

MATE IN THREE (*scacco pazzo*)

(1989)

a play in two acts by Vittorio Franceschi

translated by Christopher Cruise

Characters

Antonio, about 40 Valerio, a few years older Marianna, about 30

ACT ONE

Scene One

THE LIVING ROOM OF A MIDDLE-CLASS APARTMENT. FIFTIES-TYPE FURNITURE WITH A COLOUR TV AND OTHER MORE MODERN ITEMS TO INDICATE A MISHMASH OF STYLES UNCONCERNED WITH CONSIDERATIONS OF TASTE. AT THE BACK IS A LARGE SPACE UNDER AN ARCH WITH A CORRIDOR RUNNING OFF TO EITHER SIDE. BEYOND THE ARCH, A FROSTED GLASS DOOR LEADS TO THE BATHROOM. TO THE LEFT OF THE DOOR, A BIG OPAQUE GLASS WINDOW GIVES ONTO THE BUILDING'S INTERIOR COURTYARD. THE CORRIDOR LEADS, ON THE RIGHT, TO THE FRONT DOOR, WHICH WE CANNOT SEE, AND, ON THE LEFT, TO THE ALSO INVISIBLE BEDROOM DOORS. IN THE RIGHT-HAND WALL, TOWARDS THE BACK, IS A GLASS KITCHEN DOOR. FURTHER DOWNSTAGE A FRENCH WINDOW LEADS TO A TINY TERRACE CLUTTERED WITH CARDBOARD BOXES, RAGS, AND EARTHENWARE VASES WHICH ONCE UPON A TIME CONTAINED FLOWERS. AGAINST THE BACK WALL, BETWEEN THE ARCHED SPACE AND THE RIGHT WALL, STANDS A LARGE DRESSER: THE GLASS-FRONTED CUPBOARDS OF THE UPPER PART ARE FULL OF PLATES, GLASSES, SAUCEPANS, ETC.; THE DRAWERS CONTAIN VARIOUS ODDS AND ENDS; IN THE BOTTOM PART, CLOSED BY TWO WOODEN DOORS, ARE KEPT SHEETS, TOWELS AND TABLE LINEN; ON THE SHELF IS A KITCHEN ALARM CLOCK, STOPPED SINCE FOREVER, A TORCH, A GLASS FLOWER VASE AND LITTLE JARS FULL OF SCREWDRIVERS, SCISSORS, BITS OF STRING, ETC. NEXT TO THE DRESSER IS A TROLLEY WITH BOTTLES AND GLASSES. BETWEEN THE ARCHED SPACE AND THE LEFT WALL IS A BRASS THREE-LEGGED COAT-STAND FROM WHICH HANG: A MAN'S LOOSE JACKET, A SKIRT WITH AN APRON ATTACHED TO IT, A SHAWL AND A SLEEVELESS WEDDING DRESS, ABOVE THESE ARE A BORSALINO-TYPE HAT AND TWO WIGS - ONE WITH SEVERELY DRAWN BACK GREY HAIR, THE OTHER LONG, WAVY AND BLONDE. AT THE FOOT OF THE COAT-STAND ARE A PAIR OF MEDIUM-HIGH-HEELED WOMEN'S SHOES. A SHELF ON THE LEFT WALL HAS AN OLD RADIO ON IT. FURTHER UPSTAGE IS ANOTHER DOOR WHICH IS OBVIOUSLY NEVER USED AS IT IS CLUTTERED, AS IS THE REST OF THE WALL, WITH PILES OF NOTEBOOKS, CARD-INDEXES, EXERCISE BOOKS AND OTHER STATIONERY MATERIAL. DOWNSTAGE, ON BOTH SIDES, ARE A COUPLE OF DELAPIDATED ARMCHAIRS. BESIDE THE LEFT-HAND ONE IS A SMALL TABLE WITH A TELEPHONE. BEHIND THE RIGHT-HAND ONE IS AN OVAL TABLE WITH A FORMICA TOP AND FOUR CHAIRS. IN FRONT OF THE LEFT-HAND CHAIR IS A TV SET FACING UPSTAGE. DOWNSTAGE CENTRE IS AN ELECTRIC TRAIN SET. KIDS' WALT DISNEY-TYPE MAGAZINES AND TOYS OF EVERY KIND ARE SCATTERED ABOUT ALL OVER THE PLACE. ON THE FLOOR NEAR THE RIGHT-HAND CHAIR IS A STRIPED BALL.

A MORNING IN EARLY AUTUMN. FROM THE BATHROOM COMES THE VOICE OF ANTONIO PLAYING WAR GAMES. WE SEE HIS SILHOUETTE AGAINST THE GLASS DOOR. VALERIO ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN DOOR; HE'S SLOVENLY DRESSED IN

A NONDESCRIP SHIRT AND TIE AND BROWNISH TROUSERS. HE GOES TO THE COAT-STAND, PUTS ON THE SKIRT AND APRON AND THE GREY WIG AND MOVES UPSTAGE TO KNOCK ON THE BATHROOM DOOR.

VALERIO Antonio!...(HE GOES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN)

ANTONIO (OFF) Crack! Boom! Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!

VALERIO (OFF) It's ready, Tony.

ANTONIO (OFF) Can't come. There's a war on.

VALERIO Breakfast? (HE COMES BACK IN WITH A CLOTH WHICH HE SPREADS OVER THE TABLE)

ANTONIO (OFF) (IMITATING AN AEROPLANE) Vroooooom...

VALERIO Couldn't you declare a truce?

ANTONIO (OFF) No.

VALERIO After, you could reopen hostilities.

ANTONIO (OFF) No way. The war ends when I want it to.

VALERIO (GOING BACK INTO THE KITCHEN) All right, all right. Anyway, breakfast's ready.

THE BATHROOM DOOR OPENS TO REVEAL ANTONIO. HE IS WEARING A SHABBY STAINED OLD MORNING SUIT OVER A GREASY SHIRT AND DANGLING BOW-TIE. ON HIS FEET ARE A PAIR OF BLACK POINTED SHOES. IN ONE HAND HE HOLDS A MODEL TANK, IN THE OTHER AN AEROPLANE.

ANTONIO I don't want honey. (HE PLACES THE TANK ON THE TABLE AND FLIES THE PLANE AROUND IT. SPARKS ISSUE FROM THE TANK'S GUN) Ta-ta-ta-ta! Vrooooooom! ...Boooooom!

VALERIO COMES BACK CARRYING A TRAY WITH A STEAMING CUP, TOAST, BUTTER, TWO JARS OF JAM AND A BANANA. HE PUTS IT DOWN ON THE TABLE.

VALERIO Now Sit down and behave yourself. (ANTONIO OBEYS)

ANTONIO Did you Chuck it out of the window?

VALERIO What?

ANTONIO The honey.

VALERIO Ah...yeah, yeah, I chucked it out.

ANTONIO Did it make a lot of noise?

VALERIO Like a bomb. It just missed denting the milk van. (HE SITS AT THE TABLE AND DISTRACTEDLY SIPS HIS COFFEE)

ANTONIO Aren't You eating anything, Mum?

VALERIO I've already had my breakfast.

ANTONIO Do you think blonde hairs are blonde just so there can be blondes?

VALERIO That's got to be the reason.

ANTONIO Blondes like Elizabeth?

VALERIO Come on, eat your breakfast. Who's winning?

ANTONIO The Outer Space lot. (HE DROPS THE PLANE INTO HIS COFFEE CUP)
Gotya! Direct hit!

VALERIO (JUMPING UP AND SLAPPING HIM,) Idiot!

ANTONIO No! Mummy doesn't, hit me.

VALERIO Maybe you don't remember. (HE DRIES THE SPILT COFFE WITH A
NAPKIN)

ANTONIO (WITH A RESENTFUL WHINE) No! Daddy does, but Mummy doesn't.

VALERIO Anyway, there's no more coffee. Finish what's left in your cup.

ANTONIO It's full of oil. I hit the tank.

VALERIO Well eat your banana then.

ANTONIO Don't want it.

VALERIO All right, I'll eat it. (HE REACHES OVER FOR IT)

ANTONIO No! (HE GRABS THE BANANA, PEELS IT VIOLENTLY AND BITES OFF A PIECE. VALERIO TAKES THE TRAY WITH THE REST OF BREAKFAST, INCLUDING THE PLANE STICKING OUT OF THE CUP, BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.)

VALERIO Now get ready, it's time to go to school. Have you brushed your teeth?

ANTONIO (GOBBLING THE BANANA WITH HUGE BITES) Not going to brush them, not going to brush them. Mummy hurt me. (THROWING THE SKIN OVER HIS SHOULDER) Not going to brush them. And give me back my aeroplane.

FROM THE KITCHEN VALERIO THROWS THE DRIPPING AEROPLANE AT ANTONIO, WHO JUST MANAGES TO DUCK OUT OF THE WAY.

VALERIO (OFF) Hurray for the Navy!

ANTONIO You're not my Mummy. It's no use pretending, you're not my Mummy.

VALERIO (OFF) All right, then, I'm your brother. You've found me out at last. Have you got your satchel ready?

ANTONIO I'm not going to school I'm a good boy, and all the others are horrid. They gang up on me and steal my stamps. So I spit at them and then they beat me up. Because I'm not big and strong like them. I'm smaller than the other boys in the fourth form, and if I run away they catch me and steal my pencils. I'm not going to school.

VALERIO COMES BACK IN, HAVING TAKEN OFF THE APRON.

VALERIO Shall I ask you again? Do you want me to insist?

ANTONIO No, that's enough for, today.

VALERIO I must go down, it's eight already. Got to open the shop. (HE TAKES OFF THE SKIRT AND WIG AND HANGS THEM BACK ON THE COAT-STAND)

ANTONIO When'll Dad be back?

VALERIO At twelve-thirty. A bit earlier if there are no customers.

ANTONIO Why doesn't Lucy come any more?

VALERIO (WHO HAS PICKED UP A FILE FROM THE HEAP AND IS CHECKING THE CONTENTS) Do you know how old Lucy is? Seventy-three. Eleven years have gone by

since...you know when. She's kept this house in order for eleven years. With you in it. And now she's had enough.

ANTONIO So I'm going to be alone all morning.

VALERIO I'm always alone too.

ANTONIO I want an au pair.

VALERIO They won't come for little boys like you.

ANTONIO Keep looking.

VALERIO They refuse.

ANTONIO Sodding tarts.

VALERIO As little boys go, you're rather special.

ANTONIO As sodding tarts go, they're extra-special.

VALERIO It's true we need a woman around here. I mean, look at this... (HE MAKES A DESPAIRING GESTURE AT THE GENERAL MESS)

ANTONIO It's your fault, not mine.

VALERIO (IN THE TONE OF ONE RECITING THIS LIST FOR THE HUNDREDTH TIME) Don't answer the telephone. Don't turn on the gas. Don't wet yourself. Tidy up your toys. if you need anything, ring the bell and I'll be up. But only if it's an emergency. (HE GOES TO THE CORRIDOR)

ANTONIO Valerio...

VALERIO Mmm?

ANTONIO How old would Elizabeth be today'?

VALERIO Thirty-eight.

ANTONIO And me?

VALERIO Forty-two.

ANTONIO And instead, how old am I?

VALERIO Seven. Eight. Three. (HE DISAPPEARS DOWN THE CORRIDOR) Six. Ten. Twelve. Four... (WE HEAR THE FRONT DOOR CLOSING BEHIND HIM)

ANTONIO I'm as old as the dinosaurs, even if I die young, like flowers. It's true, isn't it, Mummy? In the spring I sprout ve-e-e-ry slowly. First a tiny finger, then the whole hand, and finally all of me, stalk and all. That time I met Elizabeth I'd barely pushed my way through the earth and she was about to trample on me. So I shouted 'Look out!' and she jumped to one side and missed me. Love at first sight, stalk and all! If I'd been born in a flower bed, we'd never have met. But I sprouted on a path, between two stones, and that day she took that path. Luckily for me! Hullo? Hullo? (HE LOOKS DOWN AT HIS CHEST AND SPEAKS AS THOUGH THERE WERE SOMEONE UNDER HIS SHIRT) Elizabeth is beautiful and all the others are ugly. And if anyone says it isn't true, I'll wet myself. Say it isn't true, if you've got the guts! All of them, ugly,ugly,ugly. Look,I'll do it! I'll do it! I warned you! Psss...psss...(WITH A HALF-BEATIFIC, HALF-TRAGIG EXPRESSION, HE SPREADS HIS LEGS AND PEES IN HIS PANTS AS ...)

THE LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM.

Scene Two

LUNCH-TIME. THE STAGE IS EMPTY. WE HEAR THE FRONT DOOR OPEN AND CLOSE. STEPS ALONG THE CORRIDOR AND VALERIO ENTERS CARRYING TWO PLASTIC BAGS FULL OF SHOPPING AND A NEWSPAPER. HE PUTS IT ALL DOWN ON THE TABLE AND TURNS ON THE TV WITH THE REMOTE CONTROL. WE HEAR THE SIGNATURE TUNE FOR THE NEWS.

ANTONIO (OFF) (CALLING FROM HIS BEDROOM) That you,Dad? (VALERIO DOESN'T ANSWER BUT GOES TO THE COAT-STAND AND PUTS ON THE JACKET AND THE HAT) Dad,is that you?

VALERIO (FLOPPING WEARILY INTO THE CHAIR IN FRONT OF THE TV)
Yes,it's me.

ANTONIO (ENTERING) Valerio promised me you'd come back sooner. (HE STANDS BETWEEN THE TV AND VALERIO) Hi,Dad.

VALERIO Hullo.(HE GESTURES AT HIM TO MOVE OUT OF THE WAY)

ANTONIO Aren't you going to ask me seven times seven? Eh? Seven times seven?

VALERIO What's seven Limes seven?

ANTONIO Forty-nine. (WE HEAR THE NEWSREADER'S VOICE)

VALERIO Jolly good. (ANOTHER GESTURE) Now, let me watch the news.

