

Jack the Reaper

by Vittorio Franceschi

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The Process Begins

This project had its very first beginnings in the fall of 2006, when I was considering options for my senior work at Middlebury College. I had declared an Italian-Theatre joint major and was looking for something that could incorporate the two. The suggestion that I latched onto was that of a translation of a contemporary Italian play, never before translated into English. So when I set off to study in Ferrara, Italy for the first six months of 2007, I kept my eyes open for possibilities, browsing through bookstores for new, interesting, possibly local plays. One of the classes I was taking at the University of Ferrara, a course called *Comunicazione teatrale* (Theatrical Communication), was taught by an engaging and passionate professor – Roberta Gandolfi. I asked her for recommendations, and she gave me the names of a few playwrights to look into.

One of her suggestions was Vittorio Franceschi, a man of the theatre from Bologna, the capital of Emilia-Romagna, the same region in which Ferrara is found. I read some of his works and took an instant liking to them. When I returned to the U.S, I read through his works, searching for just the right one. Although many of the plays that reflected Franceschi’s background in Cabaret theatre attracted me, I decided against using them since they were so thoroughly steeped in Italian culture that they would have had terrible difficulty functioning in another context. I was still left with a wide variety to choose from, and finally settled on a two-act play about a serial killer and a tv-crew that captured my imagination: “*Jack lo sventratore*”. The themes of reality and fiction that the script played with fascinated me. The vibrant characters, each with their own charms

and flaws, captivated me, and the echoes of Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author", which had been my first introduction to Italian theatre, thrilled me. I was hooked, and started to plan the next stage of the adventure: meeting the playwright himself.

Encountering Vittorio Franceschi

I first met Vittorio Franceschi on a brisk Bolognese evening in January, 2008. I was able to contact Signor Franceschi in the late fall of 2007, and told him that I would be coming to Italy in January, and if the occasion arose, I would love to meet with him. When I arrived, we confirmed the event: he was scheduled to perform a reading of the 132nd chapter of "Moby Dick" at the Circolo Pavese, a cultural club off the beaten sight-seeing path of Bologna, and I could come hear him speak and then chat with him afterwards. That evening, after a heart-felt recitation of a poem in honor of a club member who had recently passed away, Franceschi skillfully performed Melville's piece. After a period of questions and answers with the audience, people began to file out and I finally got to meet the actor/playwright/director face to face.

In the bustle of post-performance *auguri*'s, Sr. Franceschi suggested to me that we go someplace more tranquil to talk, and so I joined him, his official English translator Marla Moffa, and set designer Matteo Soltanto for a late dinner in a warm and cozy *osteria*. It was getting close to 11:00pm, so we were the only diners there, but our waitress was genial and the food was excellent. We talked about this project, how it had

begun and where I wanted to take it. Sr. Franceschi was certainly surprised and curious as to how I, a young American student, had stumbled upon his works. I explained how Professor Gandolfi had directed me to his plays, and he was pleased to know that he was starting to gain some recognition in the universities. After over forty years, he supposed it was about time. We discussed my idea of translating “*Jack lo sventratore*” for my thesis project, and he gave me his personal go-ahead. That evening was neither the time nor the place for a formal interview, but we later agreed to correspond via e-mail, since our schedules would not permit another meeting.

Despite this, I felt that during my time with him that evening, I learned a lot about him. I found Sr. Franceschi to be a humble man, who had an air of great gravity to him. Not to say that he was always completely serious – he told us, with a humorous and understated theatrical flair, the story of how he had accidentally managed to schedule two different dentists to extract the exact same tooth on the same day. Nonetheless, his eyes were filled with an impressive depth of one who knows a great deal about the world he lives in. To me, he represented the true spirit of a storyteller.

A Biography of Vittorio Franceschi

Vittorio Franceschi was born in Bologna, on October 14, 1936. His father Luigi was a woodcutter, and his mother Paola had been a factory worker until the birth of her first of two children, Anna, in 1931. The Franceschi household also included at the time Paola’s sister Laura, who was working as a school caretaker. They lived in a loft of a

building in city center, a few hundred yards from the *piazza maggiore*. The home was two bedrooms and a kitchen whose only source of heat was a stove run on sawdust (since wood was too expensive). The only books they owned were a collection of Biblical illustrations, and Vittorio's beloved "The Adventures of Pinocchio".

In 1941, Luigi Franceschi was out of work due to the war, and, encouraged by the fascist government, immigrated to Bremen, Germany to work in the war industry. After the first air raids on Bologna, Paola took her children and fled to live in a farmhouse owned by distant relatives of her husband in Marzabotto, a small town five miles outside of Bologna. Laura preferred to remain in the city. The family lived in an attic above the stalls for three years, speaking only in dialect, not the standard Italian taught in schools. In August, 1944, Luigi died under an Allied bombardment. Upon receiving this news, the family returned immediately to Bologna, with ironically fortunate timing. The month after they left, Sturmbannführer Walter Reder led a massacre of the citizens of Marzobotto, killing over 700 men, women and children.

The return to Bologna was not easy, however. Franceschi stated, "with my father's death, my family passed from poverty, in which we had always lived, into true and abject misery." Sleeping all in the same bed, they lived off of beneficent organizations, charity from their parish on Christmas and Easter and the generosity of their downstairs neighbors, who owned a funeral parlor, and were therefore certainly getting enough money to get by. Paola occasionally received small subsidies for the "forthcoming pension" she was due as a civil widow of war. After the liberation, the Franceschi family was still in trouble. Anna became an apprentice in a workshop of artificial flowers, where she worked until her wedding in 1952. Laura began to beg on

the streets, which began her lifelong profession. She begged until the age of 80, and died at 82.

Despite these family difficulties, Vittorio got a diploma of third *avviamento* (roughly equivalent to junior high, but usually frequented by children of low-income families, looking to get a “piece of paper” in hopes of finding a proper job), and enrolled in the high school for the arts. By this point in time, he his interest in theatre had already begun to blossom. From his first encounter with a puppet theatre in the years after the war ended, his creative instinct had grown strong, writing his first play at the age of 15. However, after one year of high school, he could no longer afford it, and went to work odd jobs wherever he could find them. In December, 1955, Vittorio’s mother was diagnosed with carcinoma of the spinal column. The doctors could do nothing for her, and so she spent her last six months painfully at home, as her son tried to nurse her. She died on July 3, 1956, at the age of 56 (six years before her pension ever arrived). The young Franceschi found a job working for the Oxygen Industry Society and held down the job until 1958. He had enrolled in the *Accademia Antoniana d’arte Drammatica* (the Antonian Academy of Dramatic Arts) to train as an actor while simultaneously working his steady job, and in October of 1958, after receiving his diploma, he left for Milan to become an actor.

Franceschi began his career in the cabaret theatres of Milan in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. The Italian cabaret theatre originated in small establishments in Milan, and is a descendant of the French cabarets and German Kabarett theatre, with aesthetically transgressive and politically charged material. Franceschi became a member of the Established Theatre of Trieste, where he had his first professional production of a play he

had written, “*Pinocchio Minore*” (“Younger Pinocchio”) in 1964. Four years later, with Dario Fo and Franca Rame, he was one of the founding members of the Nuova Scena Association.

Franceschi has acted in a diverse repertoire of shows. Notable acting credits include: Reduce in Angelo (Ruzante) Beolco’s “*Il parlamento*” (directed by Francesco Macedonio), Tartuffe in Molière’s “*Tartuffe*”, (directed by Francesco Macedonio) Oedipus in Sophocles’ “*Oedipus Rex*” (directed by Benno Besson), Godson in Malaparte’s “*Das Kopital*” (directed by Franco Giraldi), Robespierre in Przybyszewska’s “*Sprawa Dantona*” (directed by Andrzej Wajda), Pécuchet in Flaubert’s “*Bouvard et Pécuchet*” (directed by Giovanni Pampiglione), and Gloucester in Shakespeare’s “King Lear” (directed by Glauco Mauri). He has also acted in French for two productions at the Comédie de Genève, and four films.

His successes in the field of playwriting are even more impressive. Seventeen of his texts have been published in Italy and abroad. He has won many awards and prizes for playwriting. His two most lauded pieces have been “*Scacco pazzo*” (“Mate in Three”), for which he was awarded 1st prize at the IDI (*Istituto del Dramma Italiano* – Italian Dramatic Institute) for never-produced plays (1990), IDI prize for the best new play produced in 1991, as well as the Taormina Arte Prize and the AGIS Golden Ticket, both in 1992; and “*Il sorriso di Daphne*” (“Daphne’s Smile”), for which he was awarded the Enrico Maria Salerno Prize in 2004, and the ETI – Olimpico Prize and the Ubu Prize in 2006. “*Jack lo sventratore*” was honored at its premier at the Due Mondi Festival in Spoleto in 1992 with the IDI Production Prize.

Franceschi still lives in Bologna – in fact, his current residence is less than a

hundred yards from his childhood home. He teaches acting at the Alessandro Galante Garrone School of Theatre, of which he is also the co-director. Most recently, he has been touring Italy with a production of “*Svet. La luce splende nelle tenebre*” (“Svet. The Light Shines in the Shadows”), a newly realized manifestation of a never-completed play by Leo Tolstoy, written in Italian by Danilo Macrì, and directed by Marco Sciaccaluga. Future projects are yet unknown, but Franceschi shows no intention of stopping his work in the theatre.

A History of Nuova Scena

The Nuova Scena theatre company was founded in 1968 by Dario Fo, Franca Rame and Vittorio Franceschi. In 1977, the company took control of San Leonardo, a deconsecrated church, restructured and transformed it into a 180-seat theatre. Here, the company developed its own artistic aesthetic, blending together different forms of performance art – theatre, music and dance. Beginning in 1981, Nuova Scena began a new project in collaboration with the City of Bologna: “interAction”. Housed in the Testoni Theatre, a larger space with a capacity of 500 audience members, the scope of this project was to produce shows and invite other artists – theatre makers, dancers and musicians; Italians and foreigners alike – to experiment and exhibit their results. In 1985, the company was recognized officially by the Italian government as the *Teatro Stabile di Produzione* – Established Producing Theatre of Bologna.

A great new step was taken in 1994 when the city administration handed the

management of the Arena del Sole to Nuova Scena, and the company was transferred there on February 20 of that year. The Arena del Sole was built by Pietro Bonini on the site of a convent of Dominican nuns that was abandoned after the Napoleonic suppression of religious orders. It housed its first theatrical production, "*Corradina d'Este al Torneo o l'Eroe del Rubicone*" ("Corradina of Este at the Tournament, or the Hero of the Rubicon") on July 5, 1810. It was originally an open-air theatre, but in the 1930's a removable roof was installed for the winters. In 1949, as cinema was gaining great popularity, the Arena del Sole was demolished and rebuilt as a movie theatre, screening its first film, "*Cavalcata d'eroi*" ("Cavalcade of Heroes") by Mario Costa on April 24, 1950. In 1984, the city of Bologna acquired the property, and ran two theatrical seasons there under the artistic direction of Yuri Lyubimov before the region of Emilia Romagna helped fund the radical transformation of the Arena into the theatre that stands today. From their days at San Leonardo to the transfer to the Arena del Sole, Nuova Scena had brought 771,541 spectators to the theatre.

Nuova Scena – Established Theatre of Bologna is now funded by the Italian State, the region of Emilia Romagna, and the city of Bologna. Additionally, it was one of the founding members of the European Theatrical Convention, a group recognized by the Commission of European Communities, consisting of 25 producing theatres in 14 European countries, with its central location in Luxembourg. Their artistic pursuits are frequently collaborations with various directors focused on contemporary playwriting, new Italian plays, and modern readings of classic texts.

I was able to witness two manifestations the Nuova Scena experience myself. Matteo Soltanto, the designer I had met with the night I met Sr. Franceschi, had designed

the sets and costumes for “*Drammi didattici*” (“Didactic Dramas”), a collection of two plays by Bertolt Brecht (“*Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis*” and “*Die Ausnahme und die Regel*”), and invited me to see it at the Arena del Sole. The production was a collaboration between the Arena del Sole and Arte e Salute Onlus, an organization that produces a wide variety of theatre with psychiatric patients as the featured actors, aiming not only to give the patients a means to express themselves, but also to change public perception of people suffering from mental illness. The other show hosted by Arena del Sole – Nuova Scena that I witnessed was Ascanio Celestini’s “*Appunti per un film sulla lotta di classe*” (“Notes for a Film on the Struggle of the Classes”), where the protagonist/playwright, who declared himself a Communist at the beginning of the evening, spoke and sang stories of laborers around Italy. These charged, meaningful shows are typical fare of the shows produced and hosted by Nuova Scena – theatre with a purpose.

Translation Choices

I would like to explain here a few of the larger choices I made in this translation. The first choice is the location. The original text never explicitly states where Jack’s Mother’s apartment is found. The town is Anytown, Italy. Because of this openness, I felt comfortable deciding that my version would be transferred across the Atlantic to Anytown, U.S.A for the purposes of an American production. When I spoke with Sr. Franceschi, he agreed that part of the intrigue of the story is the fact that the audience

does not know where the events transpire, allowing it to be as close to home as their imagination lets it be. To achieve this goal of keeping the play close to the audience, the geographical references were all taken out of Europe and into America, and the language spoken is American English. If a director outside of the U.S. wanted to put on an English production of “*Jack lo sventratore*”, I would encourage the shifting of the script to fit the locale. I believe that this allows for a more authentic experience for the audience. The original Italian audiences witnessed the telling of a story that could potentially have taken in their home city – or one near by – without ever being completely sure. I wanted an American audience to have the same experience.

A related choice is that of the names of the characters. I chose to follow a precedent set by Christopher Cruise in his translation of “*Scacco Pazzo*” (“Mate in Three”) and followed by Marla Moffa’s translation of “*Il Sorriso di Daphne*” (“Daphne’s Smile”), and leave the original Italian names unaltered. A character’s name is a part of the character itself, chosen by the playwright for specific reasons, and I did not wish to alter the characters by Anglicizing their names. Although the names can remind the audience that the play was originally Italian, I believe that they do not ultimately detract from the American-ness of this translation. After all, it is a nation of diversity, where we encounter names from across all cultures.

The *Sventratore* Problem

Perhaps the most difficult issue in translating this script was that of the words

sventratore (and its verbal form *sventrare*) and *squartatore* (and its verbal form *squartare*). In the play, there is a discussion of why the serial killer wanted to be known as *Jack lo sventratore*, and not *Jack lo quartatore*. Both words had been used in the past as Italian translations of the moniker “the Ripper” when referring to the London killer. However, *squartatore* became more popular and is now in standard use. For the purposes of this English translation, however, these two Italian words that came from a common English source had to retain their separateness or the entire point of Jack’s choice to be known as the *sventratore* and not the *squartatore* would be lost. Only one could return to its English source “ripper”. Therefore, I had to look into the denotations and connotations of the two words in Italian.

Squartare as a verb can be used to mean “to rip” or “to tear”, and can be used today in reference to pieces of paper, but also has violent connotations from its historical root meaning of “to draw and quarter”. *Sventrare* is more like the English word “to gut” and can be used for both the removing of the innards of a fish and the demolishing of a building. Their phonetic similarity is also a notable factor that I wanted to take into consideration. Since *squartatore* was the name that the media originally gave the Jack of this play, and *sventratore* was a name that came later, I decided to assign “ripper” to *squartatore* and use a new word for *sventratore*. I talked with students and native speakers of both English and Italian, composing lists of possible words I could use to make this contrast. Although “to gut” shared all uses and connotations of *sventrare*, the substantive form loses all power: Jack the Gutter would be a ridiculous name for a serial killer. Other failed possibilities were Jack the Disemboweler, Jack the Eviscerator, the Butcher, the Tearer, the Raper, the Slasher and the Slicer. Finally, I thought of the

possibility of Jack the Reaper. It certainly was not a literal translation of *sventratore*, but it had the right sound, and the undertones resonated with me.

Looking back to the text I tried to ask myself what Franceschi's Jack would pick for himself if he were an English speaker. The switch from *squartatore* and *sventratore* seemed to be very deliberately motivated. This Jack wanted to stand out from London's Jack, and he wanted to be something grander. In Italian, Jack is not satisfied with *squartatore* because while you can *squartare* a woman or an ox, you can *sventrare* much greater things: a building, a city, a planet. I needed my English-speaking Jack's ego to be satisfied with a new moniker of similar greatness. What image is more frightful and universal than that of the Grim Reaper? To be linked to Death itself would be gloriously imposing. I knew that I had found my ideal translation when I realized that *Jack lo sventratore*, with his **obsession** with super-human justice and the cold pitilessness he showed toward his victims, would feel proud to be known as Jack the Reaper.

The Name Game

A particularly difficult passage began on the third page of the second act, when Jack's Friend tries to guess the Journalist's name. The two characters are talking quietly as the others sleep around them. The Journalist smoothly tries to get information from Jack's Friend about his past relationship with the killer, but he turns it around and begins a flirtatious guessing game to get her to reveal something about herself to him. When I set out to tackle this passage, I had already decided to leave the character's names

unaltered. However, for this passage, the use of the original names being guessed would be counter-intuitive and confusing for the audience. In the original Italian, Jack's Friend starts off guessing Italian names that could possibly be the Journalist's, and then the names he guesses become gradually more comical, trying names that are increasingly rare in Italy. However, leaving them un-altered in English produces somewhat of a reverse effect. In the United States today, names like Josephine and Marilyn are much more expected than Lucilla or Carlotta, and so the point of the joke would be lost. To reflect the original pattern, I replaced the first set of Italian names with anglicized equivalents, and used names that would sound foreign or absurd in his later guesses.

A second problem arises when the Journalist reveals her name – Bianca. It is a name that transcends culture, being popular in both Italy and the United States, but the two cultures have different connotations associated with it. In Italian, the name is also the feminine singular form of the adjective meaning “white”. So whereas to an Italian audience, the connection with the name Bianca and the moon would be immediately evident, I needed to guide an American audience there a bit more explicitly. It's not out of character to imagine that Jack's Friend knows a thing or two about Romance languages and would therefore know that the name Bianca has its roots in words meaning “white”, so I helped the audience out by having him vocalize the thought process that went into making the connection.

The most complicated issue in this passage was the translation of an idiom. In English-speaking cultures, when children are looking for a hidden object, one tells them “you're getting colder” if they get further away, “you're getting warmer” if they get closer, and “you're burning hot!” when they're right on top of it. Italy's equivalent is

“acqua”, “fuochino” and “fuoco”, literally “water”, “little fire” and “fire”. It was a difficult passage to deduce at first, being unfamiliar with the idiom, but **once I understood** the secondary meaning of “acqua”, I was able to insert the equivalent English idiom for the passage to make sense.

However, this change left many loose ends untied. The moment a change is made that deviates from the literal sense of the original text, there is a chain reaction of consequences. Having changed “water” to “cold”, the joke about Venus no longer functioned, since the transition relied on Venus being born from the sea. I had to connect the English idiom to a different name that Jack’s Friend could guess that could share as many connotations with Venus as possible. Some connotations would of course have to be sacrificed, since there are no standards of female beauty more well-known than Venus. I felt that Snow White was the most appropriate choice for the matter – coming from folkloric tradition, she has a mythical timelessness that Venus also possesses, but is renowned for beauty associated with the cold, not water. Jack’s Friend has already finished guessing names that he believes could truly be the Journalist’s; this final guess is motivated by flirtation and fantasy, luring the Journalist into biting the metaphorical apple.

A Storyteller’s Story

It should not be surprising, given Vittorio Franceschi’s life and works, that “*Jack lo sventratore*” is at its heart a storyteller’s story. We have all seen pieces of theatre that

have in some way “missed the point”. They try to achieve something so lofty, abstract or unrefined that the audience is left feeling unwelcome or poorly guided through the play. The public is bored and insulted when they sit in their seats and the playwright has given them something too muddy, too distant or too unbelievable to appreciate. Sometimes a play is confused in its telling and fails to convey all the meaning it intended. Others present a compelling and interesting situation, but the characters who ought to bring it to life are flat and fail to engage the interest of audience. Still others pump all their energy into making a visually and aurally stunning work that while the eyes and ears get their fill, the mind is left with nothing to chew on. Franceschi’s works never fall under these categories, because he focuses so well on the human-to-human communication that is at the very basis of theatre: the true art of telling a story. Storytellers, or *cantastorie*, have always been a part of Italian culture, from Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, through Carlo Collodi, Luigi Pirandello and Orazio Strano, up to the modern day as Franceschi, and other playwrights, actors, directors and designers continue the tradition, telling new stories all across Italy.

Looking at Signor Franceschi’s body of work, one sees how strong a role storytelling plays in his aesthetic. Several of his plays (“*La signora dalle scarpe strette*”, “*Cabaret da viaggio*”, “*Il fanciullo allegro*”, “*L’arca di Gegè*”, “*Frammenti di vita*”, for example) have strong echoes of Franceschi’s roots in Cabaret theatre in Milan. They tell stories with songs and dialogue, usually with one overarching plot for the whole show, but sometimes crafted in a more episodic format. Other works include monologues for one actor, some lengthy pieces that could hold their own as a brief evening of theatre (“*Dialogo col sepolto vivo*”, “*La barbona e il pappagallo*”), and other brief explorations

of ideas that could be performed in conjunction with other pieces (“*Una malattia non classificata*”, “*Voglia di pentimento*”, “<http://web.lapidaria.it>”, “*Il provino*”, “*Qualcosa da salvare*”). The rest of his plays (such as “*Il sorriso di Daphne*”, “*Scacco pazzo*”, “*Ordine d’arrivo*”, “*Autoscontro*”, “*La regina dei capelli*”, “*L’uomo che mangiava i coriandoli*”, “*I naufragi di Maria*”) can be categorized together as being more standard “straight plays”, but nonetheless have a great diversity in their content. There are stories of families, friends and lovers, stories of youth and old age. Several of them involve ailments of the mind, things which inhibit the capacity to recall stories of the past. Themes and plot elements can range from love, to addiction, to fame and euthanasia, but the focus always remains on the characters and the stories that they have to tell.

