

### Machina ex Deus

His light blue shirt fitted snugly, but not tightly. It had been ironed carefully with prominent creases down each arm. Turning sideways, he dipped his shoulder so he could see the flash of gold braid on his epaulets. The street below his apartment was growling to life, reminding him that his work was waiting. Truong quickly glanced around his basic apartment, before grabbing his folding stool and racing toward the fire stairs.

He hurried along the sidewalk towards his entitlement, carefully avoiding the parked scooters, but occasionally reaching out to caress a fairing or a seat. They waited, quiet and dormant, ready to awaken. The local People's Committee had entrusted him with the most important job in the city. His uniform recognition of his stature. On the street, scooters glided back and forth, majestically avoiding pedestrians, and clumsy cars and trucks.

A couple of regulars had already arrived. He sat on his stool and dutifully wrote out a receipt for each. He tilted his head as he heard the familiar tone of his favorite, the BMW 400 GT. It sounded like no other and it was beautiful with a sculpted, lustrous, metallic, black body. Nam worked at the Vietcom Bank office across the street. He must have been important to have such a machine. He took his receipt and hurried towards his office, the scooters parting as he stepped purposely. Through the morning Truong's regulars continued to arrive, including Am with her white Honda NS C110. He looked down as he wrote her receipt, not making eye contact, embarrassed for the scratched and dented Honda with the black plastic showing beneath the paint. He had suggested to her that his friend Phung could repair it. He was a master, carefully laying scooter body work on the footpath as he filled and burnished it. Smiling as he resurrected the beauty of the machine. Am ignored him. Van was the same. No respect for his older Piaggio 50. It was diminutive and lacked complexity, not even beautiful, but it had been built by people who understood.

Truong listened. He could hear low, rhythmic singing. He looked towards the park where a small crowd gathered. He was torn. His charges were settled and content, but it was his duty to watch over them, to protect them. He had spread towels across their seats in case of rain. He walked along the line double-checking that none were touching. He paused at the BMW and smiled, stroking the fairing, feeling the slow curve as it sloped towards the wheel. He crossed quickly towards the park, the scooters weaving away from him.

Their faces glowed, an unworldly gold, and they bowed in adulation. He pushed his way to the front so he could see the source. The light radiated from its gold paintwork, glowing, drawing them. The scooter hovered; it was magnificent. It was a Lambretta TV 175.

He dropped to his knees and bowed; his face golden.