ANTONIO I'm hungry.

VALERIO I'll fix lunch in a minute. Just let me see the headlines. (ANTONIO DOESN'T MOVE)

ANTONIO Did you do a lot of photocopies this morning?

VALERIO Oh, hundreds. (IMPATIENTLY) Now get out of the way!

ANTONIO (JUMPING UP AND DOWN IN FRONT OF THE TV) Not true, not true, not true! Daddy never had a Xerox machine, you had it put in. Isn't that the truth? Isn't it,Dad?

VALERIO (MAKING A GREAT EFFORT TO STAY CALM) Yes,it is. (DEEPENING HIS VOICE) There was none of that nonsense in my day.

ANTONIO I'll ask you the question again.

VALERIO All right.

ANTONIO Did you do a lot of photocopies this morning?

VALERIO (DEEP VOICE) There'll be none of those damn things as long as I run this shop. once You instal a machine, you've had it. Always breaking down. Lose customers. Notebooks, pencils, fountain pens are good enough for me.

ANTONIO And rubbers?

VALERIO (DEEP VOICE) Yes, rubbers too. (ANTONIO SITS ON THE RIGHT ARM OF THE CHAIR. VALERIO LEANS FORWARD TO LISTEN) (NORMAL VOICE) Now, shut up a minute.

ANTONIO Are there still nibs in the brown box?

VALERIO (IRRITATEDLY) Nibs?

ANTONIO I liked to count the nibs when I came down to the shop. I laid them out in rows on the counter. And you used to say, 'There's a good boy, you count the nibs.' Tell the truth, you really had me count them to keep me quiet, didn't you'?

VALERIO There was no need. You were a good little boy.

ANTONIO Wasn't I naughty? Wasn't I a rowdy little bugger?

VALERIO Oh, every now and then, like all kids. (LEANING FORWARD AGAIN) Let me hear this.

ANTONIO There were more than two hundred.

VALERIO Two hundred what?

ANTONIO Nibs. All laid out in rows.

VALERIO No one uses nibs any more.

ANTONIO Why not?

VALERIO Because we have ball-points. Let me listen! (HE TURNS UP THE VOLUME AND WATCHES THE NEWS. ANTONIO GETS UP, PICKS UP THE BALL AND BOUNCES IT REGULARLY AGAINST THE BACK WALL. VALERIO FLIPS.) will you stop that!

ANTONIO Take me down to the shop with you. I promise I won't be any trouble.

VALERIO (IMPATIENTLY) I can't, don't you understand? I have to work, see to the customers. How can I do that with you around?

ANTONIO Are you ashamed of me?

VALERIO What are you talking about?

ANTONIO Do you think I don't know? Do you think I don't understand?

VALERIO well if you know, stop breaking my balls! Leave me in peace!

ANTONIO I'm hungry.

VALERIO Well, eat then! (HE FLIPS OFF THE TV WITH THE REMOTE CONTROL, GETS UP AND EMPTIES THE TWO PLASTIC BAGS ONTO THE TABLE) Here's bread, ham, cheese, bananas, eat! (HE RAISES HIS ARM AS THOUGH TO HIT HIM) Eat!

ANTONIO (CALLING OUT) MUMMY! Daddy's hitting me!

VALERIO God Almighty! (HE TAKES OFF THE JACKET AND HAT AND HURLS THEM TO THE FLOOR)

ANTONIO Mummy! Mummeeeee!

VALERIO (YELLING) That's enough!!!

ANTONIO You should have braked sooner. It's your fault. (THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER) You should have braked sooner. (HE SINGS, BOUNCING THE BALL RHYTHMICALLY ON THE FLOOR) 'Apples and pears Nobody cares Peaches and plums Everyone comes...' (GIVING HIS BROTHER A SLY LOOK) Elizabeth's bringing me a pair of gold cuff-links tomorrow. Chosen by her. If you were my Mummy, I'd help you lay the table.

VALERIO PICKS THE JACKET AND THE HAT FROM THE FLOOR, HANGS THEM BACK ON THE COAT-STAND AND PUTS ON THE SKIRT AND THE GREY WIG.

VALERIO Antonio!

ANTONIO TURNS ROUND, SEES HIM 'DRESSED AS MUMMY' AND SMILES. VALERIO PULLS FACES AND MAKES FUNNY NOISES. ANTONIO LAUGHS LIKE A CHILD IN FRONT OF A CLOWN.

VALERIO Go and wash your hands, there's a good boy.

ANTONIO Yes, Mummy. (HE RUSHES TO THE BATHROOM AND DRIES HIS HANDS WITHOUT HAVING WASHED THEM. VALERIO OPENS THE PACKETS ON THE TABLE, THEN GOES TO THE DRESSER TO LOOK FOR A KNIFE. ANTONIO RUSHES TO A CHAIR AND SITS DOWN.) I'm first. Aaahhh! (HE OPENS HIS MOUTH AND WAITS TO BE FED.)

VALERIO I'll give you the first mouthful. After that, you feed yourself. (HE POPS A PIECE OF BREAD AND CHEESE INTO HIS BROTHER'S MOUTH. ANTONIO CHEWS HAPPILY)

ANTONIO Can I eat with my fingers?

VALERIO Today, yes. There's nothing cooked. (HE CUTS SOME CHEESE INTO SQUARES) But cut the cheese like this, spear it with a toothpick and...(SUITING THE ACTION TO THE WORD)...pop it in.

ANTONIO (LAUGHING) You too, Mum.

VALERIO I'm not hungry.

ANTONIO You're never hungry. Why'? (VALERIO DOESN'T ANSWER) Why Mummy?

VALERIO Because when you grow up, you don't get so hungry any more. (HE OPENS THE PAPER, FEELS FOR HIS GLASSES IN HIS APRON POCKET, DOESN'T FIND THEM, GETS UP AND GOES OVER TO THE DRESSER. AFTER RUMMAGING AROUND HE FINDS THEM, PUTS THEM ON, SITS DOWN AND STARTS TO READ.)

ANTONIO I love being hungry. Aaahhhmmm! (HE EATS ANOTHER MOUTHFUL AND CHEWS EXAGGERATEDLY) When I grow up, I'm always going to be hungry. That'll make Elizabeth happy, (BECOMING SUDDENLY GLUM) I haven't seen her for ages. Could she be ill? Perhaps she's gone away. (HE SHUDDERS. HE GRABS A PLATE WITH BOTH HANDS ANE), USING IT AS AN IMAGINARY STEERING-WHEEL, IMITATES THE NOISE OF A CAR. VALERIO, WHO CLEARLY KNOWS WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN, RUSHES TO THE COAT-STAND, WHIPS OFF THE SKIRT AND GREY WHIG AND PUTS ON THE WEDDING DRESS AND THE BLONDE WIG, AS ANTONIO GOES ON WITH HIS MONOLOGUE WITHOUT LOOKING AT HIM.) Where's Elizabeth, Mum? Where's my lovely blonde? Careful of the bend! Careful! Watch it! Watch out for the wall! Brake! Brake, for Chrissaaake ...! Smash! Splam! Padapow... Bammmmm! (HE BREAKS THE PLATE ON HIS FOREHEAD AND FALLS TO A SITTING POSITION ON THE FLOOR. MECHANICALLY HE MOVES HIS HEAD ROUND) Where's Dad, Mum? Where's Mummy, Dad? Mummy, where's Elizabeth? There's no one here. Elizabeth, where are you? I'll count to five, dead or alive... (HE TURNS UPSTAGE AND SEES VALERIO 'DRESSED A LA FIANCEE' SMILING AT HIM: A TERRIBLE, SUFFERING SMILE. ANTONIO LAUGHS HAPPILY AND JUMPS

UP AND DOWN CLAPPING HIS HANDS AS ...)

THE LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM

Scene Three

IT'S ALMOST EVENING. ANTONIO, SLUMPED IN A CHAIR, IS READING A WALT DISNEY MAGAZINE. VALERIO IS SITTING AT THE TABLE, READING THE PAPER. EVERY NOW AND THEN HE GLANCES UNEASILY AT THE PHONE. HE'S OBVIOUSLY EXPECTING A CALL. ANTONIO LAUGHS DELIGHTEDLY AS HE LEAFS HIS WAY NOISILY THROUGH THE MAGAZINE.

VALERIO Is it a good one?

ANTONIO Terrific!

VALERIO What's it called?

ANTONIO 'Donald Duck Goes To Hell'.

VALERIO Boy! Strong stuff!

ANTONIO There's a devil who wants to roast him. But it isn't really a devil, it's Peg-leg Pete dressed up as a devil.

VALERIO Does he succeed?

ANTONIO Succeed in what?

VALERIO Eating him.

ANTONIO If you don't let me read, we'll never find out, will we?

VALERIO Sorry, sorry. (HE GOES BACK TO HIS PAPER. ANTONIO TURNS OVER THE PAGES FASTER AND FASTER AND FINALLY THROWS THE MAGAZINE OVER HIS SHOULDER)

ANTONIO It was just Donald Duck's dream. or nightmare, rather. What's a nightmare?

VALERIO A bad dream. A dream that scares you, even after you've woken up.

ANTONIO Why?

VALERIO Because it stays like a running sore inside you. It can last for ages.

ANTONIO Longer than an hour?

VALERIO Sometimes, yes.

ANTONIO Longer than a week?

VALERIO It can last all your life.

ANTONIO Like my suit.

THE TELEPHONE RINGS. VALERIO RUSHES TO ANSWER IT.

VALERIO Hullo? Hiii! Yes, we're both here. I was just going to ring you...No, not yet, I sort of hinted, but there's no problem, matter of fact I'll tell him right now. (HE LOOKS AT ANTONIO WHO'S WATCHING HIM) We want to know how he feels too, right? ...Sure, I'll call you back...No, no, it's a date. Saturday...Oh, why not?...Couldn't they send someone else?.. What drag! Well, we'll expect you Sunday, then. Don't be late. Ten o'clock, sharp. We'll be waiting for you. 'Bye, now. Yes, I'll tell him. He's happy about it 'Bye. (HE HANGS UP, SMILING HAPPILY)

ANTONIO Who was that?

VALERIO Marianna. She says hullo. (ANTONIO GOES TO THE TROLLEY, OPENS A BOTTLE OF GIN AND SPRINKLES THE CONTENTS ALL AROUND HIM. VALERIO GRABS IT AWAY FROM HIM, RUSHES TO THE BATHROOM, COMES BACK WITH A RAG AND CRAWLS AROUND ON ALL FOURS WIPING UP THE MESS) My fiancée. Didn't I tell you I was engaged? Well, anyway...I have a girl friend.

ANTONIO I don't want to see her.

VALERIO (CONTINUING TO MOP UP) She's going to stay with us. Just for the week-end. Well, not even...only Sunday, she can't make it Saturday. After that, we'll see. It's a sort of trial run.

ANTONIO (POINTING TO A SPOT VALERIO'S MISSED) Here.

VALERIO Ah, yes, sure. I finally persuaded her. Took some doing, you know. But I managed it. I'm sure you'll like her. You'll become great friends. And anyway, if it doesn't work...(HE SPREADS HIS ARMS AS IF TO SAY 'TOO BAD!') But if it does, she'll come back. Another week-end...then another...and then she'll stay. That'll be great, eh? Choo-choo! (HE IMITATES THE WHISTLE OF A TRAIN)

ANTONIO (GLUMLY.) Choo-choo

VALERIO (PUTTING THE BOTTLE AND RAG BACK AND WIPING HIS HANDS) It's a big apartment...and I've reached an age when...if I wait much longer...it's not so easy, you know, these days...finding a wife. Easier to find a husband! (HE LAUGHS AWKWARDLY.

ANTONIO RUNS ONTO THE TERRACE AND STANDS FACING THE WALL, CRYING.) She'll be company for you, she'll be home a lot, you'll see, she has an agency...well, works in one, anyway...she gets around, selling houses, you know...great life! Lots of time off too, she'll take you out, I never have time... (HE STANDS BY HIS BROTHER, STROKING HIM) Nice name, eh, Marianna? Happy name. She's a great girl. I'll be here too, of course, so everything'll be normal...nothing'll change...there'll be your train, your ball, just like before, like now, except...you'll grow up in a family. You wanted an au pair and instead you'll have a little sister. Even better, eh? Much better! (ANTONIO TRIES TO SHRUG HIS BROTHER OFF) What's the matter?

ANTONIO (IN A THREATENING SNIVEL) It's not true that I'm happy about it.

VALERIO (SWIFTLY MOVING TO THE COAT-STAND AND STARTING TO DRESS 'AS MUMMY') You will be, as soon as you see Marianna.

ANTONIO Liar!

VALERIO You'll see how good she'll be to you. Marianna's beautiful. And clever?! Ah, I forgot to tell you, she's a fantastic cook. Her cakes are even more scrumptious than mine.

ANTONIO (COMES IN FROM THE TERRACE AND SEES VALERIO DRESSED 'AS MUMMY'. WITH A HAPPY SMILE) Hi, Mum.

VALERIO Hullo, precious.

ANTONIO Do you know Marianna?

VALERIO (WIPING AWAY HIS TEARS) She's a fine girl.

ANTONIO I'm scared.

VALERIO No need to be (SHE TIDIES HIM UP A BIT, STRAIGHTENING HIS BOW-TIE)

ANTONIO Marianna will start all the clocks. I'll hear them tick-tocking in every room. And then my beard'll start to grow...and my hair begin to fall out. Tick-tock...tick-tock...will Marianna start all the clocks'? If you're my Mummy, you should know what to say.

VALERIO Would you like me to read you the 'Time Story'?

ANTONIO (ENTHUSIASTICALLY) Oh, yes, please! (HE TAKES A BOOK FROM THE DRESSER AND HANDS IT TO VALERIO)

VALERIO You remember the moral of the story? Only grown-ups need to be afraid of

time. Children have nothing to fear. (HE SITS IN THE LEFT-HAND CHAIR AND PUTS ON HIS GLASSES. ANTONIO CURLS UP AT HIS FEET)

ANTONIO Time wears squeaky shoes. Some nights I hear him walking up and down in the corridor.