“*Jack lo sventratore*” is no exception. It examines storytelling on several levels. The fact that it is a piece of theatre where the characters are in the process of making television brings the artifice of the two media into the spotlight. It is ironic when the Journalist tells Jack about how he needs to tell stories for television, saying, “[w]e’re not at the theatre.”¹ The audience suddenly becomes very aware of the fact that they are sitting in a theatre and are thus forced to consider the implications. We see the Director modify truth for the sake of making good television, and we constantly wonder how truthful Jack’s Friend and the Mother with their stories about Jack. What is reality and what is fiction is not as clearly defined as we want it to be. We go to the theatre knowing to usually expect a fictitious story, but we watch the news on television expecting the truth. When we see television-makers on stage making their story into “[p]ure theatre”,² as the Director puts it, we become uncomfortable and distrusting. This play uses a dual

¹ *Jack the Reaper*, p 25.

² *Jack the Reaper*, p 116.

format of storytelling (the act of producing television represented on a stage) to allow the audience to examine the various types of storytellers contained within the play.

The speaking characters in “*Jack lo sventratore*” each have their own way to tell a story. The Camera-Man, for example, loves to butt into the conversation with quick anecdotes of his life. Despite protests from his co-workers and the several promises that he won’t say another thing, he cannot help but tell anyone who will listen about his wife, his daughters, his mechanic buddy who ripped him off one time. The Camera-Man tells stories to try to get people to relate to him. His stories are not particularly lengthy, intricate or original, but they help him to come off as a likeable character because of their earnest, occasionally self-deprecating perspective.

Carolina’s stories are not too complicated either, as she is more accustomed to being a tool through which the story is told. Her function in the crew is “a pair of lips”³, as the Journalist puts it, little more than a pretty mouthpiece, and sometimes even just a prop. Her body is used to re-enact the stories of Jack’s crimes – she obediently contorts herself on the floor playing the role of the corpse of Jack’s first victim so that the Director can get a good visual for the re-enactment scene he envisions. The stories that she herself produces are trivial at best, and it is shown that her function primarily lies in assisting others telling their stories.

The Director is a character whose storytelling abilities are more prominently featured than the previous four mentioned. He tells his stories with bright lights and colors. His goal is to achieve high ratings, with the most attractive and flashy story. He compromises strict adherence to realism in exchange for a more widely appealing transmission. He takes liberties and feels free to play with the story. He tells the

³ *Jack the Reaper*, p 5.

Journalist, “[i]t’s a game, I mean. The truth won’t be altered. Just re-dressed. And it really needs some re-dressing, poor thing. As it is, it isn’t very nice to look at.”⁴ The Director is a storyteller whose attention is focused on the audience and how they will receive it.

The Mother’s perspective on storytelling is completely contrary to the Director’s style. While the Director is an entertainer, the Mother is a historian. She does not think about the aesthetic appeal of her stories, only the complete accuracy in the re-telling. Her role in the story of Jack was that of the scribe. Jack recounted his stories and his Mother wrote them down. Creativity was not a concern in her task, only facts. This nature is reflected in stories she tells in front of the television crew. At first she is reticent, telling the Journalist, “[t]here isn’t much to say about my life. And besides, I’m not used to talking about it.”⁵ When she does begin to tell her own story, her style is dry and succinct. She only includes the details she believes are absolutely necessary to convey the facts of the story. Her personal feelings and reactions to events are left out of the stories she tells. She speaks of how her husband abandoned her for an eighteen-year-old girl, but she leaves her emotions out of the story. Most people want to share their emotions with others as they tell stories, looking for sympathy, a release, or a connection with the listener. The Mother does not describe the pain of being left by her husband, for to her it is superfluous to the story. She has already stated the facts, and her suffering is a redundant detail that can be surmised from the facts. When telling about the family’s home, she mentions that she dislikes sunlight only out of the necessity of needing to make the crew to understand that it was a place of conflict, not out of any intentional

⁴ *Jack the Reaper*, p 21.

⁵ *Jack the Reaper* p 9.

desire to let listeners to have particular insights about her personality. She never intends to be poetic in her speech, only clear and concise.

The Journalist initially seems to be the type of storyteller who would side with the Mother's style. At first, the flowery language of Jack's Friend is too much for her. When he speaks of man having to become blade, she interrupts and reprimands him. "You need to be clearer! Television is a very simple and very direct means of communication. The news needs to be precise and dry, bam!! [...] Don't speak in metaphors, please: one plus one is two."⁶ Her adherence to her own rules, however, is at best wavering. Even before she admonishes Jack's Friend, she herself has shown an appreciation of metaphors and imagery. Her idea to order the transmission based on the cycle of the seasons rather than the true chronology of the events shows her weakness for a beautiful image. Despite her assertions of professionalism, she betrays the dry and direct storytelling that her job demands when she is seduced by the poetry of Jack's Friend. She plays along with his tour of the "old historic district" at the beginning of the second act, and after her affection is won again by his final song she consents to the fantasy wedding, her last act before her death. The side of her character that favors literal and direct storytelling is in the end overcome by fantasy and imagination.

No other character has as great an imagination as Jack's Friend, and no other character is as captivating a storyteller. He begins with stories of Jack's youth, slashing tires and watching courtroom dramas. He delights the crew with his passion, eccentricities and charisma. The Camera-Man tells him he could be a talented actor. He enchants them all with his charm. His stories are vibrant and full of life, with attention given to the details that make the images more vivid. At the same time, however, he

⁶ *Jack the Reaper* p 25.

leaves many elements unexplained. His mysteries, as he calls them, entice the crew. He baits them with these little packets of information. Some, like that of the lily of the valley, he eventually reveals to them, showing some reluctance; others, like that of his true name, continually elude them. The captivating stories that Jack's Friend tells become for him a source of great power. His imaginative style keeps his audience always engaged, and his abstract and poetic language keeps them one step behind him. He seduces the Journalist with fantasy and poetry, tickling her imagination and leading her astray.

"Jack lo sventratore" gives its audience a look at several different storytellers, each with their own charms and moral ambiguities. We find the Camera-Man so affable and relatable throughout the play, but then are we disturbed when he takes delight as he films the Journalist fight with the Mother, break down into tears and give Jack's Friend a slap? Do we blame the Mother for protecting and loving her murderous son, completely leaving justice as the responsibility of God? And are we, like the Journalist, seduced by Jack's Friend's charms and drawn to like and trust a man who could be a homicidal maniac? Whether sticking strictly to the facts or embellishing with artistic license, using blinding lights or seductive metaphors, there are many different ways to tell a tale to another person. Once the play has come to an end, however, perhaps the only thing one can be sure of is that one of the fundamental elements of good theatre is a good story to tell.

JACK THE REAPER

Synopsis

A modern-day serial killer has already killed 18 women. A small, private television crew has identified the house (a dark basement-level apartment) of the mother of the killer – dubbed “Jack the Reaper” by the press, after the historic Jack in whose footsteps today’s Jack is following. In fact, he kills in the same way as London’s Jack of the late nineteenth century. It was a childhood friend of Jack, his best friend, who disclosed the old woman’s house to the crew. And it is the same friend who drove them there, to respond, with the mother, to the journalist’s questions about Jack (now even his mother and friend refer to him by this name), who disappeared years ago (although a light filters through the closed door of his room). What were his tastes? His favorite color? Did he believe in God? And his early childhood? Girls? Questions abound, bold and silly alike, while the crew bit by bit lights the cavernous room, making it into a bright studio set: curtains, mirrors, armchairs and couches, spotlights... is it possible that television transforms reality? It would be a fantastic story. The journalist persists with her inquiries and we can ask ourselves if beside the old mother, is it really a friend of Jack or Jack himself responding to the questions? Such is the process of identification of this strange character who knows everything about Jack, even the innermost secret workings of his mind. Perhaps more prudence, more sensibility, more respect for this mother’s pain is necessary. But the crew delves unrelentingly into the darkest corners, even asking the friend to re-enact a crime, with a young starlet called up to play the victim. Magnificent, bravo! Everything is recorded, and soon the material will be ready to air, an audience is guaranteed. But suddenly, there is a black-out. Agitated voices in the dark, this is not fiction! A few seconds. When the lights return, the journalist is on the ground, stabbed to death. Who was it? Has Jack returned? Or has his friend already taken over all of his characteristics, including homicide? Or, more simply, are Jack and his friend the same person? We will never know. But is it really that important? The crew is terrified and runs out, jumping over the corpse. Chaos is God’s crazy brother, the mother says, which of the two will judge us?

JACK THE REAPER
(Jack lo sventratore)
(1992)

A play in two acts by
Vittorio Franceschi

Characters

JACK'S FRIEND – a man in his forties

JACK'S MOTHER

A somewhat scruffy crew of a small, private TV program, composed of:

The JOURNALIST (Bianca) – beautiful, somewhat intellectual, in her thirties

The DIRECTOR (Elio) – in his forties

The CAMERA-MAN (Lallo) – in his fifties

The ELECTRICIAN (Alberto) – who does not speak

The SOUND TECHNICIAN (Gigi) – who does not speak

Additionally:

CAROLINA – a very cute young actress

ACT ONE

In the basement level of an apartment complex. A large, bare and squalid room, more like a garage than an apartment. There are two doors on the back wall, left and right. Next to the left door there is a switch. A short distance from the right door, towards center, a filthy sink with only one basin and a broken mirror. On the left wall, there is the main entrance, which is wider than normal, like a shop door. A bit more downstage is a chipped door to the bathroom. Set up by the left wall is a little Formica table with metal legs. On it, a small lamp, a radio, and piles of puzzle magazines, many of which are scattered on the floor. Next to the table are an old wicker chair and a cloth folding chair. Here and there are mountains of cardboard boxes and various junk. On the upstage wall, twenty-three calendars are hung in an orderly manner, in tiers. Two lines of nine below one line of five. Low on the left, hung by a nail, a dark jacket. High on the left wall are three little frosted-glass windows which look out to the building's courtyard. At center, hanging from the ceiling, there is a rectangular light, similar to those used in billiard halls. On the right wall, towards the back, is the circuit breaker. A light filters from under the door on the left and its keyhole.

It's about ten in the evening, and the scene is dark. The sound of a motor is heard from outside. The light from two headlights beams for an instant from the windows, weakly lighting the set before disappearing. The motor stops, car doors slam, and we hear the scuffling of feet. The door on the left suddenly opens and quickly closes again. Again the set is lit, due to the intense light coming from the room. We have enough time to see

the figure of an elderly woman sitting on the wicker chair. Then everything falls dark again. A key turns in the main entrance door, which opens slowly, letting through the dim light of a streetlight. The beam of a flashlight, held by JACK'S FRIEND, cuts the darkness.

JACK'S FRIEND

Shut the door.

(The door is shut. In the semi-darkness we catch a glimpse of a few silhouettes.)

Here.

(With the flashlight, JACK'S FRIEND illuminates the calendars, the sink, the doors, and finally the seated woman – JACK'S MOTHER – who protects her eyes with her hand.)

MOTHER

Turn off that flashlight.

JACK'S FRIEND

Sorry.

(The scene falls into darkness, but after a moment the lamp turns on. Now we see a bit better the characters that have entered together with JACK'S FRIEND: the JOURNALIST, the DIRECTOR, the CAMERA-MAN, and two TECHNICIANS, who are carrying a few rolls of electric cables. They all stand motionless in front of the main door.)

MOTHER

Come forward.

JACK'S FRIEND

I didn't mean to hurt your eyes. I wasn't even sure I would find you here.

MOTHER

And where did you think I would be?

JACK'S FRIEND

Well, I don't know. In bed, resting.

MOTHER

Why would you think that! I was waiting for you.

(Eyes the group.)

There were supposed to be two.

JOURNALIST

Plus the director. Good evening, ma'am!

MOTHER

No. Two in total.

JACK'S FRIEND

Maybe it's my fault, I didn't specify well. But I am sure that there were three. Two plus the director.

MOTHER

But there are five.

DIRECTOR

For a transmission like this, it was the minimum, ma'am. Eighteen installments is no joke.

JOURNALIST

I assure you that the troupe is already down to the barest minimum.

CAMERA-MAN

I'm a man of few words, and those two are mute.
(Indicates the two TECHNICIANS)

DIRECTOR

Carolina has been warned, too. We told her: don't buzz, don't call, just knock lightly. Delicately.

MOTHER

Who is Carolina?

JOURNALIST

An assistant. She'll be joining us later.

DIRECTOR

As soon as she finishes her show at the Old Regular.

MOTHER

Is she really necessary?

JOURNALIST

Smiles are very important on the small screen. To break the tension, understand? A couple of remarks, a pair of lips...

MOTHER

We're not off to a good start.

CAMERA-MAN

Calm down, we're being quiet.

MOTHER

It's not because of the noise – no one can hear anything coming from down here. It's all the coming and going that worries me.

DIRECTOR

There will be no comings and goings. As soon as the girl arrives, we bolt the door and for a week, nobody leaves this place. We've got cots, food, everything. A bunker. Have some faith.

MOTHER

If someone discovers us...

JOURNALIST

Ma'am, we guarantee you the highest secrecy. I'll take full responsibility.

DIRECTOR

We are a very serious station.

JOURNALIST

It's in everyone's best interest, right?

JACK'S FRIEND

Otherwise, good-bye scoop!

(ALL smile)

Is there some coffee left?

MOTHER

No.

JACK'S FRIEND

News from Jack?

MOTHER

No.

JACK'S FRIEND

Okay... well, let's make ourselves comfortable.

(Takes the folding chair, opens it, and places it in front of the JOURNALIST)

Please.

JOURNALIST

(Having taken out from her briefcase a pen, a notepad, and some loose papers.)

How kind.

(Sits.)

JACK'S FRIEND

Well... this is Jack's home.

DIRECTOR

(Indicating the up-left door.)

What's in there?

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack's room.

DIRECTOR

Ah, interesting!

JACK'S FRIEND

But you can't go in.

DIRECTOR

Why not?

MOTHER

You can't.

JACK'S FRIEND

Don't insist.

JOURNALIST

It would be very important for the transmission.

MOTHER

No.

(General discomfort)

CAMERA-MAN

And over there?

(Indicates the door on the right)

JACK'S FRIEND

The bathroom.

DIRECTOR

And over there?

(Indicates the up-right door)

MOTHER

That is my room. Go right on in.
(No one moves.)

Please.

DIRECTOR

Later, later.

MOTHER

There are a lot of photographs.

JOURNALIST

(Rising, very interested)

Ah-ha!

DIRECTOR

Photographs?

(Takes a step toward the door)

JACK'S FRIEND

But only of Jack as a child. Of Jack as a little kid. Nothing that could reveal what the Jack of today looks like. There aren't any photos of Jack after he was twelve.

(The JOURNALIST sits back down)

CAMERA-MAN

Couldn't we have a bit more light? I won't say another thing.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, of course. No need to settle for darkness.

(Flicks the switch next to the left door. The ceiling light turns on, violently illuminating the middle of the room, which now vaguely resembles a boxing ring)

Round one, fight!

(Laughs)

CAMERA-MAN

Just look at the conditions we have to work with!

DIRECTOR

What a shit-hole.

JOURNALIST

Let's not exaggerate.

MOTHER

It's our natural light.

JOURNALIST

It's an interesting touch. Lallo, get ready.

(The CAMERA-MAN shoulders the camera. The
JOURNALIST grabs a microphone that she will hold
out in turn to the interviewees)

Ma'am, may I ask a few questions?

MOTHER

Of me?

JOURNALIST

Sure. Tell us about yourself. It's a good way to start the transmission.

MOTHER

There isn't much to say about my life. And besides, I'm not used to talking about it.

JOURNALIST

It'll be a surprise, you'll see. Tell us about when you were a girl. Blonde? Brunette?

MOTHER

I don't even remember anymore.

(ALL laugh)

DIRECTOR

Good, keep going! See? You've made a good impression with the audience.

MOTHER

The audience?

JOURNALIST

I mean, if *we* like you! We're a tough crowd, you know? But the audience is easy to please. Come on, continue. Let's say that you had red hair. Is red okay?

MOTHER

If it's okay with you...

JOURNALIST

How kind!

DIRECTOR

Good! See? It's easy!

JOURNALIST

So, what were you like as a girl? Dreams? Plans?

MOTHER

As a girl, I was poor.

DIRECTOR

(Indicating to the CAMERA-MAN to zoom in on the MOTHER)

Lallo, go.

MOTHER

My parents made every sacrifice so that I could study. I loved history, philosophy, literature.

JOURNALIST

So you have some cultural interests.

MOTHER

Oh, not any more. Now I do cross-word puzzles.

JACK'S FRIEND

But she never finishes them. She's always left with a few blank boxes.

MOTHER

It feeds the Hudson. Six letters.⁷ Well! I also like proverbs. Live as a wolf, die as a wolf... the hare gets away when the dog looks away...⁸

JOURNALIST

And to what do we owe this decline in interest?

MOTHER

In what?

JOURNALIST

In culture.

MOTHER

Ah... I was about to graduate when I met an enterprising young man who asked me to be his wife. I said yes. My parents cried, but I was happy. I loved him. He did a thousand different jobs, and I was there behind him: washing, cooking, laughing. When we had bills to pay, instead of paining ourselves, we said: today, let's invent life!

⁷ Originally: "It feeds the Moselle. Three letters". The MOTHER's crossword puzzles have clues pertaining to European geography (The Moselle – *Mosella* in Italian – is a river in France). For an American production, I have changed them to more familiar locations.

⁸ The original Italian contains proverbs made up by the MOTHER, literally: "He who is born a wolf dies dismal" and "The hare escapes when the dog is scratching itself"

JOURNALIST

Beautiful! Right, Elio?

DIRECTOR

Yes, very poetic.

(The two TECHNICIANS exit)

MOTHER

He had many brilliant ideas, he was an artist. One day he opened a shop of artificial flowers. He was a success, and then I got pregnant. We wanted a boy, and a boy was born.

CAMERA-MAN

What luck! I've got three girls!

DIRECTOR

Quiet, you!

CAMERA-MAN

Sorry, sorry. It just sticks it to me right here.

(Indicates his stomach)

If nothing else, they've gotten past the little dresses and sweaters. Let's just say that that was a relief.

JOURNALIST

(To the MOTHER)

And then?

MOTHER

We went to live in a little house with a garden. First we rented it, then after a few years it was ours. There was an abundance of light there. So many large windows, sun the whole day. I don't like the sun.

JACK'S FRIEND

(As if recalling an ancient dialogue)

"Open the curtains, Mom!" – "Too much sun ruins the plants!" – "Is it possible to have two good things together? Why do we always deny ourselves one of the two?" – "I don't know what to say to you, Enrico. But don't you open those curtains!" ...

(Looks at the on-lookers with an air of one who asks: did you like that?)

MOTHER

We were passably happy. We had a dog, a cat and two magnolias. You wouldn't even know that here inside bloomed roses, lilies, violets. More beautiful than real ones. A garden.

(She covers her face with her hand, as if she has just now noticed the presence of the camera.)

JOURNALIST

You don't mind if we film, right? It's important material. Memories, the past. Everything is born there. Over here, Lallo.

(The CAMERA-MAN changes position and keeps on filming.)

DIRECTOR

(To the two TECHNICIANS who are returning with more equipment.)

Quietly.

(From here on out, the two will exit and enter several times, bringing from off-stage various crates containing curtains, electric and sound equipment, mainly stage lights and microphones, which they will mount on stage.)

JOURNALIST

(Fanning herself with her notepad)

How on earth were you relocated here?

MOTHER

You can say banished. After fifteen years of marriage, my husband ran off with an eighteen-year-old girl who worked for him and I never saw him again.

(The DIRECTOR stifles a laugh)

He sold the house without telling me anything, including the furniture, even the magnolias, even the camera. He took away the dog and left us the cat. Pinched-up black and white little bastard, as my son used to say. Luckily, the shop was still being leased, and the contract was in my name. Jack was twelve.

JOURNALIST

But aren't there any windows here?

JACK'S FRIEND

There.

(Indicates the little windows up high)

Dark at night, dark during the day.

MOTHER

As if it weren't enough, cars park up against those windows.

JACK'S FRIEND

That's when Jack began slashing tires.

JOURNALIST

Interesting. He started out like that? Lallo, in on him.

DIRECTOR

(To JACK'S FRIEND, tidying him up)

Smoothly, okay? Without Jack here, you are the protagonist, you need to feel like you are the master of the field. Would you mind standing more over here?

(The DIRECTOR places JACK'S FRIEND center, under the light)

JACK'S FRIEND

Here?

DIRECTOR

Does that work, Lallo?

CAMERA-MAN

Good.

(Meanwhile, the SOUND TECHNICIAN has placed a microphone stand, with microphone, in front of JACK'S FRIEND)

JACK'S FRIEND

What do I need to do?

JOURNALIST

Not a thing, sir, just respond to the questions.

DIRECTOR

Naturally.

JOURNALIST

Would you like to sit down? We have a couch and a rocking chair, too, in the van.

JACK'S FRIEND

No thanks, I'm ready to roll right now!

(ALL laugh)

CAMERA-MAN

That's great!

(To his colleagues)

Isn't he friendly!

(The DIRECTOR sits down again)

JOURNALIST

(Speaking into a microphone that she holds in her hand)

Anyway, he used to slash tires.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, but it didn't last long. It didn't give him any pleasure. I mean... he was looking for something else. And besides, he couldn't stand the owners yelling. One time, they beat him.

JOURNALIST

He was discovered!

MOTHER

There wasn't any proof.

JOURNALIST

Maybe someone saw him...

MOTHER

There wasn't any proof!

JACK'S FRIEND

For a while, they didn't park their cars there anymore. Then they started to again.

CAMERA-MAN

Just like in my neighborhood, same thing. The other Sunday...

DIRECTOR

Hey, no, Lallo, c'mon.

CAMERA-MAN

Sorry.

DIRECTOR

If everybody's talking... if everybody's making comments... then we'll need to cut here, edit there... alright, no, okay?!

JOURNALIST

We're not cutting anything, we're leaving it all. Truth, naturalness. Voices, comments, sounds, everything. Even the fuck-ups, people like that. Like real life.

(To the MOTHER)

Every installment will be divided in three parts. The first is introductory: some color, setting, interviews, etc. Then the central part: reconstruction of the crime. Then the conclusion: round table discussion with the experts.

