wind gets up and sends napkins, plates and glasses flying all over the place.

An immense shadow casts darkness over the scene. Alarm, fear, men and women grasp each other in atmosphere that hints at the end of the world.

Then, a ray of cold, bluish light cuts through the darkness and showers down like icy water on the tablecloth from an enormous disc suspended a few metres above the ground. The roar of the wind has been silenced, and in the sudden silence the only sound is a piercing hiss. Then this too fades away, the band of light goes out and the disc, travelling at enormous speed, disappears into the sky, which has become blue again.

The unfortunate day trippers look at each other in amazement. They are all safe and sound, and nothing terrible has happened to any of them. Only one thing is missing – the dish with the pasta.

Where can it have gone? Inside the flying saucer we can see three greenish coloured naked creatures eating the stolen spaghetti with grunts of satisfaction. We can only ask them why they acted in this way, and in the language of the extraterrestrials (whistles, sighs and pops that the electronic translating device converts into our language), the three creatures reply, «Well, the pasta was Barilla, of course!»

#### 9) THE LAST COMIC

In the style of the old comic actors, Ridolini, Buster Keaton, Fatty (filmed in black and white with a hint of sepia at the edges, jerky rhythms, action speeded up), in a two roomed setting (lounge and kitchen), we watch a classic chase involving three people who take it in turns to run after each other, arguing ferociously among themselves all the time. They trip each other up, leap from one sofa to another and dangle from the light fittings. Then, in the end, taking up defensive positions behind armchairs, seats and the piano, they start throwing

the first things that come to hand at each other – vases, books, ornaments, plates, paintings. They eventually reach the kitchen, where the chase continues between tables and the stove, and here they attack each other with piles of plates, ladles, pots, lids, eggs, tomatoes, salamis, cakes, up to the point when one of them is about to pick up a pot from the stove, inside which pasta is cooking.

He stops, confused, unsure what to do next. No, he cannot throw that pot. The others approach, look at each other, smile, then they drain the pasta. Pacified at last, they sit down around the table and start to eat.

#### 10) HIGH SOCIETY

A luxurious restaurant. Rugs, curtains, crystal, chandeliers in Murano glass, immense mirrors in gilded frames, embroidered tablecloths, all in an extremely elegant, refined atmosphere. Discreet buzz of conversation among the very well dressed diners, punctuated by the sound of crystal chalices and silver cutlery, with the occasional strain of romantic music played by a small orchestra of dinner-jacketed musicians.

The diners are in evening dress, with tailcoats and high class tailoring much in evidence. In the most intimate corner, under the soft lights of a great candelabra, a highly distinguished couple listen to the head waiter's ritual litany with polite distraction, as this latter, surrounded by four impeccably dressed waiters, rhymes off the speciality dishes of the house. We faintly hear the occasional word, hinting at exotic cuisine: "... canard... orange... tartare... chateaubriand... à la mousse..."

The beautiful lady, with large languid eyes and an aristocratic pallor, passes her long-fingered, diaphanous hand over her marble temples, lightly veined in pale blue, showing off the precious stones that sparkle from her rings... and looks at her companion with a timid smile, as if awaiting confirmation. The gentleman, with his silver locks and dignified appearance, removes his monocle and half closes his eyes in a slight nod of assent.

At that point the splendid lady slowly turns her swan-like neck towards the chef, who bends forward to ac-

cept the order, and in a deep, velvety voice murmurs, "Rigatoni!"

The distinguished gentleman smiles with approval and, after breathing gently over his monocle, replaces it over his eye, as he exchanges a look of love with the fine lady.

#### 11) MEDITERRANEAN CIVILISATION

An enchanting, metaphysically dreamlike climate, an unspecified coastline in southern Italy. In the background, a deep blue sea, furrowed with long streaks of white foam.

Amid this dazzling vision, we can make out the outlines of ancient ruins. The remains of Greek temples, light and solemn, with broken columns still rising up against the cobalt sky, broad stairways with the grass growing through, capitals half-buried in the golden sand, dotted with huge mother-of-pearl shells. A slight breeze, which seems to be blowing from the depths of time, caresses these motionless forms, which project long shadows on the sandy grass, poignant witnesses to a remote civilisation, which still succeeds in casting its spell over us.

A celebratory yet melancholy music appears to announce the arrival of a group of revellers. And indeed, down there by the shoreline we can see a cortège of people advancing with dancing movements. They are celebrating a pair of newly-weds who, surrounded by the musicians, launch into a joyous, disorderly dance. The echo of the sounds, laughter and voices finds its way up to the solemn remains we've already seen, with their columns, tympanums suspended in an airy equilibrium, corroded capitals and fragmented stairways. The sun is going down. The light, glancing over these forms, covers them in a new beauty. They seem to palpitate and look transformed, with new shadows and colours. And now, as if by magic, the columns appear to rotate around their axes very slowly, and finally settle themselves down with all the other elements – shells, capitals, and so on.

On a large, enamelled surface, which turns out to be a huge porcelain dish, all these forms now appear as the various types of Barilla pasta.