VALERIO We'll tell him to go barefoot. (HE OPENS THE BOOK, FINDS THE PAGE AND STARTS TO READ) 'Children are Time's friends. When they meet him, they greet him cheerfully and start to play with him. He gives them piggy-back rides and some of the naughtier ones try and trip him up. He just laughs, lets them do whatever they want and sometimes gives them sweets. But as they grow older, they begin to get suspicious: they keep their most important secrets from him, some even pretend not to know him, if he asks one of them the way, they send him in the wrong direction. They don't treat him like a pal any more, but as an enemy. And he doesn't understand, because he hasn't changed. Time is always the same. He still wants to have fun with them, but by now they're grown men, rushing around all over the place, paying no attention when he tries to stop them on some pretext or another: a stone in a shoe, a falling star, a pigeon doing a pooh

ANTONIO (LAUGHING) On their heads'?

VALERIO (LAUGHING TOO) Yes, on their heads 'But they don't understand, and instead of stopping for a moment to think, they rush around even more, cursing and swearing. We say that "time passes", but it isn't true at all. Time stays stock still. It's we who never stop running.' (HE CLOSES THE BOOK)

ANTONIO So how come I hear his shoes?

VALERIO The story doesn't tell us that. Perhaps it's because he hasn't really worked out yet who you are...if he can trust you. And, not being sure, he walks up and down the corridor. He's at a bit of a loss, poor chap.

ANTONIO If Marianna comes, what shall we tell her?

VALERIO Not to touch the clocks.

ANTONIO Is Marianna blonde?

VALERIO (TAKING OFF HIS GLASSES, PROUDLY AND TENDERLY) Marianna is a brunette.

ANTONIO Will she marry my brother?

VALERIO (GAZING INTO 'THE DISTANCE, WITH A SMILE) It could well be.

ANTONIO How old am I for Marianna?

VALERIO However old you want to be.

ANTONIO Are a thousand candles okay?

VALERIO Fine.

ANTONIO But don't tell her I wet myself.

VALERIO I promise.

ANTONIO No, swear.

VALERIO I swear.

ANTONIO No, together. (HE PULLS VALERIO FROM THE CHAIR AND THE TWO OF THEM STAND FACING EACH OTHER, HOLDING HANDS, VERY SERIOUS)'I swear I swear by the blood we share if I tell a lie may I hope to die!'

THEY CONTINUE REPEATING THIS AS...

THE LIGHTS DIM TO BLACKOUT

Scene Four

NIGHTTIME. VALERIO IS WATCHING A BOXING MATCH ON TV WITH THE VOLUME LOW. ANTONIO, IN HIS UNDERWEAR, APPEARS IN THE ARCHED SPACE. HE'S WEARING NAPPIES AND HOLDING A HANDKERCHIEF. HE WATCHES VALERIO FOR A MOMENT AND THEN GOES UP BEHIND HIS CHAIR AND BLOWS HIS NOSE VIOLENTLY. VALERIO GIVES A START AND TURNS ROUND.

ANTONIO I've got a cold, I couldn't sleep. (VALERIO TURNS BACK TO THE TV WITHOUT ANSWERING) I want the nosedrops.

VALERIO (IMPATIENTLY, STILL WATCHING THE SCREEN) Please.

ANTONIO Please, I want the nose-drops. (VALERIO GETS UP AND, BARELY TAKING HIS EYES OFF THE TV, GOES TO THE BATHROOM AND COMES BACK WITH A LITTLE BOTTLE WHICH HE HANDS TO ANTONIO)

VALERIO Here. (HE SITS DOWN AGAIN)

ANTONIO Could you put them in?

VALERIO You know how to do it yourself.

ANTONIO I always make a mess. (WITH UNCONCEALED IRRITATION VALERIO GETS UP AGAIN AND TAKES THE BOTTLE)

VALERIO Sit down. (ANTONIO SPRAWLS IN THE CHAIR, HEAD ON ONE ARM, LEGS OVER THE OTHER) Head back further ...(WITHOUT MISSING A MOMENT OF THE MATCH, VALERIO SQUEEZES THE DROPS INTO ANTONIO'S NOSE)

ANTONIO They've gone down my throat!

VALERIO (HASTILY TAKING THE BOTTLE BACK INTO THE BATHROOM) Do you good. Now go back to sleep.

ANTONIO I'm not sleepy.

VALERIO Well count to a hundred. And then back again: ninety-nine, ninety-eight, ninety-seven...

ANTONIO (STILL SPRAWLED IN THE CHAIR) Ninety-six, ninety-five, ninety-four

VALERIO Not. here. In bed. (HE HAULS ANTONIO UP AND SITS DOWN AGAIN)

ANTONIO (COUNTING AT THE TOP OF HIS VOICE AS HE GOES LEFT DOWN THE CORRIDOR) Ninety-three, ninety-two, ninety-one. VALERIO Quietly! You'll wake the whole building. Do you want to cause trouble with the neighbours? (ALMOST TO HIMSELF AS HE GAZES AT THE SCREEN) Do YOU want the neighbours to start complaining? (THECOMMENTATOR'S VOICE, THOUGH STILL LOW,GETS EXCITED: THERE'S PROBABLY BEEN A KNOCK-DOWN. ANTONIO COMES BACK AND DISCREETLY BLOWS HIS NOSE)

ANTONIO I want to die. If I can.

VALERIO (TURNING OFF THE TV) Now what's all this?

ANTONIO I'll go back to bed now, but I've warned you. (HE HEADS DOWN THE CORRIDOR AGAIN, COUNTING UNDER HIS BREATH) Forty-nine, forty-eight, forty-seven (VALERIO HESITATES, THEN GETS UP AND FOLLOWS HIM)

VALERIO Antonio...hey, Tony... (HE KNOCKS ON HIS BROTHER'S DOOR) (OFF)

Are you feeling alright? (NO ANSWER. VALERIO KNOCKS LOUDER) Antonio! ...

ANTONIO (OFF) (IN A LOW VOICE) I'm trying to sleep, but you won't let me. I got to eleven, now I'll have to start all over, again. (VALERIO COMES BACK IN, EXASPERATED. HE SITS IN HIS CHAIR AND TURNS THE TV ON AGAIN. ANTONIO IMMEDIATELY REAPPEARS) (ON) Can't grown-ups help tormenting children? Won't you ever stop? Won't you ever leave us in peace? (VALERIO'S AT THE END OF HIS TETHER) You thought I'd killed myself, didn't you? But see? I'm fine.(HE LEANS FORWARD, SUPPORTING HIMSELF ON ONE LEG, LIKE A BALLET-DANCER.) Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday. Like this, too. Look! (HE THROWS HIMSELF INTO THE OTHER ARMCHAIR AND LIFTS HIS LEGS IN THE AIR IN AN ABSURD, GROTESQUE POSITION) Monday, Tuesday, Wendsday, Saturday, Sunday. See? We kids are agile. You just try. Marianna couldn't either. Poor little thing! Poor little Mariannakins! One, two, three, four...(HE VANISHES DOWN THE CORRIDOR. VALERIO SITS RIGID. AFTER A FEW SECONDS,ANTONIO REAPPEARS) When I die, all the bells will ring. As long as you don't hear the bells, you can watch your telly. Feel better now? ANTONIO(C-ONT) Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three...(HE DISAPPEARS AGAIN DOWN THE CORRIDOR. VALERIO GETS UP AND GOES DECISIVELY TO THE COAT-STAND, WHERE HE DRESSES 'AS DADDY' (JACKET AND HAT) AND THEN EXITS TOWARDS HIS BROTHER'S ROOM. WE HEAR A TREMENDOUS DIN, A DOOR OPENING, BLOWS AND YELPS, UNTIL ANTONIO COMES RUSHING ON AGAIN, TRYING TO PROTECT HIMSELF FROM THE BLOWS RAINING DOWN ON HIM FROM HIS BROTHER) No, Daddy,...stop it...no! ...

VALERIO You want to die! I'll kill you then, you rotten little bugger!

ANTONIO (CROUCHING DOWN TO PROTECT HIMSELF,) Daddy doesn't talk like that.

VALERIO I'm Daddy, remember? (HE PULLS HIM UP BY HIS HAIR) Who am I? Who am I? Look at the hat! Who am I?

ANTONIO You're Daddy, you're Daddy. (VALERIO FLINGS HIM DOWN SO THAT HE FALLS ACROSS THE CHAIR, TWISTS HIS ARM BEHIND HIS BACK AND HITS HIM REPEATEDLY WITH THE HAT)

VALERIO Your father isn't your brother. I'm not good like him. Or rather, an idiot. Or rather, a stupid prick. A remorse-ridden prick! He could send you away, have you shut up in an institution, but he doesn't do it, I would, I'd do it, I'd sort you out, if he doesn't, I will, you hear me? You hear me? Answer me!

ANTONIO Yes.

VALERIO (GOING ON HITTING HIM) Yes, Daddy!

ANTONIO Yes, Daddy. (VALERIO LETS HIM GO AND SITS ON THE ARM OF THE CHAIR, BREATHING HEAVILY. ANTONIO SNIVELS AND WHINES)

VALERIO It wasn't your brother's fault, he was just unlucky, that's all, he was driving slowly, there was a bit of a drizzle, Elizabeth was laughing, me too, you know, 'wet bride, lucky bride', then that red motor-bike coming towards us, a split second!, I braked, it's not true that I didn't brake, wish the hell I hadn't, we skidded and the wall was there, there, right there! (HE GETS UP AND POINTS IN A DIRECTION HE WILL NEVER FORGET)

ANTONIO (AS THOUGH RECITING A DIRGE) Eeeeeowwww! Shploof! Pfack!

VALERIO Shut up! Your brother ran around like a madman, stopped the car, shouted, yelled, what was he to do?, what could he do?, Elizabeth was already dead, on the spot, I said 'Go on massaging', and the nurse massaged, here, (POINTING TO HIS CHEST) up and down, up and down, but there was no heartbeat, it had stopped, finished, kaput. And when I left her room they told me that Dad was dead too, poor old sod, in all that confusion I'd forgotten all about him, he died all alone and they asked me 'Are you a relation?' and I said yes, of him yes, of her no, just missed it, by an hour, in an hour she'd have become my sister-in-law, I was taking her to the church, she only lived a couple of miles away, and I thought how weird, all that blood on her wedding dress, we'll have to send it to the cleaners, blood spots are the hardest to get out (ANTONIO GIVES A SUBDUED GROAN) Is it my fault if I was unhurt? Your brother wasn't responsible, you must stop making his life a misery, he's a fine fellow, your brother, go on, say it, you know it's the truth

ANTONIO He's a fine...(VALERIO MOVES WEARILY TO THE COAT-STAND AND HANGS UP THE HAT)...Mummy, will you put me to bed'?

VALERIO (PUTTING THE HAT BACK ON AGAIN) Is it the same if Daddy does?

ANTONIO No, I want Mummy.

VALERIO Promise you'll go to sleep, then.

ANTONIO Promise. (VALERIO INDICATES FOR HIM NOT TO WATCH. ANTONIO
TURNS AWAY WHILE HIS BROTHER DRESSES 'AS MUMMY') But I won't let Marianna
put me to bed.

VALERIO Why not?

ANTONIO Because she'd look at my willie. She'd say 'Now put your pyjamas on'...and
that way she'd get a look at my willie.

VALERIO You'd just have to say, 'Turn the other way, please'.

ANTONIO No, she'd take a squint out of the corner of her eye, and then she'd reach a
hand out, like this (HE STRETCHES HIS ARM BEHIND HIS BACK AND WRIGGLES HIS
FINGERS)

VALERIO All right, then. I'll tell Marianna not to put you to bed. To begin with, anyway.

ANTONIO No, never.

VALERIO All right, never. Now let's go to bed.

ANTONIO (WITHOUT LOOKING AT HIM) Are you Mummy?

VALERIO Yes.

ANTONIO Daddy didn't ask me seven times seven.

VALERIO Daddy's tired.

ANTONIO It's more tiring for me who has to answer. Asking isn't tiring.

VALERIO He must have forgotten. Shall I ask you?

ANTONIO No, you stroke me. (VALERIO DOES SO) It's dark, it's late, I broke a plate.

VALERIO (SMILING) Never mind, I'll mend it. Good night, now.

ANTONIO Good night. (HE GOES A FEW STEPS, THEN STOPS) Do you know why
the bells are rung?

VALERIO To celebrate something. Or when there's a fire.

ANTONIO No. Because there are hanged men dangling.

VALERIO Who filled your head with all that nonsense?

ANTONIO Dig hard, dig deep, it's written in sleep. (HE DISAPPEARS DOWN THE CORRIDOR) 'Night, Mummy.

VALERIO Are you putting your-self to bed? (HE HAS TAKEN FROM THE DRESSER A PLATE WITH FOUR LITTLE BLUE CANDLES ON IT. HE LIGHTS THEM)

ANTONIO (OFF) Yes. You count to a hundred.

VALERIO Door open or shut?

ANTONIO (OFF) Open.

VALERIO With the candles?

ANTONIO (OFF) Yes, with the candles.

VALERIO (GOING INTO THE CORRIDOR CARRYING THE PLATE) One, two, three, four, five...(THE LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM. FOR A MOMENT, THE STAGE IS LIT ONLY BY THE FLICKERING CANDLELIGHT)

Scene Five

SUNDAY MORNING. THE RADIO IS PLAYING RELIGIOUS MUSIC-COUNTERTENORS, BOYS' CHOIR. VALERIO, DRESSED 'AS MUMMY' IS TIDYING THE ROOM WITH THE FRANTIC HASTE OF SOMEONE WHO'S ALREADY LATE. HE PICKS UP THE TOYS ON THE FLOOR AND STUFFS THEM IN A LARGE PLASTIC BAG. ANTONIO ENTERS IN HIS MORNING SUIT, CARRYING A TOY PAIR OF MILITARY-TYPE BINOCULARS THROUGH WHICH HE LOOKS AROUND. VALERIO PICKS UP THE BALL AND THROWS IT TO HIS BROTHER, WHO CATCHES IT.