MOTHER

Will I need to be there, too?

JOURNALIST

No, not you. If anything, at the last installment, as a guest.

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

After that incident, did Jack slash tires again?

(JACK'S FRIEND hesitates)

DIRECTOR

(Indicating the microphone stand)

Speak into the microphone.

MOTHER

No.

JACK'S FRIEND

No. He confided in me once...

(To the JOURNALIST)

Jack told everything to me! He confided in me that he had gone out to slash again. He had already opened the knife. This one.

(JACK'S FRIEND fishes out of his pocket a switchblade wrapped in a white handkerchief marked with blood. Instinctively, everyone gets closer to look.)

CAMERA-MAN

I can't see anything.

(Everyone moves back)

DIRECTOR

Hey, close-up?

CAMERA-MAN

Of course.

DIRECTOR

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Open it. Open the handkerchief.

(JACK'S FRIEND very cautiously opens the handkerchief)

Pull out the blade.

(JACK'S FRIEND looks at the MOTHER, who looks away. Then he puts the bloody handkerchief into his jacket pocket and pulls out the blade)

Now wield it.

MOTHER

(Bending over the cross-word puzzle)

When dreams end, the monsters run free.

DIRECTOR

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Come on, wield it. Good. And now make a movement like this, as if to strike...

(The DIRECTOR indicates a striking gesture from bottom to top)

MOTHER

No!

DIRECTOR

Hey, she can't keep on saying no! Stop!

MOTHER

The motion is too familiar.

JOURNALIST

This, however, you need to leave to us to decide. I realize, you are the mother of the monster...

(The JOURNALIST freezes on the inside)

But we need to have freedom of movement.

DIRECTOR

A little.

JOURNALIST

I guarantee you, ma'am, that we will make proper use of this material. Not to mention that we're paying.

DIRECTOR

We're paying very well!

MOTHER

I know, I know...

JACK'S FRIEND

(Still wielding the knife)

It isn't very good of you.

JOURNALIST

It's neither good nor bad. The contract is signed and you've already taken the deposit.

MOTHER

We shouldn't have...

JACK'S FRIEND

(Leaning over the MOTHER, affectionately)

We did it for your own good, Jack entrusted you to me. You need care, there's the light bill to pay, food to buy. And you need to buy a new pair of glasses.

(To the onlookers)

She can't even do her crossword puzzles any more!

(To the MOTHER)

And then, what if Jack comes back!

(To the onlookers)

Because he can come back at any moment!

(To the MOTHER)

Is this what you would call a house? Does it seem fitting to you to welcome him here? With this money, you could furnish it, buy a washer, a television... so you can watch when this goes on air!

(To the onlookers)

When does this go on air?

JOURNALIST

In December.

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the MOTHER)

For Christmas!

JOURNALIST

And also, by talking openly about Jack, many things will be understood, so many aspects of his personality, so many taboos will cease to be.

JACK'S FRIEND

You all can't imagine how many lies they tell. Whenever the newspapers are short on news they pull out Jack's story. To every murdered woman's name, they pin the name of Jack, they remember him only when there's a corpse. "It's Jack's work", "Suspicious on Jack", "The nth victim of Jack", "The same methods"!

MOTHER

Twenty years later!

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack only killed young girls. Sometimes...

(The MOTHER cries)

... nearly kids. The oldest of all his victims was only twenty two years old. Ornella. Last week, they killed a sixty four-year-old prostitute. Strangled and raped. And instantly they blame Jack. But Jack never raped his victims, let alone strangled them. He used a knife. How can they say the same methods? A sixty four-year-old prostitute! Jack will be furious! All of his victims were perfumed with lily of the valley, understand? Lily of the valley!

JOURNALIST

Yes, we read that.

JACK'S FRIEND

But Jack has already stopped killing. Twenty years have passed since the last time.

MOTHER

(Who has regained her composure)

He's healed!

JACK'S FRIEND

People change.

MOTHER

Twenty years! If I saw him, I wouldn't recognize him.

DIRECTOR

So no slashing gesture?

JOURNALIST

No gesture.

(To the DIRECTOR)

Or maybe later on.

(To the CAMERA-MAN)

Go back to the knife and then onto me.

(The CAMERA-MAN films)

This is the knife of Jack the Reaper. With this knife Jack killed eighteen women. But the hand holding it isn't Jack's, it is his dearest friend's. His best friend, childhood friend.

(Takes under her arm JACK'S FRIEND, who is visibly embarrassed)

They grew up together. They dreamed together. They cried together. Sir, do you know Jack?

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, yes.

JOURNALIST
Do you care about him?

JACK'S FRIEND
Oh, yes. Very much.

JOURNALIST
Could you tell us something about him?

JACK'S FRIEND
Yes. What?

JOURNALIST
Whatever you like. Your childhood games, his favorite color.

MOTHER
Yellow.

JACK'S FRIEND
Yellow.
(To the MOTHER)
Also green.
(To the JOURNALIST)
But yellow more.

JOURNALIST
Was he an animal lover?

JACK'S FRIEND
Yes, your honor.

(The onlookers look at him, stupefied)

DIRECTOR
Why "your honor"?

(JACK'S FRIEND hesitates to respond)

MOTHER
He always said it, since he was a kid. I believe he read it in a book.

JACK'S FRIEND
Actually, no. He actually saw it in a film. Jack didn't read much, Jack read very little.
Open and shut, like some surgeons when they discover that the sickness has won. Instead

he went to the movies a lot. He liked courtroom dramas. There's always someone who says "your honor" there. In the finale.

DIRECTOR

Wait! I have an idea! Fantastic!

JOURNALIST

What?

DIRECTOR

A court!

MOTHER

(Rising)

What do you mean by that?

DIRECTOR

Calm down, ma'am. Nothing dangerous.

(He makes her sit back down)

The proceedings. The courtroom. Jack's friend reconstructs the crimes. His mother testifies.

(To the JOURNALIST)

And you will be the chief justice, who asks all the questions. It's a game, I mean. The truth won't be altered. Just re-dressed. And it really needs some re-dressing, poor thing. As it is, it isn't very nice to look at.

JOURNALIST

As long as we're clear on one thing: the transmission is mine, I conduct it, the interviews are mine. I decide the order of the crimes, too.

DIRECTOR

Don't you think that they will decide that? They want to respect the real order of events.

JOURNALIST

We'll see. There's a game of sequences that I'm particularly fond of.

DIRECTOR

Sequences?

JOURNALIST

The game of the seasons. Summer crimes, winter crimes, spring crimes... it could be an idea, don't you think?

DIRECTOR

Yes, yes... it could be...

(To the MOTHER)

We're going to transform the room a bit but without ruining anything. Then we'll put everything back in order.

MOTHER

I don't know if Jack would be happy.

DIRECTOR

I think he would, I think he would. If he said "your honor"...

JOURNALIST

(Signaling to the CAMERA-MAN to start filming)

Did he say it often?

JACK'S FRIEND

Mm, yes. Once in a while. He dreamed of being condemned unjustly.

DIRECTOR

This is great! Why?

JACK'S FRIEND

He said that injustice brings you closer to God. He had searched a lot in that direction.

MOTHER

(Leaning over the crossword puzzle)

Contributes after the Missouri and the Ohio⁹.

JOURNALIST

We'll have a method to get deeper. But let's proceed in an orderly fashion. We were talking about tires, and slashing them. Jack had gone out into the courtyard a second time.

JACK'S FRIEND

Ah, yes. He had just opened the knife. But he didn't slash the tires.

JOURNALIST

Was he disturbed? Did someone arrive?

JACK'S FRIEND

No, it was just...

(Looks at the knife that he clutches in his hand)

He had pity for the knife.

MOTHER

(Still over her crossword puzzle)

For the blade.

⁹ The original crossword clue here was another reference to Italian rivers; "It comes before the Riparia and the Baltea" (two tributaries of the Po River), with the solution possibly being the Maira, the most major tributary further west. Here I supplied two major tributaries of the Mississippi, leaving the probable solution as the Arkansas.

JACK'S FRIEND

For the blade. Yes, he talked to her often, and so...

CAMERA-MAN

To the blade?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. Excuse me... can I loosen up a little bit? Excuse me...

JOURNALIST

But of course.

(JACK'S FRIEND closes the knife, wraps it up again in the handkerchief, and puts it back in his pocket)

DIRECTOR

Wait! In the meanwhile, how about the rest of us think about the court. Everybody before the bar! Do we have a balustrade?

CAMERA-MAN

We've got everything, doc.

DIRECTOR

And a gavel?

CAMERA-MAN

We even have that.

(The SOUND TECHNICIAN fishes a gavel from a crate and pounds it)
Order in the court!

(Little chuckles. JACK'S FRIEND, in a corner, is moving to loosen up his muscles. The two TECHNICIANS exit)

DIRECTOR

Good, loosen up. Like that!

JACK'S FRIEND

It strengthens the solar plexus. Oxidizes the adrenal gland... and the peritoneum... from here to here!

(Extends his hand first with the palm down low and then up high)

Not to mention the liver... the spleen... and obviously the lungs, always there inside...
(Indicating the DIRECTOR's chest)

...compressed... understand? Let it free, let it free!

DIRECTOR

Yes, yes... of course...

(Laughs stupidly, almost frightened)

Let it free!

(Indicating the sink basin, to change subjects)

Can you drink out of that?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes.

(The DIRECTOR drinks)

I don't know.

(The DIRECTOR turns off the water and looks at the CAMERA-MAN pointing to his own head as if to say "this guy's crazy")

JOURNALIST

Better? You feel more relaxed?

JACK'S FRIEND

My word, I didn't think... I could never be an actor.

CAMERA-MAN

But look, you've got talent, I mean it. Think about it a little.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Rolling his head)

Too much tension.

JOURNALIST

Do you want me to give you a massage? I'm good, you know? Sit down.

DIRECTOR

(To the CAMERA-MAN)

Now she's giving him a massage.

(The DIRECTOR and CAMERA-MAN snicker)

JOURNALIST

Sit down.

(JACK'S FRIEND sits on the folding chair)

Now lean back. Are you afraid?

(JACK'S FRIEND leans on her)

Lallo!...

CAMERA-MAN

(Filming)
Right away!

JOURNALIST

(Massaging JACK'S FRIEND's neck and shoulders)
Now how can you have pity for a blade?

CAMERA-MAN

A piece of iron...

JOURNALIST

Excuse me, Lallo, I'm conducting the interview.
(To JACK'S FRIEND, starting up the massage again)
Perhaps Jack communicated with the steel? Did he have psychic capacities?

JACK'S FRIEND

He used to say that in a blade there are millennia of thought. To understand man, you must be blade.

JOURNALIST

Cut!

(The CAMERA-MAN stops filming)

Hey, no! You need to be clearer! Television is a very simple and very direct means of communication. The news needs to be precise and dry, bam!! Be more explicit, otherwise... man, blade... it's confusing! If I don't understand it, imagine your average tv watcher! Don't speak in metaphors, please: one plus one is two. The ambush, the screams, the over-turned body. We're not at the theatre. Not even the movies, thank God. C'mon, let's film. And you don't need to be so quiet.

JACK'S FRIEND

I was speaking about a mystery.

DIRECTOR

As long as there aren't too many mysteries, otherwise this Jack with all his eighteen crimes runs the risk of being a bore!

CAMERA-MAN

Because the public doesn't wait, you know? Tick tock, tick tock...

(The CAMERA-MAN mimes flicking channels)

JACK'S FRIEND

(With sudden rage)

There are so many mysteries, more than you can imagine! You will never understand them. Never!

JOURNALIST

Calm down, calm down.

(To the MOTHER who has stood up)

Stay seated, ma'am. Nothing's happened.

(Gestures to the CAMERA-MAN who starts filming again)

We didn't mean to offend Jack, or even less offend his mysteries. I'm sure I would like to know some of them.

JACK'S FRIEND

Let's let the river run, Jack would say, when the water has all come down, the gold-diggers will come to rummage through the stones.

JOURNALIST

It's a very refined image.

JACK'S FRIEND

No, it's muddy. Gold-diggers live in the sludge.

(To the MOTHER)

May I have some coffee?

MOTHER

I'll go make it.

CAMERA-MAN

Extra large, okay?

JOURNALIST

Listen... that room...

JACK'S FRIEND

No, the room, no. I can't. You want the gesture? Like this: zip and zip!

(Executes a very fast gesture, from the bottom to the top, ending in a strange curve)

But the room, no.

JOURNALIST

(Curious about the gesture)

How did you do that?

JACK'S FRIEND

Like this: zip and zip!

(JACK'S FRIEND repeats the gesture)

DIRECTOR

Nice!

JACK'S FRIEND

It's very easy. If you want, I can teach you it. But she...
(Points to the room where the MOTHER went)
... can't see.

(The two TECHNICIANS return with a yellow
balustrade and place it center, just behind the
microphone stand)

JOURNALIST

That was so quick!

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, this is nothing. If you had seen Jack...

DIRECTOR

Amazing!

JACK'S FRIEND

You want to try? Look: like this.
(Takes and guides the DIRECTOR's arm)
Zip and zip!

DIRECTOR

It's true, it's incredibly easy!

CAMERA-MAN

It's like a magic trick!

DIRECTOR

(Who has seen the balustrade)
Ah, beautiful! Perfect.

JOURNALIST

So, the room?

JACK'S FRIEND

No. The room, no.

JOURNALIST

At least let me look through the keyhole.

JACK'S FRIEND

No.

JOURNALIST

Please.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes.

(The JOURNALIST leans over to look, but JACK'S FRIEND quickly covers the keyhole with his hand)

That's enough.

JOURNALIST

But there's a light on!

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, for twenty years now. Jack could come back at any minute.

JOURNALIST

That's an insane expenditure!

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. Let's go.

(JACK'S FRIEND conducts the JOURNALIST away from the door)

DIRECTOR

(Pointing at the balustrade)

Can we light this?

(The ELECTRICIAN focuses the beam of a spotlight onto the balustrade)

Make it bigger... more... stop! Okay! We'll need the rocking chair. Or the couch?

(To the JOURNALIST)

Martinelli...

(The JOURNALIST, who's talking with JACK'S FRIEND, doesn't seem to hear)

Martinelli!

JOURNALIST

Yes?

DIRECTOR

Rocking chair or couch?

JOURNALIST

I don't know, you decide.

DIRECTOR

Rocking chair. It's much more original. And then... we'll need to fix up the sink.
(The two TECHNICIANS exit)

Excuse me...

JACK'S FRIEND

Me?

DIRECTOR

Jack used to wash here?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. And here he filled up his glass before going to bed.

DIRECTOR

Interesting.

JACK'S FRIEND

He kept it on his nightstand.

DIRECTOR

The glass?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. But he never drank it.

(Pointing to the room where the MOTHER is)

She would say: "why do you get water if you never drink it?" – "You must have faith in the thirst. Sooner or later it will arrive, and then... glub! glub!"

(And the two glub glubs seem like two stabs)

He never spilled a drop despite there being a lot of loose rocks here.

DIRECTOR

A true acrobat!

JACK'S FRIEND

You need to keep the glass low. Look: below the knees, like this. And the arm is loose. And then you go, like this.

(Mimes the movement)

And the water doesn't spill. Et voilà! Not a drop.

JOURNALIST

You are a born actor. And even a mime. Let's do that again, huh? I want this: the nighttime thirst of Jack!

CAMERA-MAN

You're awfully intimate with the old lady.

JACK'S FRIEND

Intimate?

CAMERA-MAN

I mean... you seem at home, here. You know all the particulars...

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack and I were childhood friends. Always together, playing and dreaming. So many afternoons in here! I'm like a son to her.

(The two TECHNICIANS return, carrying a red rocking chair. They also carry an absurd pink and blue frame which they place around the sink – including the mirror – and two large, colorful curtains with sparkling sequins, which they set up on the two sides of the room, as if to frame it. The MOTHER also enters. She holds a tray with a few cups of coffee.)

DIRECTOR

Gentlemen, the coffee has arrived!

JACK'S FRIEND

Coffee!

(Everyone approaches and they serve themselves)

Jack's mom makes wonderful coffee. No one knows how to make it like she does. Yet another mystery.

(Relaxed, everyone smiles)

CAMERA-MAN

I'm curious about something. Sorry, can I? But just don't tell me that it's a mystery: between you and Jack, who could run the fastest?

DIRECTOR

What kind of a question is that? I've got a few of my own, too, you know!

CAMERA-MAN

I'm interested.

JACK'S FRIEND

I didn't care for speed. Jack neither.

MOTHER

He was awfully skinny.

JACK'S FRIEND

He loved marathons. He would've liked to have become a great marathon runner. Like Pheidippides. To shout "we are victorious" and die.

JOURNALIST

And die?

JACK'S FRIEND

It's a beautiful death.

(The MOTHER takes away the tray with the empty cups)

CAMERA-MAN

But hey, you didn't answer my question. You talked in circles but didn't answer me.

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the JOURNALIST)

And you, how would you like to die?

JOURNALIST

I've never thought about it.

JACK'S FRIEND

I don't believe it.

JOURNALIST

Honestly, never.

JACK'S FRIEND

Not even as a little girl? All children think about death.

JOURNALIST

As a little girl, I dreamed of marrying Humphrey Bogart. My mother would tell me, look, he's dead, but I still dreamed of marrying him. See? Death doesn't do it for me, we've never gotten along. The whole idea is so far away from me...

JACK'S FRIEND

Still... think about it a moment. Want me to help?

JOURNALIST

I would like to die making love. To Humphrey Bogart!

(Everyone smiles. The MOTHER enters, goes to sit and takes up the crossword puzzle again)

CAMERA-MAN

Everyone here talks in circles, but no one answers the questions.

MOTHER

An infernal river. Nine letters.

JACK'S FRIEND

You'd need Jack! Yes, he would know how to answer!

DIRECTOR

Lights!

(The ELECTRICIAN abruptly turns on all the lights which violently illuminate the balustrade, the rocking chair, the framed sink, the curtains, etc. The room now looks like a television set, a mix between an entertainment hall and a children's tv show in a mess of cables and stands. On one side, the sound system)

The law is equal for all!

(To the JOURNALIST)

You like?

JOURNALIST

A court outside of time, a toy-court. Cute!

DIRECTOR

Shall we proceed? Out in the house!

(The ELECTRICIAN turns of the main light)

Would you mind moving yourself here?

(Points JACK'S FRIEND to the balustrade. JACK'S FRIEND moves behind it)

Now say something. Sound test.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Speaking into the microphone)

I wish Jack were here.

(The DIRECTOR signals him to speak louder)

There are a bunch of steps here, Jack! They've built a bunch these twenty years, I'd like to climb them with you! Okay?

(The DIRECTOR gives JACK'S FRIEND the "OK" sign)

JOURNALIST

What steps were you talking about?

JACK'S FRIEND

All of them. Jack and I had a true passion. What crazies!

JOURNALIST

What do you mean?

JACK'S FRIEND

We really liked steps.

(To the MOTHER)

Right?

(The MOTHER does not respond)

Right?

MOTHER

(Without lifting her head)

Right.

JACK'S FRIEND

She didn't approve, said that it was dangerous. Did we ever fall? Huh? Tell the truth, did we ever fall?

MOTHER

(Still with her head down)

No, never.

JACK'S FRIEND

We scaled them all, up to the top. We went two at a time, three at a time. The higher, the better. Churches, monuments, towers. And if at the top there was a little wall, we went up that, too, and there we stood on tip-toe, as tall as possible. Shame on you if you put your heels down. Tip-toe, tip-toe! Higher, higher! More, more! Jack was certain that one day or another he would have grown wings.

JOURNALIST

He had problems with girls.

JACK'S FRIEND

Well, yeah. Like all boys. Who hasn't had problems with girls? Even girls have problems with girls!

(Laughs with the JOURNALIST)

The hardest thing was to keep them happy.

MOTHER

In my day, it wasn't like that. When we girls would look for a husband... we laughed right away to make them understand that we knew where our place was. Good little wives, respectful of our asshole husbands. But today the littlest smile costs blood. You need to tear smiles out of them with pliers, those little bitches!

(A girl's laughter is heard, sudden and loud)

DIRECTOR

(Standing next to the SOUND TECHNICIAN, who is
balancing levels)

We're doing some level tests, sorry.

JOURNALIST

(To the MOTHER)

Our work is hard, you know, ma'am!... Lights, sounds, sets... we need to make a show
out of nothing. Could you stand up, please? I'd like to talk a bit with you; you can't stay
there in the dark.

(The MOTHER stands)

JACK'S FRIEND

Am I free?

JOURNALIST

You are never free. You are my prisoner here, don't you know?

MOTHER

Where do I go?

JOURNALIST

(Not listening to the MOTHER)

You haven't told us yet your name.

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, well, I... I'm Jack's Friend... I prefer... call me that: the friend. Like in those
westerns. "Hey, amigo!"

JOURNALIST

You'd like to remain anonymous. Okay, friend. But don't try to escape me, you can't.

(To the MOTHER, pointing to the rocking chair)

Ma'am, would you like to sit down over there?

MOTHER

In the other house we had one, but we never used it. The cat slept there.

JOURNALIST

Try!

DIRECTOR

You'll like it. Let me help you.

(The DIRECTOR makes the MOTHER comfortable)

MOTHER

It has a strange effect on me.

(The DIRECTOR gives a push to the chair, which rocks with a certain violence)

DIRECTOR

And give a laugh, for once!

MOTHER

Oh God! No!

DIRECTOR

Yes! Yes, fly!

MOTHER

Enough! Help!

DIRECTOR

Fasten your seatbelts!

JOURNALIST

(Speaking into the hand microphone, which she offers to the MOTHER every so often)

How are you, ma'am?

DIRECTOR

It's rocking!

MOTHER

I want to get off!

JOURNALIST

Rocking, laughing, drinking coffee. A house like so many others in a town like so many others. Still... let's talk about Jack. The name Jack. It is the time for names. You have all asked yourselves if Jack is his real name. Is Jack your son's real name?

(The DIRECTOR stops the rocking chair)

MOTHER

Oh, no. My son's name is Enrico. Jack is a nickname. Enrico called it a pseudonym.

