

Extract from: Franco Supino, *Ciao amore, ciao*
(Rotpunktverlag, Zurich: 2004)
Translated by Donal McLaughlin

Prologue

During the week I sit in front of the radio with my mother every night. My mother works from home, piecework, and after dinner I have to help. The younger ones are in bed, Father is working shifts. Mother and I are fitting ball-bearings, the radio's broadcasting the Sanremo Festival. My mother never listens properly and so rarely remembers names. The evenings of the qualifying rounds, I sit there and root for performers I wrongly imagine might triumph.

For the final on Saturday night, everyone's round the radio: Mother's work is placed aside, Father's dozing in the armchair, with his arms folded. Mother flicks through a magazine and asks from time to time who that is, singing now? The little ones jump around on the sofa, both over-excited and fighting tiredness as they've been allowed - for once - to stay up. I - the only one listening - am afraid that once again I haven't picked the winner, and change my prediction every fifteen minutes.

The piecework was monotonous, and there was no talking. The penetrating smell of the lubricant has taken root in my memory. No matter how you scrub, it won't leave your skin. The radio was always on in the background. Reception was bad, medium wave it was, constant interference, and the volume couldn't be controlled, sometimes too loud, but mostly too faint. Mother left the radio on because Italian was being spoken. What was said or being sung barely interested her. I, on the other hand, couldn't have stood the monotony of the work, were it not for the words and the melodies.

As a teenager, I didn't like Sanremo any more. Mother had given up working from home, now the little ones were of school-age too, and had gone to work in a factory again. You could pick up Italian TV in Switzerland meanwhile and so people now *watched* the Festival. Suddenly, it was the decor that was important, and the clothes, and the gestures. The sound quality had improved too. Sanremo was no longer the same. It was seldom the case that I stayed at home and joined the others to watch it. When I did, I bit my tongue and didn't say anything, rather than disrupt the harmony surrounding me. Sanremo wasn't for me any more.

I would never have thought - having grown up and left home - that I'd ever be interested in the Festival again, until in 1997, in an Italian weekly, I read a bitter reader's letter about what its author regarded as very poor taste. To mark the 30th anniversary of the events, the Festival would have the same presenter as in 1967. And the slogan, once again, would be: *Comunque vada, sarà un successo* - *It will be a success, whatever happens.*