VALERIO Take it to your room.

ANTONIO My brother said that nothing would change.

VALERIO Nothing will change. It's just for the first impression. 'Take it away, there's a good lad.

ANTONIO (PPOINTING TO THE PLASTIC BAG) And those?

VALERIO Those too. Just for today. Then, everything'll be as before. Ah, there's another one. (HE PICKS UP A TOY SOLDIER FROM THE TOP OF THE TELEVISION SET)

ANTONIO That sentry's on guard duty. If you remove him, there'll be no one to give the alarm.

VALERIO (PUTTING THE SOLDIER BACK) All right, we'll leave him here, okay?

ANTONIO (LOOKING THROUGH THE BINOCULARS) Facing a bit more to the north-west.

VALERIO (BARELY MOVING THE SOLDIER) How's that?

ANTONIO That's it. (SCRUTINIZING THE HORIZON THROUGH HIS BINOCULARS) The attack will take place.

VALERIO (GOING BACK TO HIS TIDYING) It's confirmed?

ANTONIO Confirmed, over and out. (LOWERING THE BINOCULARS) But we'll be saved...women and children first. (HE GOES OUT WITH THE BALL)

VALERIO (PICKING UP A LAST TOY AND PUTTING IT IN THE BAG) Antonio!

ANTONIO (COMING BACK IN) Yes, Mum?

VALERIO (HANDING HIM THE BAG) This too. Go on, hurry up. (ANTONIO RUSHES OFF, THEN STOPS) What's the matter?

ANTONIO (POINTING TO THE RADIO) Mummy doesn't listen to this sort of music. (HE GOES OUT)

VALERIO GOES TO THE RADIO, FIDDLES WITH THE KNOB AND GETS A STATION WHICH SEEMS TO SATISFY HIM. BUT AFTER PICKING UP A BROOM AND STARTING TO SWEEP, A VOICE ANNOUNCES: 'THE NILE: MYTHS, METAPHORS AND FLOODS. EPISODE FIFTY-EIGHT'. VALERIO HURRIES BACK AND STARTS FIDDLING AGAIN. A FEMALE VOICE ANNOUNCES: 'LITTLE BETTY SENDS LOTS OF LOVE AND KISSES TO HER GRANNY AND GRANDPA FOR THEIR GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY'. THIS APPEARS TO BE ACCEPTABLE, AND HE DISAPPEARS, STILL SWEEPING, INTO THE KITCHEN. ANTONIO COMES BACK FROM THE CORRIDOR HOLDING THREE TOY SOLDIERS. HE PLACES ONE WHO'S FIRING LYING DOWN ON TOP OF THE DRESSER, ONE WHO'S FIRING FROM A KNEELING POSITION ON THE RADIO AND ONE WHO'S FIRING STANDING UP ON THE TABLE. ALL THE GUNS ARE POINTED TOWARDS THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM. VALERIO COMES BACK, BUSY AS BEFORE, AND DOESN'T NOTICE THE SOLDIERS.

VALERIO Have you put your toys away?

ANTONIO Yes.

VALERIO And made your bed? Today's Sunday, your turn.

ANTONIO I'll go and do it.

VALERIO Well hurry up! (HE GOES INTO THE BATHROOM, WE SEE HIM WIPING THE WASHBASIN)

ANTONIO Mum, where's Valerio?

VALERIO (COMES BACK IN, PICKING UP A COUPLE OF BOTTLES FROM THE FLOOR) He's around.

ANTONIO Around where'?

VALERIO I don't know, in some room or other.

ANTONIO I've looked in all of them. He's not there.

VALERIO Must have gone out for a moment.

ANTONIO The sentry would have noticed.

VALERIO Well, I don't know then. Something you wanted to say to him? (HE TAKES THE BOTTLES INTO THE KITCHEN)

ANTONIO Marianna'll be arriving any minute. Maybe he's forgotten. I haven't.

VALERIO (OFF) I don't think Valerio will have forgotten.

ANTONIO You don't think so because you don't know him.

VALERIO (OFF) Oh really? I don't know him, huh?

ANTONIO You parents think you know your children! Did you know Valerio picked his nose.

VALERIO (COMING BACK IN) He does no such thing!

ANTONIO When he does a pooh, he picks his nose. I've seen him through the keyhole. He sits on the loo and picks his nose.

VALERIO I don't believe this! How could you behave so badly? Looking through keyholes!

ANTONIO If the keys were still in the locks you couldn't see anything, but they're not there any more. And anyway, the badly-behaved one is him for picking his nose. All I do is look. What else is there for me to do, stuck in here all day? Eh, Mum?

VALERIO You can go and make your bed, that's what you can do.

ANTONIO When I'm grown up I'm going to leave you all, travel, see the world. I want to be rich and greedy. Mum!

VALERIO Yes?

ANTONIO I'll send you the odd postcard.

VALERIO Thanks a lot.

ANTONIO Mummy

VALERIO What is it'?

ANTONIO Who do you love more, me or Valerio?

VALERIO I love you both, just the same.

ANTONIO That's not true. All parents have a secret preference.

VALERIO Well I don't.

ANTONIO Then you're not a real parent. (HE GOES OFF LEFT DOWN THE CORRIDOR. VALERIO GOES TO THE COAT-STAND AND 'TAKES OFF THE SKIRT AND WIG AS ANTONIO CONTINUES 'TALKING) (OFF) It's all right, I won't tell Marianna that Valerio picks his nose.(VALERIO GOES TO THE BATHROOM AND TIDIES HIMSELF UP) I'll leave her to find out for herself. Wives peep through keyholes too.

THE FRONT DOORBELL RINGS. VALERIO COMES BACK IN, TURNS OFF THE RADIO AND RUSHES TO OPEN THE DOOR. ANTONIO RETURNS, STARTS THE ELECTRIC TRAIN, LIES DOWN AND PUTS HIS HEAD ON THE RAILS, LIKE A SUICIDE. CONVENTIONAL GREETINGS AT THE DOOR. THE TRAIN MOVES ROUND AND CRASHES INTO ANTONIO'S NECK. HE GIVES A FAINT CRY. VALERIO COMES IN CARRYING AN OVERNIGHT BAG.

VALERIO Come in, come in...(HE GOES BACK INTO THE CORRIDOR) I'll just take your bag to the bedroom, I'll be right back.

MARIANNA COMES IN. SHE'S NOT BEAUTIFUL, BUT MEN COULD FIND HER ATTRACTIVE. HER DARK HAIR IS BOBBED, WITH A FRINGE. THE THICK LENSES OF HER GLASSES SHOW THAT SHE IS SHORT-SIGHTED. SHE'S WEARING A CLOSE-FITTING GREY SUIT WHICH SLIGHTLY IMPEDES THE EASY SENSUALITY WITH WHICH SHE USUALLY MOVES. SHE LOOKS AROUND WITH SURREPTITIOUS CURIOSITY. ON CATCHING SIGHT OF ANTONIO.SHE GIVES A LITTLE CRY AND CALLS,IN AN UNDERTONE:

MARIANNA Valerio! Valerio!

VALERIO (HURRYING BACK IN) Yes? (MARIANNA POINTS TO ANTONIO'S BODY ON THE FLOOR. VALERIO TRIES TO COVER UP HIS EMBARRASSMENT) Ah! Good, he's here ...because he was... (POINTING TO THE CORRIDOR) Well...that's great, you can get to know each other, right away... (STEPS TOWARDS HIS BROTHER) Antonio...Tony, old man, say hullo to Marianna ...

ANTONIO DOESN'T UTTER OR MOVE. VALERIO GESTURES TO MARIANNA TO MOVE FORWARD,SAY SOMETHING.

MARIANNA Good morning, Tony. Aren't you going to say hullo? (SHE 'TAKES A STEP TOWARDS HIM. ANTONIO JERKS UP INTO A SITTING POSITION)

ANTONIO Stay where you are! Don't move? (HE TURNS HIS BACK ON THE TWO OF THEM, TAKES FROM HIS POCKET A SMALL MIRROR AND, CUPPING IT IN HIS HAND, STUDIES THE WOMAN WHO STANDS THERE RIGID, LOOKING AT VALERIO, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO. VALERIO TRIES TO INDICATE BY GESTURES THAT THERE'S NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF AND THAT SHE MUST HUMOUR HIM) Why do you have such an awful haircut? (VALERIO TRIES TO PLAY IT DOWN) It doesn't suit you at all, you should wear it swept back, maybe with a wave here...(HE INDICATES A VERONICA LAKE-TYPE WAVE DOWN ONE SIDE OF HIS FACE) but anyway longer, much longer, how on earth can you...wait a minute, turn round. (MARIANNA HESITATES.) Go on, turn round. (VALERIO SIGNALS TO HER TO DO SO AND SHE DUTIFULLY OBEYS) There you are, you see? You see? I was right. It would do something for your jacket too. A lot, actually. 'Try to shake your hair. Go on, shake it! (MARIANNA SHAKES HER HEAD) There you are, you see? Nothing moves! Total paralysis! Hair was made to flow, to get caught in branches, to ripple like sails (MARIANNA HALF TURNS BACK) Stop! Don't move! You must never cut it again! Understand? Never, never, never!

MARIANNA But it's not as short as all that. Matter of fact, I have an appointment at the hairdresser's on Tuesday.

ANTONIO You won't go.

VALERIO If I may get a word in...well...I like Marianna the way she is. That doesn't mean that...

MARIANNA I don't mind cancelling my appointment if it could please Tony.

ANTONIO (STILL LOOKING AT HER IN THE MIRROR) Antonio, if you don't mind.

MARIANNA Sorry.

ANTONIO Blonde.

MARIANNA What?

ANTONIO You must dye it blonde.

VALERIO Ah, no! She...out of the question.

MARIANNA It doesn't suit me. I tried once.

ANTONIO One day you'll thank me for it.

VALERIO Will she now?!

MARIANNA And if I refuse?

ANTONIO (LEAPING TO HIS FEET AND POCKETING THE MIRROR) You can't. (HE LOOKS DIRECTLY AT HER FOR THE FIRST TIME) You're surrounded. (MARIANNA AND VALERIO EXCHANGE GLANCES OF MUTUAL INCOMPREHENSION. ANTONIO RAPIDLY DRAWS WITH HIS FOREFINGER AN IMAGINARY LINE BETWEEN THE TIP OF THE GUN OF THE SOLDIER ON THE RADIO AND MARIANNA'S CHEST. HE DOES THE SAME THING WITH THE OTHER TWO SOLDIERS.) And if you try to escape, the sentry will give the alarm. (HE POINTS TO THE 'SENTRY' ON THE TV) Do you surrender?

MARIANNA Okay, I surrender.

ANTONIO Will you become a blonde?

MARIANNA I don't see any other way out.

ANTONIO You're right. There isn't. (HE TAKES TWO IMAGINARY PISTOLS FROM TWO IMAGINARY HOLSTERS AND POINTS THEM AT MARIANNA.) Hands up, Blondie! (MARIANNA BRAISES HER HANDS. ANTONIO SIGNALS TO HIS BROTHER TO DO THE SAME. VALERIO, BY NOW PRETTY ANNOYED, OBEYS)

MARIANNA Congratulations on the ambush. Nice work!

ANTONIO Thank you. Age?

MARIANNA You don't ask a woman her age.

ANTONIO 'Pardon'. Name?

MARIANNA I thought you knew.

ANTONIO 'S'il vous Plait'.

MARIANNA Marianna.

ANTONIO Right. Marianna prisoner.

MARIANNA For how long?

ANTONIO Could be for ever.

MARIANNA That's called a life sentence.

ANTONIO No. it's called a nightmare. (HE TWIRLS HIS IMAGINARY PISTOLS AND

RETURNS THEM TO THEIR IMAGINARY HOLSTERS. THEY ALL FREEZE, VALERIO AND MARIANNA STILL WITH THEIR HANDS UP)

BLACKOUT

Scene Six

SUNDAY AFTERNOON. IT'S LATE AUTUMN AND OUTSIDE IT'S ALREADY GETTING DARK. THE RADIO IS BROADCASTING A FOOTBALL MATCH. MARIANNA IS IN THE BATHROOM WITH THE LIGHT ON. VALERIO ENTERS FROM THE FRONT DOOR CARRYING A BUNCH OF FLOWERS. HE PUTS THEM DOWN ON THE TABLE, KEEPING ONE EAR ON THE MATCH. HE TAKES A VASE FROM THE DRESSER AND HEADS TOWARDS THE BATHROOM JUST AS MARIANNA IS COMING OUT. THEY ALMOST COLLIDE.

VALERIO Oops! (THEY LAUGH. MARIANNA IS WEARING A SKIRT AND A YELLOW SWEATER OVER A FLOWERED SHIRT.

MARIANNA (PIROUETTING) How do I look? Worth a whistle?

VALERIO (WITH AN APPRECIATIVE WHISTLE) Fantastic! Very chic.

MARIANNA Oh, I don't know about that. (PULLING AT THE SWEATER) But it's nice, isn't it'?

VALERIO Very nice. Lovely. (HE GOES INTO THE BATHROOM AND FILLS THE VASE)

MARIANNA Let's hope he likes it too. He's not easy to please.j

VALERIO Oh, now listen all that about your hair don't you dream of dyeing it.

MARIANNA (SITTING ON THE ARM OF THE RIGHT-HAND CHAIR AND SPRAYING HERSELF WITH SCENT) I don't know, I just might.

VALERIO (PUTTING THE VASE ON THE TABLE AND CAREFULLY ARRANGING THE FLOWERS) Look, that's absurd. If you give in to him once, we've had it. You don't know him. And anyway, I like you dark.

MARIANNA It wouldn't be for ever.

VALERIO You don't say!

MARIANNA To put him at ease show him that he means something to me.