JOURNALIST

Did he pick it?

MOTHER

The papers picked it... after the third crime. They found certain analogies.

JOURNALIST

For example?

MOTHER

I'd rather not respond. It has to do with particulars...

(The MOTHER covers her face with her hands)

JOURNALIST

You don't want to tell us one? A little tiny one?

MOTHER

No.

JOURNALIST

(Bothered, but professional)

We respect your pain, ma'am. Make yourself comfortable. (The MOTHER returns to her crossword puzzles)

Please.

(Indicating the balustrade to JACK'S FRIEND, who moves himself there)

DIRECTOR

(Indicating the balustrade to the CAMERA-MAN, who starts filming)

Lallo...

JOURNALIST

(Exhibiting a piece of paper)

We have a list of names.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. Eighteen names.

JOURNALIST

Next to every name a date.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes.

DIRECTOR

Could you speak up, please?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. That good?

DIRECTOR

Thanks. And don't look directly into the lens.

JOURNALIST

We have checked with the old newspapers. The names correspond. And so do the dates.

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack was very precise. He marked it all there.

(Points to the calendars)

Every crime a date, every date a name. The hard part was starting off, as it always is with anything.

JOURNALIST

Did Jack hate women?

(The MOTHER makes a light, sarcastic laugh)

JACK'S FRIEND

(Almost hushing the MOTHER)

Oh, no. He loved them.

MOTHER

He believed that he loved them.

JACK'S FRIEND

However, he suffered a lot because of them. He followed them for hours and hours. He dreamed about them. He gave them gifts: flowers, necklaces. But he was without hope because they never returned the favor. They asked him what's your job, what's your salary, what kind of car do you have...

MOTHER

An idealist and dreamer of a son who spends afternoons gazing at the clouds is the worst disgrace that can befall a mother. I prayed to Jesus to make me blind, but Jesus only cures the blind!

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack was sweet, tender. He carved hearts out of stones and put them in the girls' pockets. Here... here...

(Indicating various places)

But most of all in their overcoats. And he wrote letters. He had beautiful handwriting. But the girls never responded. One of them, one time, took the letter and tore it up in front of his face, without even opening it. Jack had spent a whole day and night writing it.

MOTHER

She tore it up right in front of him!

JACK'S FRIEND

Three months later, Jack and I met that girl on a platform at the train station. She asked us for a light, but didn't recognize us.

JOURNALIST

Do you remember this girl's name?

JACK'S FRIEND

No. It was... no. I should...

MOTHER

Alice.

JACK'S FRIEND

Alice, yes, that's right. Alice. Eighteen years old. Student.

JOURNALIST

In fact, it's here on the list. Alice.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. When Jack began to kill he remembered her.

MOTHER

Alice was the third victim. It was right after her death that the papers started to talk about Jack the Ripper¹⁰...

JOURNALIST

About that...

JACK'S FRIEND

But Jack corrected them immediately with a letter to the papers: the Reaper.

CAMERA-MAN

But why the change?

MOTHER

Ripping is for sheets of paper...¹¹

¹⁰ The issue of the words *squartatore* and *sventratore* is discussed in the preface. All instances of the word *squartatore* (or forms of the verb *squartare*) have been rendered here as "ripper" (or forms of the verb "to rip") and *sventratore* (or forms of the verb *sventrare*) have been rendered as "reaper" (or forms of the verb "to rip").

¹¹ This line and the following in the original Italian:

MADRE – Si può squartare una donna o un bue...

JACK'S FRIEND

Are you speaking, or am I?

(The MOTHER bows her head and is quiet)

But reaping is on a much larger scale. You can reap a field, a planet, souls. That's what Jack said.

JOURNALIST

One could say that Jack had great plans.

MOTHER

Yes, enormous. If I told you them, you wouldn't believe it.

JOURNALIST

You're a lucky mother, you know that? Children usually don't talk with their parents. Especially the sons, especially with their mothers. But your son told you everything.

MOTHER

The first time he woke me in the middle of the night, still covered in blood. He told me I want to tell you everything, remember what I tell you because people forget, I know that people forget...

JACK'S FRIEND

And he gave her a notebook and told her write, it's better, look, here's a pen, write. Isn't that right?

MOTHER

Right.

JACK'S FRIEND

On the first page there's still a fingerprint in blood, now turned black. Jack wrote next to it in a ballpoint pen: Stella.

MOTHER

And I told him with my eyes closed: go wash your hands.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Indicating the sink to the onlookers)

Yes, mom.

(Goes to the sink and mimes washing his hands, without turning on the water)

L'AMICO DI JACK – Parla lei o parla io? (La madre china il capo e tace) Il concetto di sventrare è più ampio. Si può sventrare un palazzo, una corazzata, un pianeta. Così disse Jack.

A literal translation, leaving the problematic verbs in Italian, would read as follows:

MOTHER – One can *squartare* a woman or an ox...

JACK'S FRIEND – Are you speaking or am I? (The mother bows her head and is silent) The concept of *sventrare* is more ample. One can *sventrare* a building, a battleship, a planet. So said Jack.

You know, mom? It's like when you wake up after a dream. Right after waking up, we remember everything, but just turn on the lights and good-bye! And so it's good to write them down, your dreams!

MOTHER

And from that point, so it was. He spoke and I wrote. And later he always wanted to reread it and add here, change there... he was very fussy.

JOURNALIST

So there exists some sort of diary.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, it's over there.

(Points to Jack's room)

But you can ask me, I know it by heart. I always had open access to Jack's diary.

(Closes his eyes, as if to remember better)

Tuesday, July 13. I met Roberta. I feel I already love her.

MOTHER

Crazy! Crazy! Just met! The same way with all of them!

JACK'S FRIEND

(Reciting)

We walked / along the piers / where the water laps / calm in the night / and the boats bump / deaf, like foolish sisters / in the great silence of men.

JOURNALIST

Beautiful!

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. This is poetry, gentlemen!

JOURNALIST

A poetic diary!

MOTHER

Yes, a slew of existential tremors.

JOURNALIST

You disagree, ma'am?

MOTHER

I detest poets, who get drunk off of sadness and then piss melancholy. You know what the proverb says? Poets find the palm trees but never the coconuts. Entire generations remain stuck on their verses like flies on flypaper. Fortunately there aren't any these days. Have you noticed? Their extinction made less noise than the dinosaurs'.

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the JOURNALIST)

Damn you! That's what Jack said.

JOURNALIST

He swore at his mother?

JACK'S FRIEND

Did he have a choice?

JOURNALIST

A curious dispute. Right, Elio?

DIRECTOR

Yes, truly.

JOURNALIST

Who inspired Jack to write these works?

JACK'S FRIEND

Women. They seemed more beautiful to him reflected in the water.

MOTHER

What water? This city isn't anywhere near the sea!

JACK'S FRIEND

But Jack had the sea in here!

(JACK'S FRIEND puts a hand on his heart. During the following quarrel, JACK'S FRIEND and the MOTHER are distant, as if they're each absent, only intent on evoking the past)

MOTHER

(To the JOURNALIST)

Read that diary, read it. Two lines under it's written that Roberta's a slut, that she deluded him, that he will make her pay with blood. Leaf through that diary: it's full of love affairs that lasted a day, insults and crosses.

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack insults traitors!

MOTHER

But what betrayal? Women chew just like men, Enrico! Even the sweetest creature can have a bit of spinach between her teeth!

JACK'S FRIEND

Shut up!

MOTHER

Love them for their meat, Enrico! It's too easy to love them for their moments of beauty!
Put your heels on the ground, stay here with the rest of us, don't run away!

JACK'S FRIEND

Nooo!!

MOTHER

Look your mother in the face!

JACK'S FRIEND

I hate you!

MOTHER

Enrico!

JACK'S FRIEND

Call me Jack!

(To the onlookers)

But Jack yelled much, much stronger. I can't get so high.

MOTHER

It's true, he had a very acute voice.

JACK'S FRIEND

But also very deep.

MOTHER

I meant... he had a large vocal range. Unpredictable.

JACK'S FRIEND

He still does, I would imagine.

MOTHER

Surely much less.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, probably. Time passes even for Jack.

(To the DIRECTOR)

How was I?

(Everyone applauds)

DIRECTOR

Magnificent! It's like Pirandello, theatre within theatre!

(The MOTHER sits down, head between her hands)

JOURNALIST

Very interesting.

DIRECTOR

Did you get all that?

CAMERA-MAN

It's a hit.

DIRECTOR

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Well done, sir!

(To the MOTHER)

You too, ma'am, bravissima.

JOURNALIST

I would like to pick up again on the theme of love. So, Jack was never loved. All the girls ran away from him, made fun of him.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes.

CAMERA-MAN

Me too, same thing. The exception being my wife. And that was just luck. Then out of nowhere all of a sudden as soon as we get married... like that!

(Gestures with one hand in the air)

They all come knocking on my door! Psh. Explain that one to me.

DIRECTOR

Listen... you want to give me the camera? That way I can film you while she interviews you. Looks like Jack is him!

CAMERA-MAN

I won't say another thing.

MOTHER

I'd like to say something.

JOURNALIST

Go right ahead, ma'am.

DIRECTOR

Lallo!

(To the ELECTRICIAN)

Alberto, a spotlight over here.

MOTHER

No, please, I'm no longer used to the light, it hurts my eyes.

JOURNALIST

Okay, it's okay like this.

DIRECTOR

The film will be awful, I won't put my name on it.

JOURNALIST

Please...

(Moves the folding chair next to the MOTHER and
sits down)

But ma'am, do you ever go out?

MOTHER

Sometimes, but only after sunset.

JOURNALIST

Does someone do your shopping for you?

MOTHER

Oh...

(Points towards JACK'S FRIEND)

He is very kind. And besides, I eat so little.

JOURNALIST

Do you go out for walks?

MOTHER

Only short distances.

JOURNALIST

Do you have any friends? Relatives?

MOTHER

No. Hunger feeds itself.

CAMERA-MAN

Did Jack say that?

MOTHER

It's an old proverb. Look... what I meant to say... on the subject of love...

JOURNALIST

Yes?

MOTHER

I loved my son very much. I did everything for him that a mother should. Everything that this old world of ours has decided that mothers should do. I have the pedigree of an impeccable mother, an observant mother. In a certain sense you could say that I cultivated the bigotry of motherhood. Because I wanted to be reassuring for that little boy who was growing up in front of my eyes in a house like this. I already knew that family was a deception, even before my husband left. Unfortunately I'm no longer a free spirit, I don't know how to fight. Even if I know how to see things. They taught me to have more respect for my pots than my eyes. But with my son... all of that is prescribed. Bedtime stories... breakfast with honey... invisible stitches... if he skinned a knee, I disinfected it...

JACK'S FRIEND

(With a reproachful tone)

With tincture of iodine...

MOTHER

It's the best disinfectant, even in the first aid kits they use tincture of iodine.

JACK'S FRIEND

All of Jack's friends skinned themselves: shins, elbows, knees. And all the moms used alcohol. Only she used tincture of iodine! And all his friends: Enrico has the tincture! Enrico has the tincture!

JOURNALIST

Please! The lady was speaking.

JACK'S FRIEND

Fine, fine. I won't say another thing.

MOTHER

Despite his crimes I never stopped loving him. And consoling him. What ought a mother do, if not console her own children? God will take care of justice later. And we will be punished. But as long as we are here... you don't know how in this room... what screams... how much pain...

(The MOTHER cries)

JACK'S FRIEND

(To himself)
Cry, cry, yes. It does you good.

JOURNALIST

Truly moving.

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

May I ask you a question? I realize that it could seem absurd but I'm asking it the same also because you had said something before... about injustice...

JACK'S FRIEND

It's an interesting theme.

JOURNALIST

Look, here's the question: Did Jack believe in God? Did he pray?

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, yes. He prayed.

MOTHER

Since he was a little boy. I taught him all the prayers. He even made the nativity scene.

JOURNALIST

All kids do that. I meant after.

JACK'S FRIEND

He prayed, he prayed. In his own way. He prayed for his victims. He prayed for his knife. He prayed for all the world's knives. Do you believe me when I say he prayed as he killed?

JOURNALIST

What kind of prayer?

JACK'S FRIEND

Difficult to say. What can I do?

JOURNALIST

Don't you remember a few words? Jack never told you anything?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, but... he was a little bit ashamed.

JOURNALIST

Ashamed? Why?

MOTHER

He wasn't like all the other boys.

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack would say: I want to die from a strike to the heart. The day I find God... I will ask him to aim straight for the heart.

JOURNALIST

So he was looking for God.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes... but he had vague information... like everyone, I suppose. Turn here and there... go up, down... the neighborhood isn't very big and in the end, like everyone else, he would wander into church. He would open the side door... there was a sticker with "door closes automatically" on it and Jack liked to imagine that that was one of God's miracles. He'd enter, take off his hat... sometimes he stood in the back, but more often he kneeled... on only one knee. Since he was a kid he had divided men into two categories: those who put both their knees on the ground and those who put only one down. He was part of the second team and was proud of it. Yes, to him, that position seemed more dignified. Maybe he had seen in some film that even the ancient knights kneeled like that in front of their sovereigns. He, too, wanted to submit himself with honor. Not yet knowing how God would appear to him in that position, head bowed, he would close his eyes and listened. He had learned to train his hearing... he could hear the slightest sounds... even the dripping of the candles... and, you know?... the whispering of the women at confession, too. He had learned how to decipher them. It's hard! It's like reattaching the meat onto the bone.

(Laughs lightly)

And so he knew all of their sins. But God, no, God didn't appear. Yes, sometimes he felt a wind around him and thought: He's here, He's here, look at Him! And he opened his hands to be ready to catch Him... to never let Him go again. Once he made an offering to the chaplain to play the organ for him. Bach is always Bach... but God didn't come and Jack left. Night had fallen, it was cold and starting to rain. It was then that Jack... intuited... to have been victim of a great injustice. But he didn't rebel, no, on the contrary. He thought that it was a sign. Maybe I'll die right now, he thought. That's why God wanted to reward me with His absence! Because my agony and my need become oil for his lamp! He was so sure that with a shout he knelt in the middle of the street. He spread his arms and closed his eyes. With his mouth open, so that his soul could take the quickest route to Heaven. It was the driver of a '64 Chevy van who brought him back to reality. He was blocking traffic. There on one knee in the middle of the crosswalk. Yes. The labor of Faith can make us crazy. Jack rose humiliated and disillusioned. His pants were wet up to both his knees. He leaned against a wall, lit a cigarette and talked to himself, he said: enough searching, now, I'm not a kid any more, I'm going to the movies. And even if He calls me I won't turn. Now He's the one who needs to ask for me on one knee. In any case... to each his own road.

MOTHER

And so it was. Jack never again set foot in a church

(Silence)

DIRECTOR

Cut!

JOURNALIST

Cut! Very good, a little bit lengthy, but we can remedy that with the commentary. How did it go?

DIRECTOR

Excellent! Beautiful monologue! Well done!

CAMERA-MAN

A little dark.

DIRECTOR

(To the SOUND TECHNICIAN)

Could you put in some sort of background effect? Solitude in the city... lines of old men withdrawing their pension... you follow? Smog, traffic, drugs... I don't know if... I'd like something spiritual, transcendental. For example, some of those Tibetan chants. Even the Tibetans search for God, for at least ten thousand years. Look a bit to find something

CAMERA-MAN

Can you smoke in here?

MOTHER

No.

JACK'S MOTHER

Jack had quit.

MOTHER

From one day to the next. He threw away the pack and said: starting today, I won't smoke again.

DIRECTOR

Smoke-free. Like me.

CAMERA-MAN

A week without smoking?

JOURNALIST

You can take turns outside the door.

CAMERA-MAN

Well, best to fill 'er up, since if I don't smoke...

(Fishes from his pocket a pack of cigarettes)

Is it break?

JOURNALIST

Are you crazy? You film, film... everything, everyone. From behind, from above, from below. Then I'll worry about filling it with commentary.

(Gets closer to the MOTHER while the CAMERA-MAN, having put the pack away, starts filming again)

How long has it been since you've seen Jack?

MOTHER

His last calendar is from twenty years ago.

JOURNALIST

And the others?

MOTHER

(Pointing to JACK'S FRIEND)

He brings me them. Every year at New Year's he shows up with a calendar.

JOURNALIST

Did he tell you when he would come back? How was the farewell?

JACK'S FRIEND

There wasn't a farewell.

MOTHER

I found a letter.

JACK'S FRIEND

On the nightstand. With all the lights on.

MOTHER

There are several in the room. Enrico wanted it illuminated during the day.

JOURNALIST

Did he ask you for forgiveness?

JACK'S FRIEND

She's never read it.

MOTHER

On the envelope was written: Do not open till the next crime.

JACK'S FRIEND

P.S.

(To the JOURNALIST)
How do you like it for the trial scene?

JOURNALIST
Yeah, it could work. But it isn't a scene, Elio. It's a testimony, a confession, the telling of a true crime. Eighteen true crimes.

DIRECTOR
Okay, okay. But with the costume it will be much better.
(To JACK'S FRIEND)
What's your size?

JACK'S FRIEND
Large. Pretty large.

DIRECTOR
Could you give us a number?

(The SOUND TECHNICIAN enters with eccentric floral screen, which he places upstage left directly in front of the hanging jacket)

JACK'S FRIEND
It's been a long time since I bought myself a suit.

DIRECTOR
Would you mind trying it on?
(JACK'S FRIEND hesitates)
Behind there!
(Points to the screen decisively. JACK'S FRIEND goes there with the suit)

The top hat!
(The DIRECTOR hands JACK'S FRIEND the top hat)

JACK'S FRIEND
Even this?

DIRECTOR
Naturally. Shirt. Tie. Shoes. Cane.
(The DIRECTOR hands JACK'S FRIEND everything. JACK'S FRIEND disappears behind the screen)

JOURNALIST
He'll look so handsome. Ma'am... are there many mysteries in Jack's life?

So many.

MOTHER

And do you know some of them?

JOURNALIST

All of them.

MOTHER

And you don't want to reveal some of them to us?

JOURNALIST

(From behind the screen)

JACK'S FRIEND

No!

(Very dryly)

JOURNALIST

I am a journalist and I need news, I need it to breathe. You promised me great revelations and I don't believe that my channel will pay the bill if they don't decide to open the cash drawer! Come on, let me live a day of glory. One mystery!

(His head appearing for a moment)

JACK'S FRIEND

Fine, but only one.

The one about the lily of the valley.

Was Jack this stubborn?

JOURNALIST

Just the same.

MOTHER

All of Jack's victims had lily of the valley perfume. Why?

JOURNALISTS

Stella used that perfume.

MOTHER

Who is Stella?

JOURNALIST

The first girl that Jack killed.

MOTHER

JOURNALIST

(Indicating the balustrade)

Ma'am, would you mind coming over here to say that?

DIRECTOR

Speak up, could you?

MOTHER

The first girl... his little brat, that's what he called her. Jack knew how to be terribly sweet.

JOURNALIST

(Getting comfortable on the folding chair)

And the lily of the valley?

MOTHER

Stella used that perfume. An essence. It was very persistent.

JOURNALIST

Did you know the girl?

MOTHER

Enrico always had me meet his girlfriends. He brought them here, I prepared tea and biscuits. And afterwards he asked me: did you like her? Stella was sitting there...

(The MOTHER points at the folding chair)

JOURNALIST

(Standing up, unsettled by the idea)

Here?

MOTHER

Yes. She stared at me in the silence. A deep gaze and a feeble smile... on that white face.

JACK'S FRIEND

(From behind the screen, singing. Dialogue continues over.)

You are like me
Crazy like Jack
You want to throw yourself
Into the coming darkness
La la la la la...

DIRECTOR

Nice voice.

MOTHER

Then all of a sudden she asked me: do you know Boston¹²?... Who knows why?... Maybe just to break the silence. Two days later Stella was dead. Enrico stole the bottle from her and so, afterwards, he put two drops of the essence on every victim, here, behind the ear. He called it “olfactory continuity”. The police had a field day making a thousand hypotheses. Jack laughed at them reading the paper.

(The song finishes)

JOURNALIST

How old was Jack when he killed Stella?

MOTHER

Eighteen.

JOURNALIST

Oh my God! And Stella?

MOTHER

Seventeen.

JOURNALIST

They were two kids!

MOTHER

Children grow up quick these days.

JACK’S FRIEND comes out from behind the screen
dressed to the nines)

JACK’S FRIEND

How do I look?

DIRECTOR

Extraordinary! Lallo, get a hold of this!...

(The CAMERA-MAN films)

A real Jack! A real reaper! Here, come here!

(Conducts JACK’S FRIEND to the balustrade, moving
the MOTHER, who returns to sit in her place)

Do you mind, ma’am? More lights! Up! Up!

(The lights on the balustrade brighten)

Swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Say I swear.

JACK’S FRIEND

I swear.

¹² In the original, Stella asks about Venice, but I chose to localize the reference to an American port city.

DIRECTOR

Magnificent. What's your name?

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack!

JOURNALIST

(With the moralistic tone of certain commentators)

We'll leave it to the experts to tell us what could be the causes that would transform a sensible and tranquil young man full of ideals, we could almost even say old-fashioned, into ruthless monster, into a ferocious assassin. We are not setting out to make judgments or give a moral, we are not interpreting the facts, but only presenting them as they are in all their unrelenting crudeness. It's the price one must pay in order to know the truth.

CAMERA-MAN

(Sotto voce, still filming)

Brava.

JOURNALIST

If this transmission is able to make a breakthrough, to open even a little glimmer in our drowsy consciousness, we will have achieved something great and our work will not have been useless. Hey, friend!

JACK'S FRIEND

(Seemingly having been given a certain boost by his new outfit)

Hallo!

JOURNALIST

What does friendship mean to you?

JACK'S FRIEND

When Jack ran the marathon, all of his neighborhood friends were there.

MOTHER

He was sixteen: a stick!

JACK'S FRIEND

I followed him on my bike encouraging him. Then I stopped and insulted the others. That is friendship. Jack won. And then tap.

JOURNALIST

Tap?