VALERIO I hope I mean something to you too. That is (GOING OVER TO HER) Well, let's wait a day or two...see how it goes...how he behaves.

MARIANNA It'll be tough.

VALERIO I know. Very. tough. I warned you. (HE STROKES HER HAIR)

MARIANNA (SPRAYING HIM LAVISHLY WITH SCENT) Actually, what you said was a bit different.

VALERIO What? That he was retarded, that...stop that!, you'll have me ponging like a tart, they'll be queueing up for me!

ANTONIO, UNSEEN BY THEM, STANDS IN THE CORRIDOR, LISTENING.

MARIANNA That he was like a defenceless child.

VALERIO Exactly! That's what he is. You'll see for yourself. (HE TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS)

MARIANNA He doesn't seem so defenceless to me. Quiet... (VALERIO KISSES HER ON THE NECK AND CARESSES HER. MARIANNA HAS HER BACK PRESSED AGAINST THE CLOSED DOOR. And he doesn't seem like a child either. Valerio...

VALERIO Then what does he seem like? (VALERIO IS CLUMSY, THEY ALMOST TRIP AS THEY EMBRACE)

MARIANNA That's enough. (THEY PULL APART) He has a way of looking at things that scares me.

VALERIO Well he's not normal, that's what it boils down to. Just one more. (HE KISSES HER. MARIANNA ENDS UP WITH HER HIP AGAINST THE DOOR HANDLE)

MARIANNA Ouch.

VALERIA What is it?

MARIANNA The door handle.

VALERIO Did it hurt?

MARIANNA No, it's nothing. What's in here? (POINTING TO THE DOOR)

VALERIO It's the mattress room.

MARIANNA The mattress room?

VALERIO Look. (DUE TO THE ENCUMBRANCE ON THE FLOOR, HE ONLY MANAGES TO OPEN THE DOOR A CRACK. THEY BOTH PEER THROUGH THE OPENING) See. It's full of mattresses up to the ceiling.

MARIANNA What are they doing there?

VALERIO We had a cousin who sold mattresses. After our mother died he asked if he could leave some here since a room had freed up. Then he left for Australia and we never heard from him again.

MARIANNA So they're just going to stay there forever?

VALERIO The house is big. What if one day he returns wants them back... in any case it's just temporary. Come here...

HE LEANS OVER TO KISS HER. ANTONIO TUGS VIOLENTLY AT A PIECE OF FLEX WHICH COMES AWAY FROM THE PLUG UNDER THE RADIO. THE STAGE IS PLUNGED INTO DARKNESS, THE RADIO GOES OFF. DIM LIGHT FILTERS THROUGH THE WINDOWS FROM THE STREET LAMPS.

MARIANNA What's happened? Power cut? (ANTONIO'S GIGGLE CAN BE HEARD FROM THE CORRIDOR)

VALERIO No. Guess who! (HE GOES TO THE DRESSER, FINDS A TORCH, TURNS IT ON AND PICKS UP THE FLEX) You see? He's pathetic.

MARIANNA Ten years certainly is a long time.

VALERIO Eleven. Eleven years!

MARIANNA Shut up in here

VALERIO Yep. (HE KNEELS DOWN, PUTS THE TORCH ON THE PILE OF STATIONERY AND FIDDLES AROUND WITH THE PLUG UNDER THE RADIO)

MARIANNA Is something broken?

VALERIO Just a loose wire, I'll fix it in a second. Mind holding this for a minute? And this? (HE HANDS HER A CARD-INDEX AND A PILE OF FOLDERS) Thanks. (AS HE WORKS) At first, I thought I'd go crazy. Doctors, nurses, endless bills. And my mother. Never stopped crying... Tony... my little Tony ... all she thought of was him. Because I was unhurt, see? I used to say to myself, someone's got to go to the loony bin. Either them or me. But you get used to everything. Ouch!

MARIANNA Hurt yourself?

VALERIO The screwdriver slipped. (SUCKING HIS FINGER) it's nothing. You know, I've never told anybody this, but when mother died, two years later, it was a big relief. Sudden appearance of the Big C. and off she went in four months. (HE GOES BACK TO WORK)

MARIANNA The Big C.?

VALERIO Yeah, cancer of the spine, got into the lymph, spread all over, phwitt! She didn't fight it. I think she was glad to go. She was no longer herself...husband dead, son bonkers...you could see her point, poor old thing...never combed her hair or dressed properly, shuffling around in her slippers all day...Ah! That's it. Switches and plugs are my speciality. I'm an expert. Anyway, that's enough about her, now there's you. I wish I'd met you before.

HE PUTS THE PLUG INTO THE SOCKET: THE LIGHTS AND THE RADIO COME ON AGAIN AND, BY SOME MYSTERIOUS CONTACT, THE TRAIN STARTS MOVING ROUND THE TRACK. MARIANNA CLAPS, VALERIO RUNS TO TURN OFF THE BATHROOM LIGHT, LOWERS THE VOLUME ON THE RADIO AND KNEELS DOWN TO STOP THE TRAIN. FROM THAT POSITION, HE LOOKS ADMIRINGLY AT MARIANNA.

MARIANNA What is it?

VALERIO You know, you're really beautiful. When I used to think of the sort of woman I'd like to start a family with, I'd imagine someone like you. And then I'd say, 'Hey, nothing's happening around here!' And the years go by, and you start to lose your hair...it's a family failing, my father and Tony too...my father always wore a hat, even in the house. And I'd say, 'You'll see, we'll end up two old bachelors!' And it really got to me because...well, this flat, for instance, who would it go to?...we've no relatives. And the shop...kind of a pity, after all the work...I modernized it too...put in two Xerox machines. I mean...if there are children, it's worth it. But Tony...well, there's no hope there...(HE GETS UP AND GOES TO THE DRESSER) By the way, sheets, towels and stuff are kept here ...(HE OPENS AND CLOSES THE TWO WOODEN DOORS) and here...(OPENING THE TWO DRAWERS) well, there's a bit of everything...(HE SMILES, A BIT EMBARRASSED AT THE DISORDER) But we'll soon have the place nice and tidy. Tomorrow morning...to work!

MARIANNA (PUTTING THE CARD-INDEX AND THE FOLDERS BACK ON THE PILE) What was she like?

VALERIO Who?

MARIANNA His girl friend.

VALERIO Elizabeth? Pretty. Blonde. Normal.

MARIANNA Were they madly in love?

VALERIO Er, yeah, I guess so. They went to the flicks, liked to go dancing. Like most engaged couples. They're supposed to be in love, right? (MARIANNA HAS TAKEN A FLOWER FROM THE VASE AND PUT IT IN HER HAIR) Nice, it suits you.

MARIANNA (TRYING IT IN THE V OF HER SHIRT) Better here?

VALERIO Mmm, don't know. Nice there too.

MARIANNA Well, make up your mind. Which is it to be?

VALERIO I'm not sure, maybe...oh, you decide.(MARIANNA GOES TO THE BATHROOM TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR. VALERIO TAKES A COMB FROM HIS POCKET AND HURRIEDLY COMBS HIMSELF) You know, my brother went berserk after the accident. He laughed.

MARIANNA Laughed?

VALERIO Yeah. Then he'd stay absolutely still for hours. Then he'd start laughing again. (HE CLEANS THE COMB WITH HIS FINGERS UNDER THE EYES OF MARIANNA WHO'S COME OUT OF THE BATHROOM) One time he ate all the photographs.

MARIANNA Ate them?

VALERIO Yes, really. He took all the photos of Elizabeth and ate them. First he cut them into little pieces, then he ate them. (MARIANNA HAS PUT THE FLOWER BACK IN THE VASE) Aren't you going to wear it?

MARIANNA No, it doesn't look good.

VALERIO Try another one.

MARIANNA Mm-mm, better without. (A SHORT, EMBARRASSED PAUSE) What about us? Are we in love?

VALERIO Of course. Like most engaged couples!

MARIANNA I don't really feel engaged.

VALERIO If it comes to that, neither do I . I'm a bit ancient for a fiancé. But my heart is twenty. No, that's a bit of an exaggeration, not twenty, let's say thirty...thirtyish... in my thirties, anyway, okay? (HE LAUGHS)

MARIANNA Aren't you being a trifle pedantic?

VALERIO But it's the truth! (HE MOVES TO KISS HER)

MARIANNA (SLIDING PAST HIM AND GOING TO THE RADIO) A little imagination's what's needed around here. Dazzle me, good Sir!

VALERIO All right, whatever you say. Dazzle coming up!

MARIANNA (TURNING UP THE RADIO WHICH IS PLAYING AN OLD TWIST) Let's dance! SHE STARTS TO TWIST AND VALERIO WATCHES ADMIRINGLY AND APPLAUDS) Come on! (SHE TAKES VALERIO'S HAND, BUT HE PULLS BACK)

VALERIO I can't dance.

MARIANNA I'll teach you. Come on! (THEY DANCE. VALERIO IS AWKWARD AND RELUCTANT, BUT MARIANNA ENCOURAGES HIM) That's it. Good!

VALERIO (OUT OF A MIXTURE OF EMBARRASSMENT AND EXHILARATION, HE STARTS TO DANCE WILDLY, GROTESQUELY) God, it's great to be twenty again! (HE FAKES THE COMB OUT AGAIN AND COMBS HIMSELF WHILE DANCING) How's this for dazzle?! (HE FALLS ON HIS ARSE AND LAUGHS RIDICULOUSLY. MARIANNA HELPS HIM UP AND BRUSHES DOWN HIS TROUSERS WITH HER HANDS. THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER. VALERIO IMPULSIVELY KISSES HER. THE RADIO ANNOUNCER SAYS: 'THE NILE: MYTHS, METAPHORS AND FLOODS. EPISODE FIFTY-NINE'. VALERIO GOES TO TURN OFF THE RADIO. A LAST FLOURISH WITH THE COMB) What do you think of the flat? Do You like it'? (HE PUTS THE COMB AWAY)

MARIANNA It's a bit gloomy. It's so big.

VALERIO It's stayed the same way all these years, but now we'll change it. You'll help me, you have lots of ideas. Bit by bit, one room at a time...

MARIANNA We'd have to gut it completely, repaint it from top to bottom and totally refurnish it.

VALERIO Well...that could be done...

MARIANNA (POINTING TO THE WINDOW AT THE BACK) There, for example, I'd hang a curtain.

VALERIO Why not? I'll buy the material. A nice grey.

MARIANNA Could be.

VALERIO You don't seem convinced.

MARIANNA Do you think this is a place for children to grow up in?

VALERIO Why not? What's the matter with it? I mean, given we're going to repaint it and do it all up...Ah, there are two entrance doors, you know. (HE POINTS BEHIND THE PILE OF STATIONERY) We use that one, but we could easily...might come in useful...(A BRIEF PAUSE)

MARIANNA We must be going.

VALERIO Ah, right. I'll call him. No flower, then?

MARIANNA No, no.

VALERIO (GOING UP TO HER) Pity. I love flowers. The old woman sets up her stand down there on the corner every Sunday. Give us a kiss. (HE PULLS HER TO HIM AND KISSES HER. ANTONIO APPEARS WEARING A STRAW HAT SEVERAL SIZES TOO SMALL FOR HIM. HE WAVES IRONICALLY ROMANTIC KISSES AT THE TWO OF THEM WHO SEE HIM AND MOVE APART) You ready?

MARIANNA Oh I like that hat!

ANTONIO Dad gave it me one Sunday when we went to the seaside.

VALERIO You'll take it off in the cinema, won't you?

ANTONIO Why should I?

VALERIO Because it blocks people's view. You're big enough already.

ANTONIO (HOLDING UP HIS HANDS, FINGERS SPREAD) I'm as tiny as Pinkie, my Daddy was Thumbelino and my brothers and sisters are all finky-wingies.

VALERIO (IMPATIENTLY) Shall we go?

ANTONIO (POINTING HIS FINGERS FIRST DOWN, THEN UP) When the finky-wingies are down they're walking on the beach, and when they're up they're sunbathing.

VALERIO Come on, we'll be late. (HE TURNS OUT THE BATHROOM LIGHT AND STARTS OFF DOWN THE CORRIDOR)

ANTONIO The whole family's gone to the seaside. (MOVING HIS FINGERS AS ABOVE) Now they're walking, now they're sunbathing...now they're walking, now they're sunbathing...

VALERIO I don't want to miss the beginning.

MARIANNA It doesn't matter all that much. It's a Walt Disney, not a thriller.

VALERIO It's a matter, of principle. I never go in after a film's started.

ANTONIO On Sundays, my Mummy takes me to the cinema.

MARIANNA Your mummy? (VALERIO IS ALARMED)

ANTONIO Yes. Daddy listens to the football matches and Mummy takes me to the cinema.

MARIANNA But...your mummy isn't here.

ANTONIO Oh Yes she is. What do you know about it'? Do you want me to call her? Are you going to force me to call her? (MARIANNA'S AT A LOSS, VALERIO INCREASINGLY NERVOUS)

VALERIO No, listen...I'm not...

ANTONIO (RUSHING FIRST INTO THE KITCHEN, THEN THE CORRIDOR, SHOUTING) Mummy! Mummy!

VALERIO Now get this into your head. I'm not dressing up.

ANTONIO The vase has flowers in it, that means Mummy's here. She goes down and buys them every Sunday. Mummy! (WE HEAR HIM OPENING THE BEDROOM DOORS, ONE BY ONE) (OFF) Mummy! Mummy, where are you?!

VALERIO God damn it!

MARIANNA What do you do when he's like this?

VALERTO What do I do? You'd never guess!

ANTONIO (OFF) Mummy is the household's guardian angel, and I'm her little pink bottom. Where's the baby powder? Sprinkle it on, sprinkle it on! (HE COMES BACK IN)

VALERIO (EXASPERATED) Now shut up, that's enough.

ANTONIO Who's made Mummy disappear? (THREATENINGLY TO MARIANNA) Was it Marianna? (TAKES A STEP TOWARDS HER) Was it her?

VALERIO (INTERPOSING HIMSELF) Antonio...Tony, please... let's go the cinema.

ANTONIO (PUSHING HIM VIOLENTLY ASIDE SO THAT HE FALLS INTO THE RIGHT-HAND CHAIR) Hullo, Marianna! (HIS THREATENING EXPRESSION CHANGES TO THE SWEETEST OF SMILES) While we're waiting for Mummy, shall we play a game?

MARIANNA (STILL A LITTLE SCARED, AS VALERIO NODS AFFIRMATIVELY) I'd love to.

ANTONIO But first you must promise me something.

MARIANNA What?

ANTONIO That you won't start the clocks.

MARIANNA (LOOKING AROUND) The clocks?

VALERIO (WHO HAS GOT UP, IN A DAZE) Well, yes, it's a (HE GESTURES TO INDICATE THAT AGAIN ANTONIO MUST HUMOURED)

ANTONIO Will you hurry up, Mum? (VALERIO LOOKS HELPLESS) There are three, but they've all stopped. One here. HE POINTS TO THE CLOCK ON THE DRESSER) One in the corridor and one in the drawer of my bedside table. Promise me you won't start them.

MARIANNA All right, I promise.

ANTONIO Good, now we can play our game. (HE GOES TO THE COAT-STAND AND TAKES THE TWO WIGS) To the flicks, ma! (HE THROWS THE GREY WIG ON THE TABLE, UNDER VALERIO'S NOSE. THEN HE HANDS MARIANNA THE BLONDE ONE) Put it on.

MARIANNA Why?

ANTONIO (IMPERIOUS) Put it on! (VALERIO MAKES A GESTURE OF PROTEST) Mummy, are you taking me to the cinema or aren't you'? (MARIANNA TAKES THE BLONDE WIG AND PUTS IT ON)

MARIANNA How's that'?

VALERIO HURRIES TO THE COAT-STAND AND DRESSES 'AS MUMMY'. THIS TIME HE DOES IT PROPERLY, ROLLING UP HIS TROUSERS, UNFASTENING THE APRON FROM THE SKIRT AND PUTTING ON THE HIGH-HEELED SHOES. HE DRAPES THE SHAWL OVER HIS SHOULDERS.

ANTONIO A bit further back. That's it! There's my Little blonde!

MARIANNA Who, me? (ANTONIO COMES VERY CLOSE TO HER)

ANTONIO (IN A WHISPER) My little blonde! (HE STROKES HER. MARIANNA FREEZES, LOOKING AT VALERIO WHO'S STILL DRESSING) She had tiny white teeth which used to nibble me there (POINTING To A SPOT ON MARIANNA'S NECK) And when she ate radishes, her teeth went 'Crunch!'...she loved raw carrots too: 'Crunch, crunch!' (HE KISSES HER ON THE NECK. MARIANNA IS PARALYZED) Just...there! 'Crunch!' Where there's this little mole. 'Crunch!' This perfume. 'Crrrunch!'

VALERIO (WHO HAS JUST FINISHED DRESSING) Tony! (ANTONIO KISSES MARIANNA AGAIN) Antonio!!! (ANTONIO TURNS ROUND WITH CLENCHED FISTS, AS IF ABOUT TO HIT HIS BROTHER. HE INSTANTLY CALMS DOWN AND SMILES)

ANTONIO Aaaah! There you are at last! Are you going to take me to the cinema? (VALERIO IS BREATHING HEAVILY. MARIANNA IS VISIBLY DISTURBED) What are they showing?

VALERIO 'The Wizard of OZ'. A lovely film. Great songs. (MARIANNA LOOKS WITH ASTONISHMENT AND DISTASTE AT THE WAY HE IS DRESSED)

ANTONIO Will you buy me an ice-cream?

VALERIO Of course.

ANTONIO And popcorn. And a bar of chocolate?

VALERIO Yes, the same as usual.

ANTONIO Is she coming with us?

VALERIO I don't think so.

MARIANNA Certainly I'm coming with you.

VALERIO You like this game? Find it amusing?

MARIANNA It wasn't my invention.

ANTONIO Who's she?

VALERIO (IN TOTAL CONFUSION) She's...Dad...Mum...er, Valerio's fiancee

ANTONIO She won't touch my willie, will she? (MARIANNA GIGGLES) She won't do this to me? (HE REPEATS HIS PREVIOUS GESTURE, STRETCHING A HAND OUT BEHIND HIM)

MARIANNA I promise I won't.

ANTONIO Then we can all go to the cinema!

MARIANNA (TO VALERIO) You're going out like that?

ANTONIO Of course, we do it every Sunday. Off we go! (HE TAKES THEM BOTH BY THE HAND) One big happy family! (HE LAUGHS AND DRAGS THEM TOWARDS THE DOOR, SINGING) 'We're off to see the wizard, The wonderful Wizard of Oz'...

(IF 'THERE ARE PROBLEMS OVER RIGHTS, HE COULD SING:;) 'To the flicks, to the flicks, Where we go to get our kicks'...

BLACKOUT

Scene Seven

SUNDAY NIGHT. THE STAGE IS IN DARKNESS EXCEPT FOR A FAINT LIGHT FILTERING THROUGH THE WINDOW AT THE BACK. ANTONIO IS SITTING IN HIS PYJAMAS IN THE LEFT-HAND CHAIR, HOLDING A TEDDY BEAR IN HIS LAP. MARIANNA, WEARING ONLY A SLIP, ENTERS FROM THE CORRIDOR LEFT AND HEADS TOWARDS THE KITCHEN.

ANTONIO Crick...crick...crick...(MARIANNA GIVES A START OF SURPRISE) Don't be scared, it's only a cricket. There are lots of them around.

MARIANNA Oh, it's you!

ANTONIO They all have names: Humphrey, Tufter, Filipino...the one chirping just now was Filipino.

MARIANNA What are you doing here? Why aren't you asleep?

ANTONIO I'm keeping the crickets company.

MARIANNA You really scared me.

ANTONIO Why don't you stay here with me for a bit?

MARIANNA (GOING INTO THE KITCHEN) But it's the middle of the night. (SOUND OF WATER RUNNING)

ANTONIO Expecting someone? Got an appointment? Has a jaguar escaped from the zoo?

MARIANNA (COMING BACK WITH A GLASS OF WATER AND HEADING FOR THE CORRIDOR) I have to be up early.

ANTONIO Stay where you are! (SHOWING HER THE TEDDY BEAR) Do you like Curlylocks?

MARIANNA Curlylocks? (SHE PUTS THE GLASS DOWN ON THE TABLE)

ANTONIO Sit down. (HE PATS THE ARM OF HIS CHAIR) He's called Curlylocks because he's...well, curly.

MARIANNA He looks very cuddly.

ANTONIO He isn't! (HE THROWS THE BEAR AWAY) He's a spy.

MARIANNA He doesn't look like one. (SHE SITS ON THE ARM)

ANTONIO Well he is. First he woke me up and said, 'Come and look', then he took my hand and led me to your room. I didn't want to go, but he insisted. 'Come and look, come and listen'...and he sniggered and pulled my arm so hard it hurt. He was laughing because he knew that afterwards I'd play with myself. (MARIANNA JUMPS TO HER FEET, BUT HE CATCHES HOLD OF HER ARM) He teaches me all sorts of nasty things...eavesdropping, peeping through keyholes. He taught me how to play with myself. I don't want to, but then I can't help it. And he blackmails me. 'If you don't come, I'll tell your brother everything. So I get up and follow him barefoot. We put our ears to the door and listen. I know what you were doing. Curlylocks laughed, but I didn't.

MARIANNA (WRENCHING HER ARM AWAY) You were spying on us!

ANTONIO (WITH A CATCH IN HIS THROAT) Grown-ups make love and children know it. They hear all the noises. (MARIANNA STARTS TO MOVE AWAY, BUT ANTONIO BLOCKS HER PATH) I didn't see anything, I swear. Nor did Curlylocks. The light was out.

MARIANNA You looked through the keyhole!

ANTONIO (CRYING) It was all dark. (MARIANNA AGAIN STARTS TO LEAVE, ANTONIO THROWS HIMSELF ON THE FLOOR) Don't go, don't go! (MARIANNA STOPS) I have a tender heart, crickets are my friends. Sit down. (MARIANNA KNEELS BESIDE HIM) What does a child mean to you?

MARIANNA I don't know, I've never thought about it. Someone to love, to help grow.

ANTONIO Gosh and golly, you'll be sorry.

MARIANNA Sorry? Why?

ANTONIO Trite, trite, fly by night! (MARIANNA SMILES WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING) A child is an empty hut with human footprints outside it. The footprints go in all directions, but hardly ever towards the hut. The few times they do, they get to the door and then turn back. How wonderful it would be for the child if humans went in and lit the fire! He'd listen to their stories and learn to grow. But instead he listens to their footsteps going away and cries. When you see an empty hut, go into it. It could be a child. Crick...crick...crick...

MARIANNA Is that still Filipino singing?

ANTONIO No, it's Tinkerbell. Hear what a silvery voice she has? Crick...crick...crick...She sings all night, I can't get a wink of sleep.

MARIANNA Who told you the story about the hut?

ANTONIO It's not a story, it's the truth. It's in a book we have. Mummy reads it to me now and then, but by now I know it by heart.

MARIANNA How do you know it's the truth?

ANTONIO Because I'm a hut. Can't you see the moss on the floor? Listen to the wind howling down the chimney. Whoo-oooo! Listen to the door creaking...screech, screech...listen to the first drops of rain on the roof...clip! clap! It's going to pour, want to come inside?

MARIANNA I'm not much good at lighting fires.

ANTONIO Never mind, I'll do it. I'm an expert, Curlylocks taught me.

MARIANNA Maybe tomorrow.

ANTONIO But I'm empty tonight. (MARIANNA LAUGHS) You think it's funny? That means you're not a good little sister. (HE JUMPS TO HIS FEET)

MARIANNA Ssh! You'll wake Valerio.

ANTONIO Valerio's awake, because you've made love and now he's waiting for his good-night kissy-wissy.

MARIANNA (TRYING TO CALM HIM) I came here to get to know you too.

ANTONIO (RETREATING) Don't come near me, don't touch me I mean it...otherwise I'll pee in my pants. (MARIANNA STOPS)

MARIANNA You must be patient, we've got to learn to talk to each other, I know very little about you, probably the least important things, but I'm already very fond of you. Tomorrow I finish at two, I have the whole afternoon free. We could start with your toys, I'd like to learn all their names. And I want to read that book. What did you say it was called?

ANTONIO I didn't say.

MARIANNA Won't you tell me?

ANTONIO We don't know the name because the cover was ripped off along with the title page, so we call it the 'titlepage book', because there isn't one. It's always been like that, it belonged to my grandfather's grandfather's grandfather.

MARIANNA Ah, so it's very old. (SHE MOVES TOWARDS HIM)

ANTONIO Yes, it's worth a fortune. It's written in tiny, tiny print.

MARIANNA (STROKING HIS SHOULDER) Will you show it to me tomorrow?

ANTONIO When there's a wind, there's a wind.

MARIANNA Sorry?

ANTONIO But only when it blows.

MARIANNA What are you talking about?

ANTONIO Now I want you to stop me.

MARIANNA Stop you?...I don't understand.

ANTONIO God, do I have to explain everything? I'm going to leave now and you stop me, as if I was trying to get away and you didn't want me to because there's something you want to say to me, so you take my arm, like I did yours when I asked you to stay, and you ask me to stay and make me sit down and explain to me why and I understand and we go on as before except now there's been this stopping me thing which has made it all a bit clearer. Got it? I leave and you stop me.

MARIANNA But why?

ANTONIO (OUT OF PATIENCE) Why, why? Grown-up always want to know why! When we kids ask why, you send us to hell ! Come on, now, stop me. I'm going to sit down, and then I'll get up and you stop me. (HE SITS) Here we go! (HE JUMPS UP AND STARTS TO MOVE AWAY. MARIANNA DOESN'T STOP HIM) Well?

MARIANNA Sorry, I wasn't ready.

ANTONIO Wake up! Tinkerbell's watching us. Don't make me look like an idiot! (HE SITS DOWN) Here we go! I've had enough, I'm going to bed. (HE JUMPS UP AND MARIANNA STOPS HIM)

MARIANNA No, stay, please.

ANTONIO You want me to? Really?

MARIANNA (SMILING) Yes, really.

ANTONIO Now you must tell me you love me.

MARIANNA Me?

ANTONIO Yes, of course, you. Who else? You. Tell me you love me.

MARIANNA That's enough. I don't like this game. (SHE STARTS TO LEAVE)

ANTONIO (STOPPING HER) It was you who asked me to stay.

MARIANNA Good night, Tony. (ANTONIO GRABS HER HANDS AND KISSES THEM. MARIANNA TRIES TO GET FREE) Good night, good night...

ANTONIO Chérie, chérie (HE DETAINS HER BY FORCE) Ma Petite...

MARIANNA Please, stop this. I want to go to bed. (ANTONIO TRIES TO KISS HER LIPS. AT THIS MOMENT, VALERIO ENTERS FROM THE CORRIDOR IN HIS DRESSING GOWN)

VALERIO (WHO HASN'T CAUGHT ON) Ah, there you are...

ANTONIO (PICKING UP THE TELEPHONE AND TALKING INTO IT)
Crick...crick...crick...

VALERIO I wondered where you'd got to.

MARIANNA I ran into Tony, we were having a chat. Tomorrow he's going to introduce me to all his toys.

VALERIO (TO ANTONIO, NOW A BIT SUSPICIOUS) Why aren't you in bed?

ANTONIO I was doing the round with Curlylocks.

VALERIO Go to bed, go on!

ANTONIO (MARCHING OFF LIKE A SOLDIER) Crick, crick, crick, crick... (HE EXITS LEFT DOWN THE CORRIDOR)

VALERIO What were you doing'? What did he want?

MARIANNA (VERY NERVOUS) he was eavesdropping at our door. You've got to do something, that I cannot stand.