JACK'S FRIEND

Have you ever seen Jack when he tap-dances?

(JACK'S MOTHER smiles, as if lost in a memory)

Look, Jack is... he's formidable! The floor seems to pop under his feet! Like a fireplace in winter!

(Dances a few steps of tap with an awkward vehemence)

Bam! Cha! Ba-bam! Ch-ch-cha!

MOTHER

(As if she were talking to Jack back then)

Stop that, silly! Crazy little fool...

JACK'S FRIEND

And the happiness that sprang forth from those steps is so contagious that everyone caught it.

(Dances his far-fetched tap-dance)

This is the song of the stars! Who is it? Everyone out! Bam! Cha! Ba-bam! Ch-ch-cha! You, too! Everybody!

(For a moment, even the JOURNALIST, the DIRECTOR, and the two TECHNICIANS dance, laughing. The CAMERA-MAN dances, too, still filming)

The whole world dances with Jack!

(The tap-dance ends amidst general happiness)

So... friendship is something unstoppable, like some invasions. It saks you from head to toe and there isn't anything left that's ours. But at the same time, everything that we have is worth more than before. If a friend dies, no one can make up for it. Isn't it terrible? And when he leaves, you hope he comes back soon. Isn't it also the same in love?

JOURNALIST

Beautiful imagery.

(The CAMERA-MAN stops filming)

Sure, if Jack had listened to you...

JACK'S FRIEND

He was the one who taught me. It's all written in his diary.

DIRECTOR

Precisely, in the diary. Easy to write it, but in life, it's different. Taxes, sickness, children who want to borrow the car...

CAMERA-MAN

The wife, the condominium, politics...

DIRECTOR

Who has time for friendship?

CAMERA-MAN

It's a luxury. A friend of mine works at the auto-body shop. I brought him my car 'cause someone put some dents in it. Seven hundred fifty! For nothing! A scratch! Seven hundred fifty bucks! Good-bye, friendship.

(The SOUND TECHNICIAN plays a strange Asian-sounding lullaby)

DIRECTOR

Aha! You found the music!

(To the JOURNALIST)

What do you say? Could go with the search for God?

JOURNALIST

Yeah, it's not bad, let's keep it.

DIRECTOR

It's very spiritual. Mysteries, the cosmos...

(Waves his arms like an orchestra conductor)

If I were God I'd like it.

JOURNALIST

(To the SOUND TECHNICIAN)

But you keep on looking, okay?! Look, look... you never know.

DIRECTOR

Excuse me, ma'am... may we light that door?

(Pointing to Jack's room)

Just light it.

MOTHER

Why?

DIRECTOR

This is Jack's room, I don't know if I'm making myself clear.

JOURNALIST

He's right. Seeing as we can't enter... let's put some light on it.

DIRECTOR

A thousand here, Alberto. And cut the other one. Put it here.

(JACK'S FRIEND enters into the beam of light,
back to the door)

Turn a little bit... like that...

JOURNALIST

(On the side, to the MOTHER)

What is there in that room? Why can't we enter?

MOTHER

It's a mess.

DIRECTOR

Is this okay for framing? You like?

JOURNALIST

Yeah, it's fine. But is he entering or exiting?

DIRECTOR

(To himself, doubtful)

Is he entering or exiting?

JOURNALIST

(To the MOTHER)

Let me give it a quick look. Later, when everyone's asleep. I promise I won't touch anything.

MOTHER

No.

DIRECTOR

If you ask me... I'd say that he's exiting for one of his endeavors. You there, Lallo?

CAMERA-MAN

(Filming)

I'm going.

JOURNALIST

(To the MOTHER)

We'll talk.

(To the microphone)

Yes, he's definitely exiting.

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

You got it all, Jack?

JACK'S FRIEND

(Very much in character, feeling the pocket where he keeps the knife)

Yes, I've got it all.

JOURNALIST
Who are you going to meet?

JACK'S FRIEND
Roberta.

JOURNALIST
Where?

JACK'S FRIEND
By the cattail pond.

JOURNALIST
At the cattail pond? Why?

JACK'S FRIEND
The water's warm. It's comfortable there.

JOURNALIST
Will you go swimming?

JACK'S FRIEND
Yes... I believe so...

MOTHER
(Sighing, her head between her hands)
Don't go out, Enrico...

JOURNALIST
And after?

JACK'S FRIEND
After?
(Is confused)
There was a blue light... the diary says: like a neon light. But it was the moon. The warmth of the mud under naked feet gives a strange pleasure...
(Fishes the knife from his pocket, wields it with the blade open and looks at it. The bloody handkerchief dangles from the pocket)
Your honor... some grieve for the victim... some pity the assassin. But no one thinks about the heartbreak of the blade, so defenseless, forced to bathe herself in blood.

MOTHER
(In a whisper)
Jack...

JOURNALIST

Continue.

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack said... only the frogs could be heard.

JOURNALIST

And then?

JACK'S FRIEND

(His hand trembles)

Good, good, my dear. Don't be afraid, don't do that. A light, soft "plop", a flutter of wings. Then I will clean you with the handkerchief. Yes, that's how it is. The blade stops trembling. Go ahead, she says. If we really must... but hurry, I can't stand the shouts. Now she comes out of the water... and the only sound... was the silence of the frogs.

(Smells the air)

Lily of the valley! Is that you, Jack?

(Yells)

Jack!

(The lights suddenly go out. There is an almost unreal silence in the darkness)

DIRECTOR

What's happening?

CAMERA-MAN

Who was it?

DIRECTOR

Lights!

MOTHER

Is that you, Jack?

DIRECTOR

Alberto!

JOURNALIST

Hurry up!

CAMERA-MAN

Where's the flashlight?

DIRECTOR

I smell lily of the valley!

CAMERA-MAN

For the smoke

(The CAMERA-MAN stays to smoke near the opening.
For a moment we get a glimpse of two car
headlights from the windows, as if someone were
parking)

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the JOURNALIST)

Did you think that Jack had returned?

JOURNALIST

Well, for a moment...

JACK'S FRIEND

It would have been too perfect.
(Taking one of her hands)
Beautiful hands.

JOURNALIST

And if he had killed me?

CAMERA-MAN

(Indicating JACK'S FRIEND)

Impossible, he's got the knife.

JOURNALIST

Ah, yes. True...

CAMERA-MAN

We don't need to worry.

DIRECTOR

(To the MOTHER)

Do you really believe he could come back?

MOTHER

Yes. He could.

JACK'S FRIEND

At any moment.

(Knocking at the door. Everyone jumps, then
freezes. No one speaks. More knocking, a discreet
rapping. Everyone instinctively moves back a
step. Then the door opens slowly and a girl's

face is seen. Enter CAROLINA, looking as if she had just run. Wears a cape which she immediately takes off, throwing it into the CAMERA-MAN's face)

DIRECTOR

Carolina!

CAROLINA

Hi everyone!

DIRECTOR

(To the MOTHER)

That's Carolina!

CAROLINA

(Who gives a special smile to the DIRECTOR)

I couldn't make it any sooner, I haven't even taken my make-up off. How's it going? This place is cute. But what a stuffy smell! Can't you open up?

(Pointing to JACK'S FRIEND)

Is he Jack?

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, no. Your honor.

CAROLINA

(Chatty)

Your honor? How cute! There was some awful traffic... worse than noon! Speaking of which, I parked in the courtyard, right in front there.

(Pointing at the windows)

That's allowed, right? Not like they're going to slash my tires? Because in my neighborhood they do it all the time! They're in pieces, the Old Regular is a mob. Oh, you know what, Elio? They offered me a film, but it has to be a little bit porno, I don't think I'll do it. It's hard for people who want serious work. Right? I am going to fall down I'm so tired. Can I have a coffee?

(Sees the knife that JACK'S FRIEND is still grasping in his fist and lets out a shriek)

Ah! But that's a real knife!

(Sees the bloody handkerchief hanging out of his pocket)

And this is blood!

JACK'S FRIEND

(Affectionate, pointing to the knife)

It's Jack's knife.

CAROLINA

It's not the same... that they'll show on TV.

JACK'S FRIEND

A Gregor switchblade. See?

(He puts it under her nose)

It's written here.

CAROLINA

I had a boyfriend named Gregor!

(Carolina faints)

DIRECTOR

Carolina!

(Everyone stays frozen. The lights suddenly go out)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

The scene is re-lit by the dim light of the lamp. The usual light filters out from Jack's room. The TV crew is sleeping on five cots dispersed throughout the room. Without making a sound, the JOURNALIST, dressed in a light night-gown, gets up from her cot and approaches Jack's room. She listens for a moment and then moves to grab the doorknob, but in that exact moment the door opens. The JOURNALIST lets out a small gasp of fear. At the threshold is JACK'S FRIEND, still wearing the dinner jacket. He quickly closes the door, smiling.

JACK'S FRIEND

I was passing by randomly and said to myself: let's see if everyone's sleeping. Insomnia?

JOURNALIST

Toothache.

JACK'S FRIEND

Have you tried getting some exercise?

JOURNALIST

I forgot my sweatsuit.

(They both laugh, hushed: the dialogue here is all sotto voce)

JACK'S FRIEND

You want to take a walk?

JOURNALIST

Gladly. Where are you going to take me?

JACK'S FRIEND

To the slums.

(Points to the sleeping crew members)

Vagabonds. A world adrift.

JOURNALIST

I'm scared.

JACK'S FRIEND

Just kidding. This is the old historic district. Do you like it?

JOURNALIST

Yes, very suggestive.

JACK'S FRIEND

And this is the market square. The fountain freezes during the winter. Kids break off the icicles and suck on them like popsicles. Jack and I used to do that, too. Let's sit down on the edge.

(The JOURNALIST is about to sit down on the far end of her own cot)

Careful! It's wet over there. Here.

(Sits down in the middle of the cot, calling the JOURNALIST over with a gesture)

See?

(Points to a spot up in the air)

The world's highest steps.

JOURNALIST

Have you been up there?

JACK'S FRIEND

Twelve minutes and twenty-seven seconds! Jack, too, photo finish!

(Stands on tip-toe)

Old scoundrel...

JOURNALIST

Do you miss him?

JACK'S FRIEND

(Lowering his heels)

Who wouldn't? I have so many wonderful memories.

JOURNALIST

Tell me one.

JACK'S FRIEND

Waiting for dawn together.

(Sits back down)

The first light shining from behind the steeples... it was magnificent up there. Do you know our hill?

JOURNALIST

Some friend brought me there once. There was a dance salon, I think.

JACK'S FRIEND

It's wrathful and hard. Then suddenly sweet. It's like a beautiful poor woman. Have you ever noticed?

(Smiles, stands up)

Then we went down, whistling to the larks. There used to be a lot of gardens back then. Do you like the smell of roasted coffee?

JOURNALIST

I adore it!

JACK'S FRIEND

(Sits down)

The coffee shop opened at six o'clock sharp. The chairs were still on the tables, but the cream pastries were already there in the window, hot and appetizing.

(Stands up)

You had to wait for the coffee because the machine was still cold and so we stood at the doorway looking out at the square, which bit by bit came to life in the soft, light blue light. Do you know when they turn off the street lamps?

JOURNALIST

Yes, it's a very poetic moment. Magic.

JACK'S FRIEND

It's as if dawn went dark. You expect the passers-by to turn about-face and go back to bed.

(Sits down)

And after coffee, a cigarette. We both used to smoke back then. Even the sound of the first streetcars was pleasant. Yes, that is the time when every good thing is still possible. But then day comes in a hurry, someone calls your name, and your ears are ringing to death. And just what is your name? Let me guess: Laura? Matilda? Charlotte?¹³

JOURNALIST

Cold...¹⁴

JACK'S FRIEND

Lucille! Rosemary!

JOURNALIST

You're getting colder...

JACK'S FRIEND

Giuseppina! Esmerelda!

JOURNALIST

(Laughing)

Colder, colder... lost in a blizzard!¹⁵

¹³ JACK'S FRIEND in the original Italian begins guessing Italian names – Laura, Matilde, Carlotta... Lucilla, Rosalia – and then begins guessing absurdly foreign names – Josephine, Marilyn. I anglicized the first five names and made the last two foreign in an attempt to render the original comedy of the names.

¹⁴ The Italian version of the English children's "cold, warm, hot" motif for searches is "*acqua, fuochino, fuoco*" – "water, flame, fire". Information retrieved from <http://www.nntp.it/cultura-linguistica-inglese/834325-acqua-fuochino-fuoco.html> on March 8, 2008.

JACK'S FRIEND

Who is as lovely and fair as a winter's morning... Snow White!

JOURNALIST

Without the seven dwarves?

JACK'S FRIEND

I give up.

JOURNALIST

Bianca.

JACK'S FRIEND

I wasn't too far off... Bianca: white, like the moon.¹⁶

(JACK'S FRIEND caresses the JOURNALIST's hair,
but suddenly pulls his hand back, as if
frightened by his own gesture)

JOURNALIST

Now you know my name but I don't know yours.

JACK'S FRIEND

Another mystery. Better that way, right? You need to fill eighteen episodes.

(Points to the camera, which is still mounted on
its tripod)

How many mysteries can that thing hold? As many as there are stars? More than are
dreamt of in your philosophy? To be or not to be?

JOURNALIST

Come a little closer¹⁷, my mysterious Hamlet.

(JACK'S FRIEND starts)

What is it?

¹⁵ The Italian idiom of “*acqua, fuochino, fuoco*” played into a pun and mythological reference which did not function in English. So I inserted a name to fit the English “cold, warm hot” idiom and had to . The original lines are as follows:

GIORNALISTA – Acqua, acqua... un mare!

L'AMICO DI JACK – Chi esce dalle acque del mare? Venere!

GIORNALISTA – Senza conchiglia?

Which literally translates as:

JOURNALIST – Water, water... a sea!

JACK'S FRIEND – Who rises from the waters of the sea? Venus!

JOURNALIST – without the shell?

¹⁶ The name Bianca is also the feminine form of the Italian adjective meaning “white”. Here, we will just assume that JACK'S FRIEND has a decent understanding of Romance language roots or name etymologies.

¹⁷ There are two forms of the second person singular in Italian – the formal, and the informal. Here, the JOURNALIST uses the informal with JACK'S FRIEND for the first time. She returns to the formal after being asked.

JACK'S FRIEND

Please... I'd prefer a bit more formality.

JOURNALIST

You'd really rather?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, it's... it's more erotic.

(THE JOURNALIST laughs, light and seductive,
making him sit. She caresses his chest)

JOURNALIST

Okay. Sir... sir... sir... I like that a lot.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Eyes closed)

A little more to the left...

JOURNALIST

Here?

JACK'S FRIEND

The sun is on the hill now.

JOURNALIST

Yes. And no one can see us, no one can hear us... and I need to ask you something...
come closer... sir... something very professional...

JACK'S FRIEND

Don't do it.

JOURNALIST

If you only knew, my dear sir... how difficult my job is! I've been searching for years,
waiting...

(JACK'S FRIEND moves to stand up, but the
JOURNALIST holds him back)

How many closed doors I've come across in my life! If just one were to open... you are
so manly... and so kind!

(She speaks into his ear)

A little rock heart... carve one for me. Like Jack used to do. A heart for Bianca.

JACK'S FRIEND

I have one already ready. I took it tonight from Jack's nightstand drawer in there.

(Points to Jack's room)

There are a few of them in there. Hearts that Jack didn't have time to give.

(Handing her a little stone heart)

Sandstone. Do you like it?

(The MOTHER appears at the right threshold. She is carrying the tray with a kettle and teacup on top)

JOURNALIST

I adore sandstone. It's beautiful. I'll make it into a pendant to put right here.

(Takes JACK'S FRIEND's hand and places it on her own breast. With a gasp, his jaw drops. The JOURNALIST whispers into his ear)

What is hiding behind that door?

(JACK'S FRIEND laughs, carefully freeing himself)

JACK'S FRIEND

Do you know that you are very beautiful?

JOURNALIST

Is that your response?

JACK'S FRIEND

It's a smoke signal.

JOURNALIST

Like the redskins! Am I in danger?

JACK'S FRIEND

Beauty attracts Jack.

JOURNALIST

Do you think he will come back?

JACK'S FRIEND

Depends on the quality of his desire. Jack had an unquenchable thirst.

(The JOURNALIST laughs)

Why are you laughing?

JOURNALIST

Unquenchable thirst... don't you think that's a bit of a banal phrase?

JACK'S FRIEND

Anatomy's banal, too. Isn't it banal to have two nostrils and only one nose? It would be much more interesting to have two noses and only one nostril!

JOURNALIST

You're crazy! Adorable...

(She leans in to kiss him on the lips but at that moment the tray falls from the MOTHER's hands, making a loud crash. Everyone wakes up, CAROLINA screams, jolting straight up)

CAROLINA

Mommy!

JOURNALIST

What happened?

MOTHER

The piglet dreams of acorns.

CAMERA-MAN

What time is it?

MOTHER

(Picking up the pieces)

Five.

DIRECTOR

A.M. or P.M.?

MOTHER

A.M.

CAROLINA

Oh my God, how wretched!

CAMERA-MAN

(Throwing himself back down)

Aw, sweet mother of God...

MOTHER

I'm sorry. I had made myself some tea... I always get up at this hour. It slipped out of my hand.

(The MOTHER exits with the pieces on the tray)

DIRECTOR

I'm fine with five in the morning if it's the end of the night, but as the beginning of the day, it's freakin' miserable. And what the hell do acorns have to do with anything? And who's the piglet? Could I get a coffee?

CAMERA-MAN

(Still stretched out)
Triple, with two lumps.

CAROLINA

I for one, if I drink coffee at this hour, I'm not going to be able to fall asleep again. How wretched...

CAMERA-MAN

And the environment sure doesn't help. And I also heard people talking... who was talking?

JOURNALIST

(Decisive, grabbing her clothes)
I say we get working.

DIRECTOR

But it's five!

JOURNALIST

The early bird gets the worm.¹⁸
(To the MOTHER, who is still in the other room)
Right, ma'am?
(To JACK'S FRIEND)
Are you feeling up for it?

JACK'S FRIEND

First I'd like to do some exercises. Two minutes. Excuse me.

(JACK'S FRIEND warms up as he did in ACT I.
Everyone rises and dresses)

JOURNALIST

(Disappearing behind the screen)
Anybody back here?

CAROLINA

(Also with clothes on her arm)
Can I come, too?

JOURNALIST

Just a minute, please.

¹⁸ Original idiom: "*Il mattino ha l'oro in bocca*" – literally translating to "Morning has gold in its mouth", it carries a meaning of starting the day off well.

DIRECTOR

(To CAROLINA)

What do you need the screen for? You're getting dressed, not undressed.

CAROLINA

You're right, Elio. It's the shock! But in order to get dressed, I need to get undressed first!

CAMERA-MAN

What's the problem?

CAROLINA

I feel watched.

DIRECTOR

You're right!

(All the men turn away)

CAMERA-MAN

At the Old Regular, sure, but here, no.

(CAROLINA gets dressed in a hurry. The CAMERA-MAN points to the bathroom, addressing JACK'S FRIEND)

Can I get in here?

JACK'S FRIEND

No problem!

CAMERA-MAN

No problem in a manner of speaking. Maybe there's Jack in there sitting on the can!

(Enters the bathroom, closes the door and screams. Everyone jumps. The CAMERA-MAN reappears)

Kidding!

(The CAMERA-MAN closes the door again)

CAROLINA

(Having fully dressed)

Done!

(The two TECHNICIANS clear the cots, piling them up as best as they can against the walls.

Meanwhile, the others quickly wash at the sink, each with his or her own towel on his or her arm)

It looks like wartime, with all the evacuees!

DIRECTOR

And what would you know about that, doll face?

CAROLINA

I saw it in this black and white film, lasted more than three hours, a total bore! My mother once told me that when she was little she used to go to the movies to keep warm. The longer the movie, the happier they were!

(Puts her hand under the faucet)

Ah!

(CAROLINA washes her hands for a few seconds, hopping back and forth from the cold. The ELECTRICIAN, having washed, sits down on a crate and appears to nod off)

DIRECTOR

Damn, and it's humid, too.

CAROLINA

Looks like we're below sea level.

DIRECTOR

My dear, here we're below all sorts of levels.

JOURNALIST

(Re-entering from behind the screen)

It's free now.

(The JOURNALIST puts cream on her face. The SOUND TECHNICIAN knocks on the bathroom door)

VOICE of the CAMERA-MAN

Occupied!

CAROLINA

Now as for me, here, what exactly am I doing? You know, I haven't really figured it out, yet.

DIRECTOR

You'll see, you'll see. Trust me. And anyway, nothing porno, I promise.

CAROLINA

And no knives up in my face. I'll scream, okay? Wake up the whole building. First scream, then faint.

DIRECTOR

Into my arms?

(Laughs stupidly. CAROLINA shivers)

May I, miss?

(The DIRECTOR puts his jacket onto the girl's shoulders)

CAROLINA

Don't you get cold?

DIRECTOR

In the mornings. But only if I sleep nude.

CAMERA-MAN

(Reappearing from the bathroom)

It's free now.

(The SOUND TECHNICIAN enters the bathroom)

JOURNALIST

We all here?

(Has taken up the notepad and papers)

You all awake? Everybody ready? Can we start again?

DIRECTOR

Yessir. C'mon, Alberto!

(Realizes that the ELECTRICIAN has fallen back asleep)

Alberto! You want a cappuccino? A little something to eat? Attaboy, buddy... up with the lights. But softly, okay? The instruments are sleepy, too.

(Lights fade up)

We're ready.

(The MOTHER has returned and is seated in her usual spot. JACK'S FRIEND has finished his stretches)

JOURNALIST

(Indicating the balustrade to JACK'S FRIEND)

Good. Would you mind getting into place?

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, yes, of course.

(Moves to the balustrade. With the top-hat in hand)

This, too?

DIRECTOR

Put it there, on the rail.

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, yes. No problem.

DIRECTOR

A little to the right.

JACK'S FRIEND

Okay. I'm ready. Where do I look?

(The CAMERA-MAN snaps his fingers above his head)

CAMERA-MAN

Here.

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, yes, perfect. There.

JOURNALIST

(In front of the balustrade, microphone in hand,
as the CAMERA-MAN begins filming)

Good morning, friends. We are again in the refuge of Jack the Reaper. It is at once exciting and terrible. The time is five A.M. We are hungry and tired. We slept on uncomfortable cots. It's cold. But here we are nevertheless ready to talk to you about him, his work, his story. Which begins in a December many years ago. Is that right?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, that's right.

MOTHER

Had it never begun...

JOURNALIST

Please, ma'am. Dear friend, I would like to open with a question that everyone has asked themselves: how did Stella and Jack meet? Do you want to tell us the story?

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, well... it's a very nice story! That morning Stella had to go to a wedding.

MOTHER

It was a Sunday.

JOURNALIST
Who was getting married?

MOTHER
Her best friend.

JACK'S FRIEND
But the car wouldn't start!

CAMERA-MAN
Just like me, same thing, yesterday!

(The JOURNALIST shoots a look at the CAMERA-MAN)

DIRECTOR
Lallo!...

CAMERA-MAN
I won't say another thing.

JACK'S FRIEND
So Stella was trying push the car, but there was a pothole and she broke a heel!

JOURNALIST
Oh the poor thing!

MOTHER
And they were new shoes!

JOURNALIST
Just try to imagine.

MOTHER
And on top of that, she was late!

JACK'S FRIEND
Are you speaking, or am I?

(The MOTHER lowers her glance)
She was desperate, understand? Do you understand, your honor? Desperate! But she saw the bus stop and so she broke into a run with one shoe in hand, to the end of the line there.

JOURNALIST
"There" where? Let's be more specific for our viewers.

JACK'S FRIEND
In front of the coffee shop, on the other side of the square.

Your coffee shop?

JOURNALIST

Mine?¹⁹

JACK'S FRIEND

Yours and Jack's.

JOURNALIST

Oh, yes, of course.

JACK'S FRIEND

And you saw her running? Careful, this is important!

JOURNALIST

Yes, we both saw her. Jack and I were eating a pastry when we saw her pass. But her hat was falling to the side of her head...

(Starts to move away from the balustrade and come to the center of the room)

Is it alright if I...

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, please, we wouldn't do without.

JOURNALIST

Thank you.

(Runs to the center of the room and makes an awkward gesture to indicate the hat's position)

Like this!

(The crew smiles)

Thank you!

(To the DIRECTOR)

Was that okay?

JACK'S FRIEND

Excellent. Go on.

DIRECTOR

But it wasn't really a hat, it was a headband of white flowers...

MOTHER

¹⁹ In the original Italian, the JOURNALIST uses the second person plural in her question (*Il vostro caffè?*), and JACK'S FRIEND responds in the first person plural (*Nostro?*). English, however, having only "your" for both the second person plural and singular (and "y'all's" being a little un-elegant for the JOURNALIST's diction) I felt that instinctually upon hearing "your", JACK'S FRIEND would assume it was singular.

JACK'S FRIEND

Don't interrupt! So Stella stopped to fix it, the headband. Still with one shoe in hand!
Two seconds, I swear, not a moment longer. But in that exact moment the bus took off!

JOURNALIST

What an unlucky morning, the poor dear!

JACK'S FRIEND

Unlucky? It was thanks to this that Stella met Jack!

JOURNALIST

And how did that happen?

JACK'S FRIEND

Poor Stella! She watched the bus drive away and, out of frustration, burst into tears. And here Jack was so clever!

JOURNALIST

He called a cab?

(The onlookers sneer; JACK'S FRIEND shoots them a look)

JACK'S FRIEND

No! He caught up to her, took off one of his own shoes...
(Takes off a shoe)
...and asked her: is there anything I can do for you?

MOTHER

First he gave her his arm and then asked her: is there anything I can do for you, miss?

JACK'S FRIEND

Ah, yes, right.

MOTHER

Enrico knew how to be quite the gentleman.

JACK'S FRIEND

Clever, right? No one else would have thought of it.

JOURNALIST

And how does the story end? The viewers are on the edge of their seats. Right, friends?

JACK'S FRIEND

They walked off arm in arm, limping, each with a shoe in hand. For a moment they turned back to me and waved good-bye like this...
(Waves the shoe)

And a great love was born!
(The crew applauds)
Thank you, thank you!

JOURNALIST

An old-fashioned love story!

DIRECTOR

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Excellent progress!

JACK'S FRIEND

I gained a little faith, I feel at my best.

DIRECTOR

Bravo.

JOURNALIST

And after? Hopes? Plans? Kisses? What happens after?

(JACK'S FRIEND is silent and looks at the MOTHER)

A small lapse in memory? Perhaps you could help us out, ma'am?

(The MOTHER lowers her head without speaking)

JACK'S FRIEND

Your honor... the wind blows without questioning. The Chinook, the no'theaster...²⁰ the stern dives and the ship goes. Jack, myself, all of you... how many mysteries there are, friends! Jack used to say: a man is what he desires. He leaves the docile to come into the ferocious as you leave one shop to go to the next. Until the desire ceases.

(Closes his eyes, recites)

"In one night / passes my life / which you wanted eternal..." Nice verses, eh?

MOTHER

The same old rotten mush.

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the SOUND TECHNICIAN)

Here there are heart-breaking roars, bellows and bleats. A lot of animalistic sorrow.

(The MOTHER laughs)

Shut up!

(The MOTHER is quiet and bows her head)

Your honor... friends... have you ever walked at night along deserted streets? Those dark storefronts... overflowing with unsold goods... refused offers... gifts never given... and

²⁰ In the original Italian, JACK'S FRIEND names the *maestrone*, a north-westerly wind that blows over Sardinia, and the *libeccio*, a south-westerly that blows over southern Italy. I have replaced them with the Chinook, which blows from Alberta into Montana, and the no'theaster, which blows up from Virginia to the New England coast.

the city becomes lead... immersed in the silence of its opulence and guilt... in its remorseless abyss... in its hominid sleep.

(Fishes out of his pocket the knife and flicks the blade)

Gregor switchblade. The best.

(The blinding light of a lightning bolt penetrates from the windows, followed by an enormous clap of thunder. The lights flicker)

JOURNALIST

It's incredible, friends. Even nature herself seems to be called to testify, seems to want to say: I was there, I saw it all. Shall we continue?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, but with her.

(Points to the MOTHER)

What comes next is very difficult for me by myself.

JOURNALIST

Is that okay with you, ma'am?

(The MOTHER lowers her head. JACK'S FRIEND gets closer to her and puts his hand on her shoulder)

JACK'S FRIEND

Here we are.

DIRECTOR

Lallo...

CAMERA-MAN

Ready.

JOURNALIST

The killing of Stella, if I'm not mistaken.

MOTHER

No, no mistake.

JACK'S FRIEND

The killing.

JOURNALIST

(To the MOTHER)

Are you up for it? Do you believe you can recreate it for the TV? The public loves particulars.

MOTHER

Jack's stories were always so meticulous, so detailed...

JOURNALIST

Good, then. Are we ready?

DIRECTOR

(To CAROLINA)

The killing!

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

With the storm, make sure to stop when it thunders, okay?

(To the MOTHER)

Otherwise, we'll lose all the lines!

JACK'S FRIEND

We're ready.

(To the JOURNALIST)

Jack suffered here very, very much.

DIRECTOR

You can go!

(Lightning)

No, wait!

(Thunder)

CAMERA-MAN

Jeez, right now?

(The thunder fades)

DIRECTOR

Action! No, just a moment! There isn't just nature in this world, artists have their needs, too.

(To the MOTHER)

Nighttime, right?

MOTHER

Yes, night. And a deep silence.

DIRECTOR

Nice. If I may... nothing's changed, okay? We'll just... help reality out a little bit. Gigi... a little wind. Tiny hisses... downward paths, illuminated pavement...

(Soft and unsettling hisses of wind are heard)

Nice... Alberto, backlight.

(The scene darkens, now with the MOTHER and JACK'S FRIEND backlit)

Action!

MOTHER

Stella had big, black eyes that filled with tears at the third stab. When she died.

JACK'S FRIEND

No. At the third stab she said: Enrico don't hurt me. But she wasn't crying yet.

MOTHER

You're confused.

JACK'S FRIEND

She was surprised, yes. But she wasn't crying. Not yet.

MOTHER

In the diary it says the third.

JACK'S FRIEND

It's wrong, it needs to be modified. Stella whimpered, this, yes. But only afterwards did she begin to cry. When Jack unbuttoned her coat.

DIRECTOR

Okay, but when did she die? We need to be precise!

(Everyone looks with disappointment at the DIRECTOR, who makes a sign as if to say: fine, we'll cut it)

JACK'S FRIEND

She died at the eleventh. It's the most plausible hypothesis. Though, even Jack had his doubts.

(To the MOTHER, who is about to say something)

He told me a long time afterwards.

(To the JOURNALIST)

The human heart, you see, is a lot smaller than one thinks. It isn't easy for a knife. That's what Jack said.

(To the MOTHER)

Anyway, she died.

MOTHER

Yes, she died. But she kept on crying. The tears kept on falling. Jack said: how strange, she was dead, and she kept on crying.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, that is true. Poor Stella, she must have been in terrible pain.

JOURNALIST

And it was at that point that Jack dragged her into that doorway where she was found by those two girls?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes.

MOTHER

No. First...

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, that's right. First...

JOURNALIST

What happened? We want to hear something in particular?

(Lightning, thunder)

DIRECTOR

Stop!

(The thunder diminishes. JACK'S FRIEND seems to breathe with difficulty)

Action!

CAROLINA

Poor things, I pity them.

JOURNALIST

Would you like a glass of water?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes.

MOTHER

No, let's move it along. He lifted her blouse up to her breast and then with one strike of the knife made the buttons fly off the skirt.

JACK'S FRIEND

Well! Are you speaking, or am I?

MOTHER

Just hurry it up.

JACK'S FRIEND

I don't know how it was... there isn't an order...

MOTHER

Yes, there is.

JACK'S FRIEND

But not in the memory. She was still warm, this, yes. And crying, yes. In the dark... your honor, do you know the sound of ripe apricots when they fall from the branch? It's the same sound that the blade makes when it cuts into flesh. That's what Jack said. A light "flop", soft, muffled. And when it comes out... it's hard to describe... it's like a beating of wings... low, very low. Lying on the ground. Swallows or something like that. Yes, very beautiful, to tell the truth. Poetic, even.

(CAROLINA cries in the silence. Lightning, thunder)

DIRECTOR

Stop!

(The thunder diminishes)

Action!

MOTHER

Come now, finish it up.

JACK'S FRIEND

Okay.

MOTHER

Plunge.

JACK'S FRIEND

Where?

MOTHER

You know. Wake up!

JACK'S FRIEND

The trachea?

MOTHER

After.

JACK'S FRIEND

The spleen?

MOTHER

Yes.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. Soft. Good-bye. The breast. Mama!

MOTHER

This first. Go!

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. Trachea. Epiglottis. Down! It gurgles.

(Starts)

What is it?

MOTHER

A window batting against the wind. Go. Cold. The breath.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, the breath. Vapor. Further down. The bladder. How did it go?

MOTHER

Thought.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, thought.

MOTHER

To free...

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, yes. I'm speaking. To free the blood from out of its prison. Gasp?

MOTHER

Before.

JACK'S FRIEND

Glance?

MOTHER

Before.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. Good-bye. Wheeze. Sink. Sink?

MOTHER

Plunge.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. Uterus. Here. Ovaries, yes. Navel. There. Everything. The middle.

MOTHER

Plunge.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. The heart. The heart. The heart. There it is. Slip away. Taken. Finished.

(Silence. The only sound is CAROLINA crying)

MOTHER

Then there's the lily of the valley, et cetera et cetera.

(A rumble of thunder rolls away)

JOURNALIST

Good. Very good. A little bit lengthy, but can remedy that with the commentary. Do we want to do the shots of the lily of the valley as long as we're hot?

DIRECTOR

I see you're feeling creative, good. On with the lily of the valley!

CAMERA-MAN

After a cigarette break, though.

MOTHER

There's something we haven't said.

JOURNALIST

Go on.

MOTHER

Enrico wore his father's jacket.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes. A dark jacket.

MOTHER

My husband used it for gardening. When he left, he forgot it, left it hanging on a hook.

JACK'S FRIEND

And Jack said: it's mine. Right?

MOTHER

Right. He wanted it for himself. I watched him grow up in that jacket.

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack called it: my chrysalis.

DIRECTOR

Interesting, yes. Maybe we could use that... around the sixth, seventh episode. You agree, Bianca?

JOURNALIST

Yes, maybe. We'll think about it. The father's jacket. But for now let's get on with the lily of the valley.

DIRECTOR

Ok, let's go. Light change, Alberto!

(The ELECTRICIAN cuts the backlight and puts up a general wash. The MOTHER heads towards her room)

JOURNALIST

Don't run off, ma'am. We need your help for the lily of the valley scene.

JACK'S FRIEND

That one I remember perfectly on my own. I've read it a thousand times in the diary. There was a Christmas tree on the balcony.

DIRECTOR

(Lighting up)

A Christmas tree?

MOTHER

Yes, on the third floor.

JACK'S FRIEND

Of the house across the street.

MOTHER

With the little lights that blink on and off.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yellow light, red light, blue light, off. Yellow light, red light, blue light, off.

DIRECTOR

Bianca, I have a brilliant idea!

JOURNALIST

What do you want to do?

DIRECTOR

We'll reconstruct the scene, excellent! Let me take care of it! I feel it, I feel it... Gigi, take a look in the van to see if there happens to be...

(The SOUND TECHNICIAN nods and exits)

JACK'S FRIEND

What do I do?

DIRECTOR

Just a moment. Carolina!

CAROLINA

Yes?

MOTHER

May I go?

DIRECTOR

Yes, yes, go already! And stay quiet, if you can!

(To the JOURNALIST, who is surprised)

That woman talks and talks, who does she think she is?

(To the MOTHER)

Leave a little bit of space for us, too, huh?

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Tell it to her!

JOURNALIST

Elio...

DIRECTOR

Hey, I'm here, too, you know. Contrary to previous indications. Come here, Carolina. Your moment has arrived. Lie down here.

(The DIRECTOR points to the pavement in front of the balustrade)

CAROLINA

On the ground? But it's cold!

DIRECTOR

You're right. Here.

(Lays a blanket on the ground)

Now would you mind getting into places, my dear?

CAROLINA

Do I have to play dead?

(The SOUND TECHNICIAN enters with a little plastic Christmas tree with lights and ornaments)

CAMERA-MAN

Where does this go?

DIRECTOR

(Points to the balustrade)

Here, on the balcony. Next to Jack's top-hat. Oh, yes, now that's good! How do you like it, Bianca?

(The ELECTRICIAN plugs in the Christmas tree)

Ma'am, you, over there.

(The DIRECTOR motions the MOTHER over to the balustrade)

JOURNALIST

We'll be careful not to sensationalize too much, I hold fast to true journalism.

DIRECTOR

Let me take care of it, we'll find the right balance. Lallo, I'd like to try a shot from above.

CAMERA-MAN

From above?

DIRECTOR

Am I speaking Arabic?

(To the ELECTRICIAN, who is standing on a ladder adjusting a light)

Alberto, I need that ladder here.

(To CAROLINA)

You ready?

CAROLINA

(Lying down)

On my back or on my side?

DIRECTOR

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Would you mind showing us how Stella's body was on the ground?

MOTHER

No.

DIRECTOR

You will become famous, ma'am: the mother who always said no. It's exhausting!

MOTHER

What does it matter how she was lying? And having the girl there on the ground... tell stories with words. Isn't that enough for you?

DIRECTOR

Video has its needs, my dear madam.

MOTHER

(To the JOURNALIST)

If you only knew the torment... it's as if I were there, too, with my son on those nights. And him, too...

(Indicating JACK'S FRIEND)

Always recalling, reconstructing, consulting the diary... and Jack said, and Jack did... makes a person suffer.

JOURNALIST

We all suffer, ma'am. Don't make a big deal of the professional exterior, we might seem cynics, but it's not like that. And besides, everyone has his own cross to bear, that's life. If I were to tell you all my problems... best not open that chapter. Why are you looking at me like that? Is it my hair?

(Goes to the mirror above the sink and checks her hair)

It's just a little dirty.

MOTHER

Do you have any children?

JOURNALIST

Nope, no children, no husband – I'm single. But I do have a horse! Toboggan, a Lipizzan.

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Do you ride?

JACK'S FRIEND

I don't really have the inclination.

JOURNALIST

Shame, I was inviting you. Riding is life!

(The JOURNALIST slaps her notepad against her leg as if it were a horse-whip. The ELECTRICIAN puts the ladder where the DIRECTOR wanted it)

DIRECTOR

Here, Alberto. I'd like to try it from here. Lallo, go!

OPERATOR

Go, go... easier said than done...

(Climbs half-way up the ladder, carrying the camera with difficulty)

Maybe it's the hour, maybe it's the ladder, but I feel my head spinning.

DIRECTOR

(Kneeling next to Carolina, who is waiting seated on the blanket)

Alberto, can you give me a thousand here? Good... now widen it a bit...

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Okay, let's say she was on her back. On the back works? It's more realistic that way, if you ask me.

(To the CAMERAMAN)

Is she in the frame?

(To CAROLINA)

Lie down.

(CAROLINA lies down on her back)

Bend your legs slightly over here... here, like this. Nice. Close your eyes.

CAROLINA

No practical jokes, alright?!...

(CAROLINA closes her eyes)

DIRECTOR

Perfect. Exquisite. You're ready for the lily of the valley.

(Laughs stupidly)

How does it look, Lallo?

CAMERA-MAN

If she could curl up a little...

DIRECTOR

Curl up.

(CAROLINA executes)

CAMERA-MAN

Stop! Good.

DIRECTOR

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

How's it looking? A good match?

JACK'S FRIEND

The head... was bent in the other direction.

(CAROLINA executes)

MOTHER

More.

(CAROLINA executes)

DIRECTOR

Like this?

MOTHER

A little bit more, still.

DIRECTOR

Ma'am... more or less, right? Now we're into socialist realism!

(CAROLINA has executed. The DIRECTOR
speaks to JACK'S FRIEND)

Is this good?

MOTHER

Eyes wide open.

(CAROLINA executes)

And the mouth...

JACK'S FRIEND

Are you speaking, or am I?

(The MOTHER lowers her head)

Eyes wide open... mouth agape...

(CAROLINA executes)

And the legs stretched out.

(CAROLINA executes)

A little bit spread-eagle.

(CAROLINA executes)

CAMERA-MAN

Wait, no! It's either the legs or the head, I can't get it all to fit.

DIRECTOR

Can't you get further up?

CAMERA-MAN

This thing wobbles. If I fell I'd kill myself, and then we'd have a real corpse with human blood.

(The two TECHNICIANS laugh; the CAMERA-MAN climbs higher)

DIRECTOR

Yes, a pool of blood. As long as we're already here... abundance! What can you see from up there?

CAMERA-MAN

I'm seeing... guess!

(The two TECHNICIANS laugh)

JACK'S FRIEND

(Forcefully, as if to hush the TECHNICIANS)

And she had her jacket on, since it was very cold. It was a leather jacket, padded, so much that it was hard for Jack to sink the first few strikes in. So he undid her buttons and it seemed like after that, things went much better. That's what Jack said. But the blanket wasn't there.

CAROLINA

(Getting up)

Hey, no! Either you give me a jacket, or you leave me the blanket. I'm freezing!

(The SOUND TECHNICIAN has fished a jacket and purse from out of one of the crates)

DIRECTOR

Here's a jacket. Try it on.

(CAROLINA puts on the jacket)

CAMERA-MAN

I'm coming down, okay?

DIRECTOR

Are you crazy? You need to be ready!

(Takes the blanket from off the ground and puts it on his shoulders)

Like in the trenches!

CAROLINA

It's kinda big on me.

DIRECTOR

Nobody will notice when you're on the ground.

(CAROLINA lies down; the DIRECTOR hands her the
purse)

This, too.

CAROLINA

Brrr... make it quick!

DIRECTOR

(To the ELECTRICIAN)

Lights up a little...

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

Come here.

(Makes JACK'S FRIEND kneel behind CAROLINA)

The knife!

JACK'S FRIEND

Oh, yes...

(JACK'S FRIEND raises the knife, which he still
has in his fist)

CAROLINA

Elio...

DIRECTOR

You're not afraid, I hope...

CAROLINA

I'd like to see you in my place.

DIRECTOR

Wait, no, it's Christmas! The lights!

(The Christmas tree lights begin to blink)

Gigi, go: background music.

("Silent Night" plays. The CAMERA-MAN films)

JOURNALIST

Now Stella lies on her back, killed by twenty-six knife wounds.

(To the MOTHER)

That's right, twenty-six?

MOTHER

Yes, that's right.

JOURNALIST

We have tried to reconstruct the scene as faithfully as possible. In the cold of the night, the only sign of life being the lights of a Christmas tree. What was Jack feeling in that moment? What was he thinking?

JACK'S FRIEND

Lily of the valley, that's what he was thinking.

MOTHER

The perfume bottle was sticking out of Stella's purse.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Fishing out of his pocket a bottle)

It was hard for him to unscrew the cap, his fingers were frozen. Surely, thought Jack, we're below freezing. Much below freezing.

MOTHER

It was a very harsh winter. In our building the pipes froze. We washed with lemon for a week.

JOURNALIST

Excuse me, is that the bottle of lily of the valley? The legendary bottle?

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, but the perfume's gone.

(Shakes the bottle in the light)

There's just a little bit left. Two drops.

DIRECTOR

Can you see it?

CAMERA-MAN

Not very well. A little bit higher, please.

(JACK'S FRIEND executes)

JACK'S FRIEND

Lily of the valley.

JOURNALIST

A perfume he knew quite well. The perfume of his first girlfriend, of his first love, the perfume of youth. He unscrewed the cap of the bottle...

DIRECTOR

C'mon, unscrew it!...

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack doesn't want to. There are only two drops left, they could evaporate.

(JACK'S FRIEND puts the bottle back in his pocket)

DIRECTOR

(To HIMSELF)

We're never going to get to smell it, this damned lily of the valley.