VALERIO He can't have heard anything, we were talking in whispers.

MARIANNA I've got to feel free, I can't bear the idea that your brother's listening behind

the door.

VALERIO (BY NOW NERVOUS HIMSELF) Now calm down, we'll sort this out. One thing at a time. Don't get upset. And anyhow, what can he have heard? Nothing happened.

MARIANNA That's not important.

VALERIO It is to me.

MARIANNA I'm sorry. It was my first night here and...try and understand...what with this place, him and...

VALERIO And?

MARIANNA And you.

VALERIO Me? Why me?

MARIANNA Dressed as a woman...with a wig, high heels...(SHE SMILES SARCASTICALLY)

VALERIO I had to do it, you saw that yourself, when his 'Mummy' or 'Daddy' mood comes over him, I have to dress up, otherwise he never calms down.

MARIANNA You looked ridiculous. In that skirt!...a little old lady! (SHE LAUGHS)

VALERIO There's nothing to laugh about.

MARIANNA All the way to the cinema. with everyone staring at you. And you so maternal, and him, every two minutes, 'Mummy, buy me an ice-cream, Mummy, buy me some popcorn!' (SHE LAUGHS EVEN LOUDER)

VALERIO That's enough. You think I do it for fun?

MARIANNA People were laughing at you, and you know it.

VALERIO That's not true. He's sick, everyone around here understands.

MARIANNA Well I can't make love with a ridiculous, man.

VALERIO You want me to send him to an asylum? What am I supposed to do? Oh, I know: I could kill him. Maybe that would turn you on! (MARIANNA WHEELS ROUND AND EXITS LEFT DOWN THE CORRIDOR) I'm sorry.

MARIANNA (OFF) I'm going home.

VALERIO Now?! I mean...it's three in the morning! (HE FOLLOWS HER OFF, WE HEAR THEIR VOICES)

MARIANNA (OFF) Better that way, no one will notice.

VALERIO (OFF) Look, it's been a very difficult day...your first time here, him getting to know you...the toy soldiers, the dressing-up...I don't do it every day, you know...I mean, sometimes months go by...and then it's usually 'Daddy', 'Mummy's only once in a while...

MARIANNA (OFF) Excuse me, I'm getting dressed.

VALERIO (OFF) Oh, I'm sorry. (HE COMES BACK ON) You'll see, normally it all goes much smoother, you just need a lot of patience. If he tries it again, I promise you I'll do 'Daddy' and give him a good thrashing. Look, you mean a lot to me, more than ...(MARIANNA RE-ENTERS, DRESSED IN HER SUIT, CARRYING HER BAG) Are you really going?

MARIANNA I'll phone you. (VALERTO TAKES HER ARM) Please, I'm very tired.

VALERTO What's the matter? Don't you love me any more?

MARIANNA I don't know. We'll see. Excuse me. (SHE PUSHES PAST HIM, GOES INTO THE BATHROOM AND COMES OUT WITH A BOTTLE OF PERFUME WHICH SHE PUTS IN HER BAG)

VALERIO It took you so long to fall in love with me, and now...(HE CLICKS HIS FINGERS) Pfuit?

MARIANNA I need to be alone.

VALERIO Why should you be alone when you can be with me?

MARIANNA Why should I be with you, when I can be alone? (VALERIO IS CRESTFALLEN) Whichever way I turn, I feel I'm being watched. If it's not a teddy bear it's a tin soldier, if it's not a soldier it's a cricket.

VALERIO A cricket?

MARIANNA Didn't you know there were crickets in the flat? There are lots of them around.

VALERIO What are you talking about?

MARIANNA Oh yes, there's Tufter and Humphrey and Filipino... (WE HEAR ANTONIO'S VOICE, HIGH-PITCHED)

ANTONIO (OFF) Crick...crick...crick...

MARIANNA Ah, that's Tinkerbell. You hear what a silvery voice she has?

VALERIO Crickets!

ANTONIO (OFF) Crick...crick...crick...

MARIANNA Yes, crickets. What's so odd about that?

ANTONIO (ENTERING) Crick...crick...crick

VALERIO You go back to your room!

ANTONIO I was talking to Tinkerbell just now, and you know what she told me? She said, 'Your brother's a sad brother'. Marianna likes to laugh, You don't laugh enough.

VALERIO Oh, that's very good! That's brilliant! Thank you, Tinkerbell!

ANTONIO (DURING THE FOLLOWING MONOLOGUE, MARIANNA BECOMES INCREASINGLY FASCINATED BY ANTONIO'S WORDS, VALERIO EVER MORE GLOOMY AND A BIT HUMILIATED) Engaged couples should be happy, they should laugh a lot. Elizabeth and I were always laughing. And every laughter had a different colour. When we laughed yellow, everyone turned round and laughed with us. When we laughed red, they'd look away, because red laughter's a bit strong, people get embarrassed. Once, I laughed cyclamen, it was when I was pretending to be a flower to win over Elizabeth, and she said, 'How do you do that? Do it again'...so I laughed cyclamen and she couldn't do it. She laughed white, blue, but she couldn't laugh cyclamen, so I tried to coach her, I struck cyclamen poses, like this...or this... (HE STRIKES VARIOUS ABSTRACT POSES) spent a whole afternoon at it, just to make her laugh in every possible colour, I pulled faces too (HE DOES SO AND LAUGHS) you've no idea how many colours laughter has, green alone has 33 different shades, blue a few less, red even more, and then there's orange...it never ends! Elizabeth would keep on getting it wrong and I'd laugh...! (HE LAUGHS) 'Higher up!', I'd say, or 'Lower down!...that's it!...no, no, no!' (AFFECTIONATELY DISAPPOINTED) She was laughing brown, that's easy, anyone can laugh brown, dead leaf colour...'No, no, sharper!' and she'd start again...you're almost there!...she got really close to a cyclamen laugh, for a moment I thought she'd got it...'There, grab hold of it, don't let it go!' There was a moment of silence...we looked at each other...seriously, but with laughter in our eyes. Had that been it...the cyclamen laugh? Or not? Anyway, we laughed all day and by the evening we were engaged. (HE LOOKS INTO MARIANNA'S EYES) Well? Aren't you going?

MARIANNA (WITH A LITTLE START, AS IF WAKING FROM A DREAM) Oh...yes,

of course. 'Bye. (SHE LOOKS AT VALERIO, LOWERING HER HEAD A LITTLE) 'Bye...

THE TWO BROTHERS ARE IMMOBILE, MARIANNA EXITS RIGHT DOWN THE
CORRIDOR AS ...

THE LIGHTS FADE

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene One

MORNING, A DAY OR TWO LATER. BREAKFAST IS LAID ON THE TABLE. FROM THE CORRIDOR LEFT COMES A ROLL OF DRUMS. AFTER A FEW SECONDS ANTONIO APPEARS IN THE ARCHED SPACE. HE'S DRESSED AS AT THE BEGINNING OF ACT ONE WITH A DRUM SLUNG ROUND HIS NECK WHICH HE IS BEATING VIGOROUSLY.

ANTONIO Valerio! (DRUM ROLL) Curlylocks has been sentenced to death, do you want to watch the execution? He'll be shot in the back as a spy! (DRUM ROLL) The execution will take place in the corridor, pity about the wallpaper! (HE LAUGHS AND BEATS THE DRUM) So, are you coming? Brother? What are you doing, a pooh? (HE LOOKS THROUGH THE KEYHOLE OF THE BATHROOM DOOR.) Deserter! (FEVERISHLY BEATING 'THE DRUM, HE OPENS ALL THE DOORS, LOOKING FOR VALERIO) Deserters are shot in the back, like spies. (PROLONGED DRUM ROLL) Fire! (HE RUSHES TO THE BELL CONNECTED WITH THE SHOP WHICH IS IN THE RIGHT HAND WALL NEAR THE TERRACE DOOR AND RINGS IT FURIOUSLY) You're dead, you're dead, you're dead! (HE GOES OUT ON TO THE TERRACE AND YELLS DOWN) Put the 'Back Soon' sign up and run to the graveyard, they're waiting for you, the coffin's all ready but the corpse hasn't arrived, everyone's worried, they're afraid something's happened to it. (HE LAUGHS UPROARIOUSLY) okay, Valerio, just joking! Come up and we'll have breakfast. (HE COMES BACK IN, LOOKS AT THE BREAKFAST LAID OUT ON 'THE TABLE AND BOWS) Good morning, marmalade, did you sleep well? Mustn't grumble, Mr Teaspoon, and you? Didn't get a wink, they left me all night in a coffee cup encrusted with gooey sugar, I feel completely coated, the perfect start to a lousy day! (HE GOES BACK TO THE BELL, RINGS IT REPEATEDLY AND THEN GOES OUT ON THE TERRACE) Allò! Allò! Est-ce que monsieur Valerio est là? Can you hear me? Stop being a stationer and come up here at once! (HE COMES BACK IN AND BOWS AGAIN TO THE BREAKFAST) How's the butter today? He's put on a bit of weight, but he's bearing up pretty well. But the de-caffeinated tea is de-funct. Too long on the shelf. And just think, only yesterday she said to me, 'I'd give my life for a good cup of coffee!'...'Got a light?' , as the fireman said to the arsonist...(HE HEARS THE FRONT DOOR BEING OPENED) We're off, we're off, fasten your seatbelts, ready for take-off! Without saying goodbye, without a word, not a note, not even a telegram!

VALERIO ENTERS, A BIT OUT OF BREATH. HE'S WEARING A GREY OVERALL WITH PENS, PENCILS AND HIS GLASSES IN HIS BREAST POCKET.

VALERIO Why did you ring? Why did you have me come up?

ANTONIO Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly riot to piss. (HE LAUGHS) You just got here in time, I was about to wet myself and we've run out of nappies.

VALERIO (GOING DOWN THE CORRIDOR LEFT) I bought some more on Tuesday.

ANTONIO I've wet myself a lot this week.

VALERIO (OFF) And that's all you rang for! You know perfectly well there's always a spare pack in your bedside table. (HE COMES BACK ON, CARRYING A PACK OF NAPPIES) There! (HE THROWS THEM AT ANTONIO WHO LETS THEM DROP ON THE FLOOR)

ANTONIO When I get up, Mummy makes breakfast for me.

VALERIO It was already made.

ANTONIO It's cold. The coffee's cold.

VALERIO (PUTTING HIS HAND ROUND THE CUP) It's lovely and warm.

ANTONIO When I got up, it was cold.

VALERIO Well it must have warmed up sitting there, mustn't it?! I slept a bit late this morning and I had to open the shop. I mean, who's the wage-earner here? Who supports the family? (DRUMROLL) Shut up!(ANTONIO OBEYS) Can I afford to flip now and then? Have a nervous breakdown? Or a tummy-ache? Or the phone bill to pay? Or pee in my pants? (HE EXITS DOWN CORRIDOR RIGHT)

ANTONIO I think Marianna will come back. (A PAUSE. VALERIO RE-ENTERS)

VALERIO No. Marianna has left and will not come back. She hasn't phoned me once. Happy now? Congratulations, you really did it this time. You're like bloody napalm, you could reduce the garden of Eden to ashes...(HE'S ABOUT TO LEAVE AGAIN WHEN ANTONIO SNIGGERS. HE TURNS BACK, HURLS HIMSELF AT HIS BROTHER AND WRENCHES ONE OF THE DRUMSTICKS AWAY FROM HIM.) It was all going beautifully, it was the first day, but you...you...(HE RAISES THE STICK TO STRIKE HIM. ANTONIO RUNS AWAY, VALERIO MISERABLY DROPS HIS ARM)

ANTONIO I'm a little Pinkie boy with his head hanging. Look, look, look! (HE TAKES OFF THE DRUM, HOLDS IT AT ARM'S LENGTH AWAY FROM HIS BODY AND EXAGGERATEDLY LOWERS HIS HEAD)

VALERIO Do you know why Marianna won't come back'? You want to laugh? Because she saw me dressed 'as Mummy', that's why.

ANTONIO Why did you say 'dressed as Mummy'. You shouldn't say that. (HE LETS THE DRUM FALL TO THE FLOOR)

VALERIO Should say, shouldn't say...I was telling the truth, for once.

ANTONIO You promised me that nothing would change, but now everything's changing and the sentry's not on guard any more.

VALERIO Oh sure, the sentry and the skirt and the wig and the heels...look at poor little bruv, deprived of love

ANTONIO (HURLING THE OTHER DRUMSTICK TO THE FLOOR) You should have braked sooner!

VALERIO I shouldn't have braked at all, that way I'd have copped it too and now you'd be in an institution pinching the nurses's bottoms and flashing it at your psychotherapist. (THROUGHOUT THIS MONOLOGUE, ANTONIO REMAINS MOTIONLESS, WITH A STRANGE, FIXED SMILE. VALERIO TALKS MORE TO HIMSELF THAN TO HIS BROTHER) It's not easy to get a woman. You invite her out, and if she says no, you're frustrated, but if she says yes...oh, if she says yes, it's terrible! What do you do? where do you go? To a restaurant? All right, okay, fine, terrific! But it's riot all that terrific, because now you're sitting there and you're thinking, 'What am I going to say to her?' And you look into her eyes and you hope the waiter will come because women always expect all sorts of things from you. I rack my brains, but I can't think of a thing to say. She lights a cigarette. If she smokes! Because if she doesn't smoke, she doesn't even do that, she just sits there bloody looking at you! And you manage to come out with, 'You like it here?' And she says 'Yes.' And that's it. Silence again. And you look at people coming in, couples, happy, laughing, but then there's a lull, nothing happens, and those are the moments I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy...(HE SITS ON THE ARM OF THE RIGHT-HAND CHAIR) Those are the moments when you wish the ceiling would fall in, with lots of people hurt, maybe a death or two, so you're saved. But no, the ceiling's still there, reinforced sodding concrete, so you pray for an earthquake...but not a spoon moves and you're lost! That's what happens when you go out with a woman. (HE JUMPS UP AND BRANDISHES THE DRUMSTICK AT ANTONIO, WHO RUNS AWAY) But there's one time, maybe just one time, when you get it right. And the conversation flows and you exchange ideas and you're off! Marianna listens to me, smiles at me, answers me. (HE STOPS, THROWS THE DRUMSTICK AWAY AND, IN A MOMENT OF MACHO PRIDE, STRAIGHTENS HIS TIE) And that, my dear brother, was a triumph. I hadn't had a girl friend for eleven years!