JOURNALIST

Can you at least go through the motions?

JACK'S FRIEND

The motions?... Jack said...

MOTHER

First, close her eyes.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, that's true. The eyes.

(JACK'S FRIEND closes CAROLINA's eyes)

MOTHER

And the mouth.

JACK'S FRIEND

The mouth, too.

(JACK'S FRIEND closes her mouth)

MOTHER

Then he put on the scent. With his pinky.

JACK'S FRIEND

That's right, the pinky. There.

(Raises his pinky. The CAMERA-MAN snaps his fingers to get JACK'S FRIEND's attention and motions him to look into the camera)

There, see? It's simple. Like this.

(Executes the motion and then rises suddenly, very frightened)

Who's there?

JOURNALIST

What's going on?

JACK'S FRIEND

Footsteps! Someone's coming!

(JACK'S FRIEND runs left and right)

MOTHER

He was terrified.

JACK'S FRIEND

He didn't know what to do. Escape? Where? Over there! Yes! Running? No, better go quietly. Without making eye contact. They're coming!

MOTHER

(Covering her face)

Oh my God...

JACK'S FRIEND

There was a maze of back alleys... and Jack went here and there... yes, just like this... here and there...

(Moves nervously and frenetically)

The footsteps were getting closer... but from where? He couldn't figure it out!

(Yells)

From where?

MOTHER

(Still with her hands in front of her face)

Ask for forgiveness, Enrico... ask for forgiveness!

JACK'S FRIEND

The footsteps rang like thunder... and Jack took Stella...

(JACK'S FRIEND grabs CAROLINA by the arms and drags her behind the balustrade. The purse is left on the ground)

CAROLINA

(Terrified)

Help! Elio!

JACK'S FRIEND

(Covering CAROLINA's mouth with his hand)

Quiet!

DIRECTOR

What are you doing?

(The DIRECTOR moves towards the balustrade, but is stopped by the JOURNALIST)

JOURNALIST

Stop. Lallo, you there?

CAMERA-MAN

Here I am.

MOTHER

The purse!

(JACK'S FRIEND turns back, grabs the purse and flees behind the balustrade)

Just in time!

(CAROLINA, curled up in the fetal position on the ground, cries)

Shut up, you little slut!

JACK'S FRIEND

(Speaking through the bars of the balustrade)

They were two tall, military-looking guys. They were speaking another language that Jack didn't understand.

MOTHER

It was terrifying!

JACK'S FRIEND

Sailors, Jack thought. Look, yes. Russian sailors. Or Dutch.

MOTHER

This city isn't anywhere near the sea!

JACK'S FRIEND

Anyway, they were foreign. They stopped to look at the Christmas tree... and chatting, chatting and laughing. They wouldn't go away! And so Jack started to pray.

JOURNALIST

To pray?

JACK'S FRIEND

And to talk with the knife.

MOTHER

With the blade.

JACK'S FRIEND

With the blade. To console her. He was whispering, whispering with infinite love. And his prayers were answered, because when he looked up, the two men were no longer there. And so he left the entryway they were in, leaving Stella there behind... in that silence... in that perfume.

MOTHER

He looked at her one last time.

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, that's true. In that semi-shadow... he looked at her one last time. She looked like a wet rag. A rind. Then he closed the knife, wrapped it in the handkerchief, put it in his pocket...

(Executes the movements)

...and returned home.

MOTHER

That's how it was.

JACK'S FRIEND

It's all written in the diary.

MOTHER

The end.

(Silence)

CAMERA-MAN

(Lowering the camera)

Beautiful.

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the MOTHER)

It's not finished!

(To the others)

There's the vandal for love!

DIRECTOR

What's that?

MOTHER

One of Jack's stories. Hot air.

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the MOTHER, angrily)

It's not a story! It's a parable!

(The MOTHER lowers her head. JACK's FRIEND speaks
to the others)

A tear-jerker. A stranger saw a fresco. It was so sweet... no, radiant... no... what did he
say?...

MOTHER

Sublime.

JACK'S FRIEND

There, yes: sublime.

(To the MOTHER)

I'm speaking.

(To the others)

So sublime that the stranger began to cry. A masterpiece. Then he saw the men passing
by. They passed by, passed by. My God! No one stopped to look at the fresco. But how?
Where are you going? The stranger called them, tugged at their jackets: wait, turn back!
Admire these forms, these spaces, these infinite perspectives! And these angels? Don't
you recognize them? They are you! But those men, nothing! They huddled their
shoulders and hurried their pace, annoyed. The stranger was desperate. What to do? What
to do?

(To the MOTHER)

Proverb!

MOTHER

A drowning man would cling to razors.

JACK'S FRIEND

And so the stranger screamed out in agony, took an awl and... ssslaaash!

(Violently slashes the air a few times,
accompanied by the shrill sound of his voice)

The lime! The plaster! Flakes! Dust! Destruction! Vandal!

(To the JOURNALIST)

Vandal, yes. But for the love of the fresco. Now that the masterpiece was destroyed
forever... reaped... with its pebbles lying in the sun... everyone ran to look at it!
Everyone there to gawk, gossip, poke it with a finger. Everyone there to weep over the
lost beauty. Traitors. They should have loved it before. That's what Jack said.
Understand?

JOURNALIST

Yes... I think so...

JACK'S FRIEND

(Lightly, as if trying to reproduce Jack's voice)
Will my little awl be able to scratch at the world's conscious?

MOTHER

That's enough now.

JACK'S FRIEND

Ask God to make knives.

(Silence. Everyone stares at each other a little
bit lost and frightened)

CAMERA-MAN

(Still perched on the ladder)
Wait, what did he say?

DIRECTOR

(Tapping his finger on his forehead)
Jack was sick.

CAMERA-MAN

I didn't film any of that...

DIRECTOR

Bianca... break time?

JOURNALIST

Yes. Five minutes.

CAMERA-MAN

I'm coming down, okay?! For good.

(The CAMERA-MAN climbs down the ladder with
difficulty)

DIRECTOR

(To CAROLINA, who is still behind the balustrade,
a little shocked)
You can come out now. How's it going?

CAROLINA

I was afraid he was going to rape me.

DIRECTOR

No, Jack didn't rape his victims. He just killed them and then...

(Runs his thumb across his belly, bottom to top)

Ssslaaassh! In French: ssssleeeeeeech!

(The DIRECTOR laughs stupidly)

CAMERA-MAN

Cigarette.

(The CAMERA-MAN lights a cigarette and opens the front door a little)

CAROLINA

Can I keep this? Brrr...

(CAROLINA wraps herself more tightly in the jacket)

DIRECTOR

It's yours, I'll give it to you. You were fantastic, good job. Very expressive.

CAROLINA

I can do better.

(To JACK'S FRIEND, who hasn't moved and is staring into space)

Hey, you really scared me, you know? You need to be nicer to girls.

(JACK'S FRIEND doesn't respond)

You feeling okay?

JACK'S FRIEND

Excuse me.

(JACK'S FRIEND accompanies the MOTHER to the table, sits her down, hands her a crossword, and then flees to the darkest corner of the stage)

CAMERA-MAN

Fresh air! The storm rinsed out the earth. In my home town, after a storm, all the little kids go out to catch snails.

(Satisfied breath)

Aaaahh!!

JOURNALIST

Carolina!

CAROLINA

Yes?

JOURNALIST

I want four smiles for the four seasons, each one of them different, and each one more beautiful than the last. But sad, since they need to announce the crimes.

CAROLINA

I don't know if I can.

DIRECTOR

I'll teach you, it's not that hard. Come here!

(The DIRECTOR and CAROLINA sit apart)

JACK'S FRIEND

(As if protected by the darkness, sings)

You are like me
Crazy like Jack
You want to throw yourself
Into the coming darkness
La la la la la...

JOURNALIST

You have a very beautiful voice.

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack and I, since we were little, sang in the choir. Then afterwards we wrote a lot of songs, lyrics and music.

JOURNALIST

I'm impressed. Can you have us listen to some?

JACK'S FRIEND

Gladly. When?

JOURNALIST

Soon. We'll be needing it, to cut the tension...
(Fishes from her pocket the little rock heart and
shows it to him mischievously)
Let's take a walk in the old historic district?

JACK'S FRIEND

With pleasure. Wait! I forgot...
(Takes off a shoe and offers the JOURNALIST his
arm)
Miss... is there anything I can do for you?

(The JOURNALIST takes off a shoe, too, laughing)

MOTHER

(Bent over the crossword puzzle)

The fly kicks at what it can.

JACK'S FRIEND

Bianca...

(Waves his hand to "hypnotize" the JOURNALIST)

You are getting sleepy...

JOURNALIST

Are you trying to hypnotize me?

JACK'S FRIEND

Abracadab... bibbly... zap zap!

JOURNALIST

I felt the shock! An electric current!

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes, enough to illuminate New York! Or would you prefer Paris? Lisbon? Prague? No, Vienna! Do you waltz?

JOURNALIST

I adore the waltz!

(JACK'S FRIEND takes her hand while the SOUND TECHNICIAN puts on the "Blue Danube". The music seems to be coming from far away)

It'll be a cripple's waltz!

(They dance, limping each on one shoe)

You dance like an angel!

JACK'S FRIEND

I was born with it...

JOURNALIST

Can I ask you a question?

JACK'S FRIEND

No. Yes. No.

JOURNALIST

What do you do? In life?

JACK'S FRIEND

Jack said that questions come dressed in evening wear, while answers, the poor things, wear overalls. I adore questions without answers.

(The music is closer now)

If Jack saw me now...

JOURNALIST

Do you know where he is now?

JACK'S FRIEND

The Danube flows, the water will dry up. Then we'll need to search through the muck. Quick, quick!

(The volume of the music increases)

DIRECTOR

(Having opened one of the two big, old, stacked boxes)

Carolina, come look!

(Takes some cloth flowers and leaves from the box and throws them into the air)

Flowers and leaves! Magnificent! All fake, but it looks all real! September, October, April!

(Puts flowers in CAROLINA's hair as she dances softly)

You look like Botticelli's Primavera! Italian Renaissance! We have smiles for all the seasons! For all the crimes!

(Everyone laughs, the JOURNALIST and JACK'S FRIEND dance, whirling rapidly)

CAMERA-MAN

(Shooting photographs with flash)

Hey, I'm sending these photos to the press! Bianca Martinelli dances with Jack's friend!

DIRECTOR

Scandal!

MOTHER

(With a shout)

Stop that music!

(The music cuts out suddenly)

Come here, you!

(Snatches JACK'S FRIEND from the JOURNALIST's arms)

Go home!

JACK'S FRIEND

You don't get to order me around!
(The MOTHER slaps him)
You did not need to do that.

MOTHER

Yes I did! To take that damned idea out of your head!

JOURNALIST

What idea would that be, if I may ask?

MOTHER

That's a fine question, coming from you, simpering bitch! Back off!

(The MOTHER shoves the JOURNALIST. Everyone moves to intervene)

JACK'S FRIEND

You can't do that!

MOTHER

(To the JOURNALIST)

From the moment you came in here, you have done nothing but flatter him with your big doe eyes, your sweet-talking, your intellectual pretensions! All the little sluts are like this! They chat and chat but their real objective is to get in your bed!

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the MOTHER)

You should be ashamed!

JOURNALIST

And what if that were true? Who's going to stop me? I'm not a baby, I can make doe eyes at whomever I please, I can go to bed with whomever I please, and the slut will be you!

MOTHER

Damn you! Damn you!

(The MOTHER throws herself onto the JOURNALIST. They scuffle. The CAMERA-MAN films)

DIRECTOR

You're crazy, you're both crazy! You're ruining everything!
(The two women are separated. The DIRECTOR addresses the JOURNALIST)

I am amazed at you.

JOURNALIST

Shit, shit, shit!

(Crying, the JOURNALIST throws herself into
CAROLINA's arms)

MOTHER

Viper...

JACK'S FRIEND

(To the JOURNALIST)

I'm distressed, I'm sorry.

JOURNALIST

Leave me alone.

JACK'S FRIEND

I don't know what I can offer, truly.

JOURNALIST

Go away!

JACK'S FRIEND

Bianca...

(The JOURNALIST slaps JACK'S FRIEND)

CAMERA-MAN

(Without stopping filming)

Bingo.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Rubbing his cheek)

Love...

MOTHER

Idiot!

(To herself)

Just the same...

JOURNALIST

What is she prodding at? Are you perhaps her son?

JACK'S FRIEND

Me? No. Her son is Jack!

MOTHER

He should have consulted me the way you consult a survival guide. Mothers are good for that. And instead... look at him, just like Enrico!... Wedged between the dreams of his youth, like between the trash in a junkyard.

(The MOTHER sits in her usual place)

JACK'S FRIEND

(Dreamy)

For Jack, life was... looking for the heads... that were dancing here and there... catching them and tying them together again... without stopping the race. Your honor... the dreams of youth are inhuman. Jack never understood how men can fall from such heights without hurting themselves. They always say that cats have nine²¹ lives, but men have many more, each worse than the last, Jack used to say.

(He gives the MOTHER his shoe and puts his foot on her knee. She puts on and laces his shoe. He speaks low)

How did it go?

(Nods to a melody)

La la la la la...

MOTHER

Little runaround...

JACK'S FRIEND

Little runaround...

MOTHER

Who walks in the night...

JACK'S FRIEND

Ah, yes... alone and desperate...

(The melody begins to flourish from memory. The onlookers watch with interest)

MOTHER

Your story is lost...

JACK'S FRIEND

Entwined in signs...

MOTHER

Inextricable...

²¹ Italian cats happen to only have seven lives.

JACK'S FRIEND

Inexplicable...

(Now singing at full voice)

You are like me
Crazy like Jack
You want to throw yourself
Into the coming darkness
Turn the world upside down
From top to bottom
Vandal for love
Reaping the night
To see where
Hides the light...

And, as companion,
Possessing a blade.

DIRECTOR

(Softly to the CAMERA-MAN)

That could be the transmission's theme music.

OPERATOR

Music and lyrics by Jack the Reaper.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Sings)

Crazy like me
You wish, like Jack,
To dance, eyes shut,
The tap dance of love
Give blood a color
Give pain some sense
Death a perfume
And in the coming darkness
Make dreams run away
Through our veins

And, as companion,
Possessing a blade.

(The song finishes, everyone applauds)

DIRECTOR

Truly extraordinary! A revelation!

It gave me goose-bumps!

CAMERA-MAN

We could launch that, you know?

DIRECTOR

Have you ever thought of singing seriously?

CAROLINA

It's a hit!

CAMERA-MAN

“Jack’s friend”! Think about it!

DIRECTOR

At the Old Regular, they’d take you right away!

CAROLINA

Bianca...

JACK’S FRIEND

(Takes the JOURNALIST’s hands)

Did you like it?

JOURNALIST

I was moved.

JACK’S FRIEND

Electric current?

JOURNALIST

A power plant inside of me. As if I had gone into that room!

(The JOURNALIST laughs, pointing at Jack’s room.
JACK’S FRIEND laughs, too)

Let’s get married.

JACK’S FRIEND

DIRECTOR

Haha, magnificent! Bianca, it’s a wonderful idea: a wedding, bouquets of roses²², a wedding cake!

CAROLINA

And Jack can make the toast! Are you there, Jack?

²² I have chosen to replace orange blossoms, which are traditionally associated with weddings in Italy, with roses, which have stronger associations to marriage in American society.

(Everyone laughs. Carolina puts a veil that she found in the boxes on the JOURNALIST's head)

JOURNALIST

Are you people crazy?

DIRECTOR

Come here. Arm in arm. Top-hat!

(JACK'S FRIEND and the JOURNALIST look like the figurines on top of a wedding cake)

Perfect! Just like that!

JOURNALIST

(To JACK'S FRIEND)

We'll be bride and groom!

JACK'S FRIEND

Yes!

DIRECTOR

For play... but also a little bit for real!

CAMERA-MAN

(Shoulder the camera)

The audience goes crazy for weddings!

CAROLINA

Me too! I always cry!

(CAROLINA distributes handfuls of rice from a bag that she found in the crate)

DIRECTOR

This is what you call the happy ending! Pure theatre!

(Laughs, applause)

Up with the lights, Alberto! Special effects!

(The lights intensify, creating an amusement park effect, sequins sparkling. The dark, cavernous space from the beginning must be almost completely gone to make room for a luminous T.V. set. Everyone throws rice, singing the wedding march)

ALL

Long live the bride and groom! Kiss! Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!

(JACK'S FRIEND and the JOURNALIST kiss. At the exact same moment, the lights go out. Total darkness. Only from Jack's room filters the usual light)

CAMERA-MAN

Nooo... we did it again! Too many lights!

DIRECTOR

Peek-a-boo!

CAROLINA

Crap.

DIRECTOR

Guess who it was?

(The sound of a slap is heard)

Ow!

CAROLINA

And who was it now? Guess!

(Sparse laughter)

CAMERA-MAN

Alberto, you there?

MOTHER

Is that you, Jack?

(The door to Jack's room opens and closes quickly, as at the beginning. The scene is momentarily lit by the blinding light. Then everything falls back into darkness)

CAROLINA

I'm scared!

CAMERA-MAN

Alberto, hurry up!

CAROLINA

I smell lily of the valley!

DIRECTOR

No, that's my after-shave: "Ancien régime" by Kopal.

MOTHER

Jack, can you hear me?

CAMERA-MAN

If you can hear her, turn the lights back on!

(Suddenly, the lights go back up; the ELECTRICIAN
has flipped the circuit breaker)

See that? See that he heard it!

DIRECTOR

Thanks, Jack!

(CAROLINA lets loose a blood-curdling scream and faints. The JOURNALIST's body is on the ground in front of the balustrade. JACK'S FRIEND is frozen. There's a muffled confusion, not even the slightest sound of voice is heard. The DIRECTOR runs to the door, opens it, is about to flee, but then turns back, lifts CAROLINA, drags her a few yards, then abandons her and escapes. The CAMERA-MAN, having abandoned his camera, lifts the girl and drags her outside. The two TECHNICIANS approach the JOURNALIST to lift her, but the SOUND TECHNICIAN nearly faints, and then dries his eyes. The ELECTRICIAN takes him under his arm. They flee. There is a long silence)

JACK'S FRIEND

(Looking at the JOURNALIST's body)

She was beautiful.

MOTHER

Beauty and madness go hand in hand.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Fishes from his pocket the perfume bottle)

Lily of the valley. Finished.

(Throws the bottle next to the corpse and then
heads towards the screen)

Did you say something?

MOTHER

No, nothing.

JACK'S FRIEND

(From behind the screen)

Peace at last, eh?

(Recites)

My own Venus / you rise from your shell / celestial birth / luminous daughter / of the sea...

(The MOTHER has taken the sheet off a cot, and now covers the body of the JOURNALIST)

Did you say something?

MOTHER

Just a little movement of the air.

(JACK'S FRIEND returns from behind the screen. He now wears the pants from the beginning and the jacket that was hanging from the hook. It's covered in stains, which could be blood)

JACK'S FRIEND

A sheet over a dead body always has a nice effect. True?

MOTHER

True.

(JACK'S FRIEND collects some flowers from the ground and throws them onto the JOURNALIST's body)

JACK'S FRIEND

Spring... summer... autumn... winter.

(The MOTHER fishes out of her pocket a letter and reads the message on the envelope)

MOTHER

Do not open till the next crime.

(Tears the letter to pieces and lets them fall onto the corpse)

That's what Jack said.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Looking up to the windows)

It's getting lighter.

MOTHER

Yes, it's dawn.

Smoke signals. JACK'S FRIEND

Clouds. MOTHER

Cheyennes. JACK'S FRIEND

Clouds. MOTHER

Ugh! (Beating his chest) JACK'S FRIEND

It's going to rain. MOTHER

(The MOTHER sits at her usual spot, picks up the crossword puzzle. JACK'S FRIEND sees the abandoned camera on the floor)

T.V. camera. JACK'S FRIEND

Ugh! (Picks it up, shakes it in his hands)

Beautiful! (Looks into the viewfinder)

Good... good, my little dear! (Fishes out of his pocket the knife, looks back and forth between the knife and the camera, weighs them, then throws away the knife and embraces the camera, which shakes in his hands)

Lallo, go! (Caresses it; the shaking stops)

(JACK'S FRIEND goes to the ladder, climbs a few steps)

They'll be here soon. MOTHER

From up high. JACK'S FRIEND

(Is at the top of the steps)

Twelve minutes and twenty-seven seconds!
(Plays with the camera)
Incredible! Better than real life! Did you say something?

MOTHER

No, nothing.

JACK'S FRIEND

(Pointing to the corpse)
A thousand here, Alberto.
(Descends from the ladder. Addresses the MOTHER)
Excuse me... would you mind moving here?
(Points to the balustrade; the MOTHER moves)
What do you say, Bianca? Gigi... background music! How?
(Turns, surprised and frightened)
Who's there?
(The MOTHER looks at him in silence)
You don't hear it? All these screams... this disorder... do you know what it is?

MOTHER

There's a proverb. Chaos is God's crazy brother. Maybe he's the one who was woken up.
(A loud thunder is heard)
Did you know that God had a brother?

JACK'S FRIEND

(Sneering)
One gives orders, and the other messes everything up!

(JACK'S FRIEND plays with the camera and films
the MOTHER)

MOTHER

Which of the two will judge us?

(A very loud thunder-clap)

JACK'S FRIEND

Stop!
(The thunder fades into a rumble. Without
stopping filming, JACK'S FRIEND addresses the
MOTHER)
Excuse me, would you mind repeating that?

MOTHER

Which of the two will judge us?

JACK'S FRIEND

Again!

MOTHER

Which of the two will judge us?

JACK'S FRIEND

Again!

MOTHER

Which of the two will judge us?

(Another violent thunder-clap followed by a long rumble as the lights slowly fade out. From Jack's door filters the usual light)

END

An Interview

Although time and circumstance did not permit a live interview to take place while I was in Bologna, Signor Franceschi was kind enough to agree to answer some questions I had in an e-mail. I have translated and included this interview as a way to bring this all to a conclusion and help the reader appreciate and understand the playwright by seeing his perspective on his life, works and world.

KT: Some biographical information: when and where were you born? Could you describe your youth, your family, and your education?

VF: I was born in Bologna, October 14, 1936. My father was a woodcutter, my mother a factory worker, then a home-maker from when my sister Anna was born, five years before my birth. We lived in Bologna, a stone's throw away from the house I live in now (between the two houses twenty years have passed, during which I have lived in almost all of the cities of Italy, notably Milan, Trieste and Turin). Living with us at the time was my aunt Laura, my mother's sister, who worked as a school caretaker. When she was fourteen, her ovaries were removed, and perhaps because of this she never married, despite having had a few suitors. She was a little bit batty, but nonetheless very intelligent and imaginative. Our house, which was really a loft, consisted of two bedrooms, a kitchen, and strangely had two entrances, one of which was raised three steps. Across from there was a crooked door that led to an old attic. Further to the right, after a small and dark hall, was my aunt's room. Coming in from the other door (the one

that my mother, sister and I usually used, while my aunt used the first), you pass directly into the kitchen. The bathroom (a toilet and a minuscule sink) was just outside, at the end of a little perch. We took baths in the kitchen in a zinc basin. We didn't have heating at home; the only source of heat was the so-called "economical stove" (they really called them this) placed in the kitchen, which we ran on sawdust since we couldn't afford wood. Sitting next to the stove you could feel a tepid warmth, but usually in the winters we kept our coats on (the winters back then were very harsh – it could get far below freezing). There was always smoke in my house; I believe now that the old pipes were clogged, but no one ever told us they could be cleaned. Before going to bed, we would put a bottle of hot water in the sheets to warm it up a bit. There weren't books in our house, or rather, there was only one, which I adored: "The Adventures of Pinocchio". And some sort of collection with illustrations of a few stories from the Bible: Joseph being sold by his brothers, the walls of Jericho, the plagues of Egypt, etc. Who knows who brought that home. Certainly not my mother, who only barely knew how to read. In 1941, my father, finding himself without work, emigrated to Germany (the fascist government, allied with the Nazis, encouraged and favored the emigration of Italian laborers to Germany, a phenomenon that then continued in the post-war). My father, whose name was Luigi, was sent to Bremen, where he worked in a factory (in the German war industry, which was the only industry alive in that country at the time). My mother, sister and I, after the first air raids on Bologna, were displaced to the hills of Marzabotto [a town about five miles outside of Bologna], and lived on a family farmhouse called "Villa Tremarè" as guests of some of my father's distant relatives who were farmers in that homestead. We slept huddled together in an attic above the stalls. There, for three years, I spoke

exclusively in dialect. My aunt Laura, instead, preferred to stay in Bologna, despite the bombardments, which were already daily and devastating. My father died in Bremen under an Allied bombardment in August 1944, at the age of 41. At this news, my mother wanted to return immediately to Bologna, which we did perched on a horse-drawn carriage towards the end of August. It was lucky for us, since shortly after, in September 1944, Marzabotto suffered a terrible Nazi massacre, and the risk of becoming a victim would have been very high. Indeed, Reder's Nazis attacked all of the surrounding Appennines, spreading horror all over. You could almost say that my father's death helped save the lives of my mother, my sister and myself. With my father's death, my family passed from poverty, in which we had always lived, into true and abject misery. We all slept in the same bed (the one that my parents had shared). I was in the middle, on the crack between the two mattresses, and often encroached a few centimeters on my mother's side on the left. I was so skinny that she almost didn't realize, or maybe she just pretended. We lived off of help from beneficent organizations, (from) gift packages from the parish on Christmas and Easter, and from small subsidies "for forthcoming pension", according to the official jargon repeated infinite times to my mother, to whom it was entitled for being a "civil widow of war". And sometimes from bowls of soup offered by our downstairs neighbors, who owned a funeral parlor and with the war and all the mourning caused by the bombs, they were getting by fine. The Liberation caught us in this state. Once the war was finished, aunt Laura remained out of work and to make ends meet she started to beg on the streets, and so she remained until the end of her days. Every morning as she left the house, she said: "I'm going to see my clients". My sister, at the age of 12, went to work as an apprentice in a workshop of artificial flowers, and

that was her work until her wedding. I finished my studies when I was 15, with a diploma of third *avviamento* [“introduction”] (a branch of the middle schools of the time, where all the children of the worse-off families went in order to get “a piece of paper” – that’s what they called that diploma – that was to help find a “proper” job – that is, not manual labor, which in fact happened to me). In fact, since I could draw well, as soon as the commercial school was finished, I enrolled myself in the high school of the arts. I passed the entrance exam (I was prepared, free of charge, by a certain Professor Bugli, a Romagnolo painter who was my drawing instructor from middle school and had taken me in as his apprentice) and attended for one year; I was admitted into and began the second year, but couldn’t continue. There wasn’t enough money and so I went to work, doing little occasional jobs – errand boy, clerk, usher, canvasser – anything to bring a couple of Lire home. Sincerely speaking, the choice to leave high school was also encouraged by the hostility of my Italian teacher (an elegant lady, called Martelli, or Scarpelli, I don’t remember exactly) who picked me – I have never understood why – as her target, mistreating and humiliating me without reason for the whole scholastic year. The trauma was particularly tough for me, amplified by the fact that at middle school I was at the top of the class, and the very top in Italian; my compositions would be read in class as examples, and when it came time for the final exam, I did three: mine, my deskmate’s, and that of another classmate who sat behind me, both of whom, after two hours (we were allotted four) still had blank pages. The boy behind me had tears in his eyes when he poked my shoulder and asked for my help. I wrote theirs, pretending to be working on my own, passing the papers under the desk, with the risk of being noticed by the proctor who walked up and down. All three of us passed! I then fell from glory into ruin, and it

was this disenchantment that was the last straw. I left my studies, which I would have had to do anyway, since the money my sister was earning was not enough. My mother, destroyed by my father's death, and terribly near-sighted on top of it all, after a few humiliating jobs eventually stopped looking and spent the rest of her life sitting in her broken-in chair, looking out the window, her toothless cheeks resting in her hands. She was 45 years old but looked ancient. Now and then she'd go to some office asking for news of her pension, only to hear the same, prompt response: it hadn't arrived. She was struck with cancer in December, 1955: they said it was "carcinoma of the spinal column" and sent her home. I nursed her for the last six months of her life. She passed these months in a bed I had moved into the kitchen so that she could stay a bit closer to the heat. To keep her spine from curving, I put the cutting board under her mattress, seeing as no one would be using it to make pastries. The/They didn't prescribe her any medicine, not even pills for the headaches. She screamed in pain for six months and died screaming. The only relief she felt came from the massages I gave her, rubbing a wad of denatured alcohol along her back, passing first from one side then to the other. My mother (whose name was Paola, though everyone called her Paolina) was born in March, 1900. She died July 3, 1956, at the age of 56. I was 19. Just a week before her death, I had found a "steady job": I was employed at the SIO (*Società Industria Ossigeno* – the Oxygen Industry Society). I had that position thanks to the interest of an accountant named Mr. Brighenti, a good person who had a position in the diaconate or something – I don't remember anymore – in my parish. It was the only joy that my mother had in her last years of life. When I told her, she made me promise that I would never leave that job. I promised, knowing it was a lie. A white lie with good intentions. Actually, I had

in the meantime enrolled in the *Accademia Antoniana d'Arte Drammatica* – The Antonian Academy of Dramatic Arts, where I studied until I got my diploma in 1958. She would have never understood this aspiration of mine, which was already a definitive choice for me. I decided to stay at the SIO until I got my diploma, at which point I left it to become a stage actor. And so it was. This is how the first phase of my life concludes. My aunt Laura begged until she was 80. She died at 82. Towards the end she had taken refuge with my sister (who had married in '52 and had two children). I always tell myself that before I die I must go to Bremen, at least one day, to see the sky under which my father died. He was buried in a mass grave and now there's no longer a trace of him underground. But I haven't been yet. My mother's pension arrived in 1962, after she had been dead for six years. After my mother's death and until October 5, 1958, I lived in my sister's house. On October 6 that year, with a single suitcase and a change of underwear, I left for Milan. I didn't know a soul, or where I would sleep the night. And here I am today.

From these days I particularly remember:

- A light to my left as I sucked the milk from my mother's breast. I believe that it came from the kitchen window.
- An Allied plane during the evacuation firing a machine gun above my mother and me, nosediving towards us as we ran towards the refuge along a country pathway. I still remember the projectiles shattering just above our heads, peeling the rocks of the cave. It was only we two: a woman and child fleeing. I always asked myself why, and the answer that "this is war" never convinced me.

- What my mother would sometimes say to my sister and me in the evenings: “kids, go to bed before you get hungry”.

- That time I was coming back home after a bombardment when I found, lying in the middle of the street, my tin drum. The house next to ours had collapsed and the shock had flung it all the way out there. The collapse also took down an entire wall of our bathroom, and for several months, from spring to autumn, we sat on the toilet looking down below us onto the traffic (mostly bicycles) on the bypass. Anyone who had looked up into that rubble would have seen us just sitting there. In the autumn the landlord had a masonite wall built, which withstood many years, even after the war was over.

- The day I won the rope-climbing competition the last year of middle school. I was at the top of the class in gymnastics, and played soccer, too – sometimes as the keeper, sometimes left wing (I’m a lefty) and maybe because of this everyone liked and respected me. I wasn’t at all a “nerd”. I once recited the first canto of the Divine Comedy up to the twenty-seventh verse, and the whole class, including the teacher, erupted into applause.

KT: When did your interest in theatre first begin?

VF: My mother took me to a puppet theatre. I was enchanted by the magic of that little booth, and on the way back I was lost in fantasy, inventing stories. I made some little puppets myself out of some rags that my mother gave me and ice cream spoons, which used to be made out of wood. I drew on eyes, a mouth and a nose with a pencil. I also built myself a little booth, nailing together pieces of wood as best as I could. I put on shows for my friends, improvising short stories and dialogues. I must have been ten or

twelve years old. And so my interest in theatre was born.

KT: Today, you are as much a playwright as you are an actor and director. Is this the way it has always been?

VF: I wrote my first play as part of a bet when I was 15. (Luckily I hadn't yet met that high school Italian teacher, or otherwise I might not have ever begun to write!) I made the bet with a friend of mine, Giampaolo Brighenti, who was a few years my senior. The challenge was for him to write a mystery novel, and for me to write a play. He didn't end up writing anything, but I did. He later became a notable sports journalist. I haven't seen him since. I titled my play "Destiny Does Not Exist" – [Non esiste il destino] and finished it with the protagonist's suicide. Our parish had formed a company "for men only", mostly my age. Boys and girls had to be rigorously divided. The priest (Don Barozzi, a tall and slightly cross-eyed man) was very moved when he read it and agreed to produce it under the condition that we would hold a debate afterwards. We put it up – I was naturally both director and star! – on the parish's little stage, and it was a triumph. At the sound of the final gunshot (done backstage with a blank pistol) the spectators – all faithful church-goers – jumped up in their seats to talk about the shock. The debate never took place because the audience, perhaps charged by the shot, after giving us a roaring round of applause rushed out before the priest could stop them. I burnt the script when I was twenty. Unfortunately. I would like to have it still, for solidarity with my adolescent ingenuity. Then when I was twenty-five, I burnt everything I had written when I was twenty. Then I stopped with the fire, but maybe I was wrong. At the time (it was 1951),

I went to church, I even served mass in the parish of Santa Maria della Pietà (it had once housed a large *pietà* by Guido Reni, hence the name. Nowadays the original canvas is in the Art Gallery of Bologna, and a copy was put in its old place in the church). When I was sixteen, I began to paint, too, and I continued until I was 22. I stopped later, I wasn't very good. And theatre had already invaded my life.

KT: Why did you, Dario Fo and Franca Rame decide to found the Nuova Scena ["new scene"] company?

VF: I have always held an interest in socially engaging theatre. When I was about 17 I stopped attending church. My origins and the "leftist" ideas that in the meantime were developing in my head and in my consciousness carried me elsewhere. In those years the Italian political left (the PCI [Italian Communist Party] and the PSI [Italian Socialist Party]) constituted a real hope for progress and emancipation for historically disenfranchised classes. The Catholic Church had always preached resignation and humility, whereas the Left preached about the fight for bread and emancipation, and a secular culture. Nor can one forget the *partigiani* ["partisans", the resistance against Mussolini's government] groups connected with those two parties, which had given important contributions to the fight for liberation from Nazi-Fascism, and fundamentally shaped the country's moral profile. Simply put, we young people (and here I refer to the people of my "bent", more or less all artists: painters, sculptors, writers, theatre-makers) dreamt of a more humane and more just world. And more mentally open. Being "left"

came naturally, none of us had read Marx. In Milan in 1960 I helped found a theatrical company with Massimo De Vita and Sandro Bajini. We called it “*I Bravi*”, with a clear allusion to [Alessandro] Manzoni [nineteenth century Italian author and poet, whose most famous novel, “*I promessi sposi*” – “The Betrothed” included a group of antagonistic wandering tough guys known as “*i bravi*”]. For two years we did cabaret-style theatre, with satirical texts (written by Bajini and myself) which aimed at the vices and crookedness of Italian society. Our point of reference was Brecht. We debuted with great success at the Gerolamo Theatre, which in those years had become the training grounds for young and emerging talent: Paolo Poli, Ornella Vanoni, Carmelo Bene, Enzo Janacci, Giancarlo Cobelli and many others all passed through there. Afterwards I went to the Established Theatre of Trieste, where they produced my first play: *Pinocchio Minore*, with the tagline “a proper fairytale with flesh puppets”. It was the story of the puppet Pinocchio who, having become a “proper boy”, lands himself in a consumerist society (we began to call it that at this time), assimilates to its principles, accepts its compromises and becomes a hangman. The show ends with a dance of hooded hangmen, jumping rope around a chocolate gallows in a modern-day Toyland. Two years later, still with the Theatre of Trieste, we put on *Gorizia 1916*, a play about the First World War based on a collage of materials I composed of various genres, calling it a “documentary for the theatre”. Francesco Macedonio, with whom I had collaborated for a good many years afterwards, directed it. It was a play that condemned the war, all the wars, even the so-called “holy wars” like the “Great War” of 1914/1918. There were many protests by the Combatants’ Association as well as ordinary citizens who accused me of defeatism, and the play was cut from the playbill early. Trieste, a “redeemed” city, much like

Gorizia, which was undergoing the 50th anniversary of its “seizure” that year, [both Trieste and Gorizia are cities on the northeast border of Italy with Slovenia, and had been part of Austria in the past, becoming part of Italy only after the First World War] has always been a politically conservative city. It could have been pure chance, but the very next year that theatre became managed by Giulio Bosetti, an actor with strong ties to the Church and the DC [Christian Democracy – a former political party of Italy with center-right leanings]. I summarized all of that to explain at least in part how, in 1968, I was ready to welcome the invitation that Dario Fo had offered to a group of young theatre makers that I associated with (“*i Bravi*” had been disbanded for a while) to take part in an initiative of creation and diffusion of a popular and engaged theatre in collaboration with ARCI (*Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana* – the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association), an organization with a strong national web (*Circoli e Case del Popolo* – Clubs and Houses of the People) closely tied to the political parties of the left, particularly the PCI. So it was not an aesthetic or linguistic affinity that brought me to Dario Fo, but a political alignment and the shared need to give new life to theatre and to address a new public – young people – with themes inspired by our nation’s current events. The push of ’68 was enormous – the State and Catholic Universities of Milan were craters about to explode, and the lava often flowed out into the streets and piazzas – and in two years the content and messages of our shows as well became more strictly political, even ideological. And it was for political reasons that we split up, in 1970, when Dario joined an extra-parliamentary leftist group (without distinctions, as long as they were “on the outside” and against the “system”), entering in a very tough polemic, and then violent rupture, with the more traditional Left and ARCI. It’s interesting to note

that the “young people” of Nuova Scena (as we had called the association we had created) lined up with apparently conservative positions, while the “grown-ups” lined up with more concretely extremist positions. Exactly the opposite of what usually happens. What happened in the years to come I believe has shown who was right and who was wrong. In the decisive assembly their line was defeated. Having lost the majority, they left Nuova Scena, moved themselves to Milan, and continued activity with “La Comune”. We remained in the “alternative circuit”, which in two years of hard work we had created in collaboration with ARCI, traveling around Italy, performing in the Houses of the People, in dance halls, old cinemas and piazzas, from Piedmont to Sicily. Certainly, the reasons for that division were much more complex than what can appear in these few remarks of mine. It would take up too many pages to explain and analyze them all. Even the human side, which revolutionaries – either real or presumed – don’t look after much, had its importance.

KT: You have acted in many of your own plays; is it a different experience from acting a role written by someone else?

VF: When I perform one of my texts, the first thing I do is try to forget that I wrote it. I concentrate on the character that I need to interpret and I do so looking to liberate myself of that load, with which I would not work well. Certainly, it isn’t easy. Especially when I’m not the director. To act in ones own play directed by another is very disarming, almost unnatural. It has happened to me several times. In the past, I found it worked well with Francesco Macedonio. More recently, it went very well with Nanni Loy and

Alessandro D'Alatri. Both of them, being film directors (I was the one to bring them to their debuts in the theatre!) approached the text and the work of the stage with that respect and modesty that one must always have, bringing their experience into the constructions of characters, and the attention to detail that is so typically cinematic. And so, without trauma and without clashing, but working in great harmony instead, we attained our best results. Because ours is a craftsman's work that requires Carthusian care and patience. When cinema and theatre meet "with love" good things come out of it. Don't trust those directors that have the air of the inspired artist, or the intellectual who knows it all. I have also had to deal with people like that and things inevitably went badly. There's nothing worse than hearing a director explain what you meant to say in your own text. Sometimes I have regretted being a living author. Returning to your question: an actor in a scene is like an acrobat on a tightrope. If I stop to think about what I've written while I'm acting, I'd fall down below. If instead I try to give body, voice and truth to my character, I'll get to the middle better. Naturally, it isn't easy, since he who writes has great responsibilities. There's also an unimportant economic implication: the Company has invested in one of your plays, and if things go badly, it's your responsibility and you would feel it was your fault. And perhaps this is the most difficult thought to fight off. But I must say, rather immodestly, that my plays have always gone well. Not all of them in the same way, to be sure. But I have never had any fiascos, and some have been truly great successes, "*Jack*" included, even if the direction was misguided. But the text held together, and Alessandro Haber was extraordinary in that role. The hardest thing to understand when one is both actor and author at the same

time is whether the final applause is meant for the actor or the author. But then concerning oneself with applause isn't that important.

KT: Have you ever discovered something new in one of your plays during a rehearsal, either as an actor or as a director, that you weren't aware of as you wrote it?

VF: It often happens that a line that has a certain meaning for me has another for the director or the other actors. And the meaning that the others attribute is sometimes much more interesting and intriguing than my own. I mean that when working on the stage, the text begins to live a life of its own, it's no longer completely yours, and this is beautiful if there is a current of art conducting it. Everyone, spectators included, reads a little bit of his or her own life in it, discovers a bit of his or her own inner, yet-unexplored world it in, and "adds" something to it. And so this "knowledge" seeps into the text and enriches it. The theatre in its greatest moments is revelation. An amazing gift offered by someone who we no longer exactly are and whom we welcome with sublime repayment. Something that resembles love, to put it simply.

KT: What inspired you to write "*Jack lo sventratore*"?

VF: Two themes, which are very close to me still now: irrationality as a sickness, which, if exalted, can bring a person to homicide while pursuing purification; and the violence of TV, which is able to transform reality, making even a crime in its most rough and vulgar meaning seem fascinating and shining. Recent current events here in Italy (happening in

Garlasco, Perugia and Erba, but preceded by countless others) seem to be part of this vein. Lightly put: fiction with real victims. And then the idea that God could have a crazy brother and that this brother would be Chaos very much intrigues me. “One gives orders, and the other messes everything up. Which of the two will judge us?”

KT: Some themes that I have taken out of “*Jack*” are the relationship between fiction and reality, justice, and the fascination that draws us towards death and danger. What do you want an audience to get out of these themes? Do you want us to discover other messages, emotions, impressions or ideas when seeing this show?

VF: In a way, I’ve already answered this. And then, one must not forget the playwright’s primary obligation: to not bore the public by moralizing or preaching. One of the unforgivable defects of political theatre is just this. Those of us who have done it, some more than others, have all fallen into this pit. Someone understands it and sets out with it because he believes in poetry. Someone else understands it but prefers to continue to taint the revolution with business. Even with the revolution you can earn quite a sum.

KT: It seems to me that some of these themes (like fiction/reality, justice) are also found in the works of Pirandello. Did these works have some influence on your own?

VF: Everything influences the work of artists. We are full of bruises owed to the past that continually rains upon us. The books we read, the testimony of those who cam/**came** before us, the echo of that which is happening in the world thousands of kilometers away.

In our DNA there are thousands of years of history full of shipwrecks, volcanic eruptions, wars and Greek mythology. In Italy it's impossible to not feel the influence of Pirandello. In the first place because he is an extremely good playwright (in Italy we haven't had many); and then because – perhaps due to that fact – they throw him on stage ten thousand times a year with shows that are usually mediocre and useless, and one can't take it any more. They'll end up making us hate him the same way it happened with Manzoni. Something that has always left me perplexed with Pirandello is that his characters never seem to be moved by economic problems. In a country like Italy, this is strange. I believe that the fiction/reality game wouldn't hold up so well with this theme.

KT: For the purposes of my translation, what would you like to communicate to an American audience?

VF: I've never been to America, and I don't speak English. I know you only a little bit through books and films. I believe that it is a country capable of receiving any type of communication. A country that thinks quickly, like Oedipus (I cite here a very acute observation made by Benno Besson, who directed me in 1980 in an extraordinary – and crushing – edition of Sophocles' "*Oedipus Rex*".) "*Jack*" is a piece that neither condemns nor absolves. By means of Chaos, which I spoke to/of earlier. But it's true that no one thinks about the heartbreak of the blade, she, so defenseless, constrained to bathe herself in blood. Who said that iron is inanimate? To know man, one must be the blade. I am sure that the American public would agree and become the blade immediately.

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