ANTONIO Twelve. (HE'S ON THE TERRACE, SHOUTING AS THOUGH HE WANTED ALL THE NEIGHBOURS TO HEAR) Your last one dropped you six months before the accident. it's not my fault if you can't make it with women.

VALERIO (ON THE TERRACE TOO, ALSO SHOUTING) You forget that in all these years I've done nothing but look after you. I've thought of nothing but you! (HE COMES BACK IN, SITS AT THE TABLE AND MECHANICALLY SPREADS A SLICE OF BREAD) When I first met Marianna, I almost wanted to run away, I realized at once how dangerous it was. But I plucked up my courage, I still don't know how, I looked down at the floor and I asked her for a date. And she accepted! God knows why! But she did. Women! I thought, she's a widow, she needs home, she has a son who needs a father, perhaps she's very ill, yes, that's it! She's very ill

and she's looking for a stationer's to die in. (HE PUTS THE PIECE OF BREAD DOWN ON A PLATE)

ANTONIO (PICKING IT UP, UNSEEN BY VALERIO) Good place to die, a stationer's. (HE EATS IT)

VALERIO Every possible reason flashed through my mind, because I couldn't believe it. But instead, it was true! (MECHANICALLY HE STARTS TO SPREAD ANOTHER PIECE OF BREAD) We went out, lots of times, we'd see each other, and she'd smile at me. At me! She talked to me, she listened to me, and then one day she said, 'I love you', can you imagine?, just like that, 'I love you.' And I...I...(WITH A STRANGLERED SOB, HE GETS TO HIS FEET, HOLDING THE PIECE OF BREAD) I talked and talked, I told her everything, all about the past, about me, everything, everything!

ANTONIO (RUNNING ON TO THE TERRACE) Did you tell her about your beer bottle top collection? Where are they now? (HE LOOKS DOWN, THEY WERE PROBABLY THROWN FROM THERE) Where are the bottle tops?

VALERIO Don't worry, I told her about you too. How could I leave you out?

ANTONIO It was like a fantastic thunderstorm, remember? They crackled like fire as they hit the ground!

VALERIO Dropped from the third floor! The whole box, hundreds of them bouncing off the pavement! Took me six years to collect. Some of them were very rare.

ANTONIO (LAUGHING HAPPILY AT THE MEMORY) Everybody rushing to get out of the way!

VALERIO There were two from a Belgian beer which was drunk hot. They don't make it any more. They'd be worth a fortune today.

ANTONIO Did you tell Marianna?

VALERIO (SINKING INTO THE ARMCHAIR LEFT, STILL HOLDING THE PIECE OF BREAD) No.

ANTONIO You should have done, she'd have liked it. The bottle tops raining down, and her laughing!

VALERIO She's not stupid, you know.

ANTONIO I tell you, she's laughing. I think I can hear Elizabeth laughing.

VALERIO What do you mean, Elizabeth?

ANTONIO (EXCITEDLY) It's her.

VALERIO Oh, come on!

ANTONIO She's trying to get the cyclamen laugh, I've got to help her. (HE RUNS FIRST INTO THE KITCHEN, THEN THE BATHROOM, THEN ALONG THE CORRIDOR) Try blue first, Elizabeth! Then olive green! Where are you? Elizabeth? My lovely little blonde? I bet you've got your wedding dress on! Look for her! Elizabeth, Lisa, Lisaaa! (HE STOPS, STARING AT A FIXED POINT OUT FRONT. THEN HE WALKS SLOWLY FORWARD AND KNEELS) Are you hurt? They said you'd been crushed against a wall, that you'd died on the spot. But you mustn't pay attention to what people say. Are your nipples still stiff? If you only knew how I love to cup your tiny little tits in my grrreat big hands! Come on, let's laugh cyclamen, shall we? (HE STANDS UP AND GYRATES AS THOUGH HE HAD A GIRL IN HIS ARMS. THEN HE STOPS, GRABS ONE OF VALERIO'S HANDS AND PULLS HIM TO HIS FEET) All right, let's try! (VALERIO STANDS MOTIONLESS CENTRE STAGE, RESIGNED. ANTONIO GOES TO THE COAT-STAND, TAKES DOWN THE WEDDING DRESS AND PUTS IT ON VALERIO) Just do what I do. (HE LAUGHS, THEN GOES BACK TO THE COAT-STAND, TAKES THE BLONDE WIG AND PUTS IT ON HIS BROTHER'S HEAD) Paradise has to be earned! (VALERIO LAUGHS TOO. ANTONIO PUTS HIS ARM THROUGH HIS AND STARTS TO SING THE WEDDING MARCH) Head up, chin in! (THEY WALK DOWNSTAGE) Well done, very good! Close your eyes, you'll feel freer! (VALERIO'S LAUGH IS MORE LIKE A LAMENT) We're almost there, cyclamen's in the air... (THE FRONT DOORBELL RINGS. ANTONIO AND VALERIO STOP LAUGHING) I'll go.

VALERIO (THROWING AWAY THE PIECE OF BREAD AND STOPPING HIM)
No, wait!

ANTONIO There's someone at the door going crick crick

VALERIO (RUSHING INTO THE CORRIDOR) it could be Marianna! (WE HEAR THE FRONT DOOR OPENING. VALERIO BACKS ON, HOLDING IN ONE HAND A LARGE SUITCASE, IN THE OTHER THE OVERNIGHT BAG. MARIANNA FOLLOWS, STARING AT HIM IN ASTONISHMENT)

ANTONIO Marianna, I'd like you to meet Elizabeth. Elizabeth, this is Marianna.

MARIANNA Hi

VALERIO This is wonderful. I'd given up hope. (HE GOES OFF BY THE CORRIDOR LEFT, TAKING THE SUITCASE)

MARIANNA I don't know why I'm here.

ANTONIO Curlylocks knows. And Filipino says hullo.

MARIANNA Hullo, Antonio.

ANTONIO (HAPPILY) Antonio, not Tony! Hey! (HE TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS, SHE GIVES A SURPRISED CRY) You know how to laugh cyclamen? It's the laugh of happy young couples. Like this, listen! (HE LAUGHS)

MARIANNA (AMUSED, CALLING OUT) Can you do it, Valerio?

VALERIO (OFF) What?

ANTONIO He's always sad, he doesn't know how to laugh. Try with me. (HE GIVES A HIGH LAUGH) Do you like colours?

MARIANNA I love them. Especially cyclamen.

ANTONIO We'll laugh, then! (HE FALLS BACK IN THE ARMCHAIR LEFT WITH MARIANNA STILL IN HIS ARMS) Go on, try!(MARIANNA LAUGHS) Good, again, you're almost there! (THEY LAUGH TOGETHER) That's it, the cyclamen laugh! (VALERIO COMES BACK ON, HOLDING THE WEDDING DRESS AND THE BLONDE WIG. HE HANGS UP THE DRESS, CATCHES SIGHT OF THEM AND STANDS THERE WITH GAPING MOUTH, THE WIG DANGLING FROM HIS HAND) Higher still, sharper! Terrific! I'm even getting the scent! (MARIANNA'S CRYSTALLINE LAUGH BUBBLES LIKE A MOUNTAIN STREAM)

BLACKOUT

Scene Two

EARLY EVENING, A FEW DAYS LATER. THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW CHANGES IN THE ROOM: THE WINDOW AT THE BACK IS COVERED BY A CURTAIN WHICH COULD BE CALLED GREY AND COULD BE CALLED BLUE; THE TABLE IS NOW BEHIND THE LEFT-HAND ARMCHAIR, THE STACKS OF STATIONERY MATERIAL ARE NOW A LITTLE TIDIER AND THE ELECTRIC TRAIN IS NO LONGER THERE. VALERIO IS SITTING AT THE TABLE WHICH IS NOW ILLUMINATED BY AN ARCHITECT-TYPE DESK LAMP; IN SHIRT SLEEVES, THE KNOT OF HIS TIE LOOSENED, HE IS GOING OVER ACCOUNTS WITH THE AID OF A RATHER NOISY CALCULATING MACHINE. MARIANNA, IN SHIRT AND JEANS, IS SITTING IN THE ARMCHAIR RIGHT. ANTONIO, SQUATTING ON THE FLOOR IN FRONT OF HER, IS HOLDING A TEDDY BEAR IDENTICAL TO THE ONE WE SAW IN ACT ONE.

ANTONIO (SHOWING THE BEAR TO MARIANNA) And this is Curlylocks's brother.

MARIANNA He looks just like him.

ANTONIO They're twins.

MARIANNA Really?

ANTONIO Yes, look! (HE PICKS UP CURLYLOCKS AND HOLDS HIM UP) They're identical.

MARIANNA So they are. What's his name?

ANTONIO Curlylocks.

MARIANNA Him too?

ANTONIO Yes, because he's curly.

MARIANNA How do you tell them apart?

ANTONIO Instinct. (HOLDING UP CURLYLOCKS) This is Curlylocks.

MARIANNA (HOLDING UP THE OTHER) But so is this.

ANTONIO Yes, but this is the real Curlylocks.

VALERIO (WITHOUT RAISING HIS EYES FROM HIS WORK) He has a shoelace

round his left ankle.

MARIANNA (TO ANTONIO) Ooh, you cheat! (THEY BOTH LAUGH) Some instinct!

ANTONIO My brain travels faster than light. Right, brother?

VALERIO (AS ABOVE) Yes, when the lights are out. (A SILENCE)

MARIANNA Direct hit. Well done!

ANTONIO (FLYING HIS AEROPLANE, IN A DARK VOICE) Vroooooom

MARIANNA Your brother didn't mean to offend you.

VALERIO (INTERRUPTING HIS WORK AND TRYING TO MAKE UP) Of course I didn't. I mean, I'm always trying to economize, so I love it when the lights are out. (AN EMBARRASSED LAUGH) When I see a light on, I rush to turn it off...unless it needs to be on, of course, in which case I'm the first to switch it on. Right, Tony, old man?

MARIANNA (TAKING NO NOTICE OF HIM, TO ANTONIO) Won't you go on introducing me to your toys?

VALERIO It's known as 'small domestic economies'. (VERY PLEASED WITH THIS DEFINITION, HE GOES BACK TO HIS WORK)

MARIANNA It's ages since I last saw a toy. Weird, isn't it? One morning you wake up and your toys are strangers, you don't look at them any more. I wonder where all my dolls are.

ANTONIO Did you have a lot?

MARIANNA Yes, about thirty. My favourite was called Olympiad.

ANTONIO Olympiad? Great name. Why?

MARIANNA My father gave her to me when the Olympic games were being held. He named all my dolls. You know what he called them? Aeneid, Iliad, Odyssey (ANTONIO LAUGHS) I'd rather have called them after princesses in fairy tales, you know, Aurora, Griselda, that sort of thing...but he said, 'No, that's so trite, we'll call this one Samothrace...'

ANTONIO Trite, trite, fly by night

MARIANNA He used to talk about our dolls! 'And how are our dolls this morning? Have our dolls slept well? Have our dolls had breakfast yet?...He was always coming back with dolls.

ANTONIO If Curlylocks had been there, he'd have got them all pregnant.

VALERIO (LIFTING HIS HEAD') There, you see? (HE TAPS HIS HEAD AND GOES BACK TO HIS CALCULATING MACHINE)

ANTONIO Think of all the trains that would have been born, the aeroplanes, the balls like 'Bomb'.

MARIANNA Bomb?

ANTONIO He's my ball. (HE PICKS IT UP) When I bounce him, he sounds like a bomb. Listen! (HE BOUNCES IT VIOLENTLY)

VALERIO That's enough!

ANTONIO You see? The neighbours complain and my brother gets pissed off. (MARIANNA GIGGLES)

VALERIO Marianna, please!

MARIANNA But we haven't done anything.

VALERIO You don't know the people below. You soon will. (HE GOES BACK TO WORK)

MARIANNA (IN AN UNDERTONE TO ANTONIO) Come closer. That way we won't disturb him. (THEY SIT ON THE FLOOR, SIDE BY SIDE IN FRONT OF 'THE CHAIR)

ANTONIO Did your father die in a car accident?

MARIANNA My father's still alive. So is my mother. They're not all that old, they had me when they were very young.

ANTONIO Do they ask you seven times seven?

MARIANNA I don't live with them any more. For years now. I'm grown up.

ANTONIO And are you going to marry my brother? (THEY BOTH TURN TO LOOK AT VALERIO, ABSORBED IN HIS WORK)

MARIANNA I don't know, we'll see. There's no hurry.

ANTONIO (CONSPIRATORIALLY) Do you want to escape?

MARIANNA (WITH A SMILE) Perhaps.

ANTONIO This is the moment, my soldiers are all asleep.

MARIANNA You're a very bright boy.

ANTONIO Well, stay then. You can always marry me.

MARIANNA Why not? Crick...crick...crick...

ANTONIO Crick...crick...crick...(THEY BOTH LAUGH)

VALERIO What is it? What are you laughing about? (A PAUSE) Marianna, why don't you answer?

MARIANNA You have a very sweet brother.

VALERIO Ah, good, I'm glad the two of you are getting on. What was he saying to you? (MARIANNA DOESN'T ANSWER, ANTONIO BREAKS THE EMBARRASSED SILENCE)

ANTONIO I told Marianna that my soldiers peed in their helmets. (MARIANNA GIGGLES)

VALERIO (ANNOYED) Can't you talk about anything except people peeing? We'll have to put your soldiers into nappies too! (FOR A MOMENT HE FREEZES, AS THOUGH ASTOUNDED AT HIS OWN WIT. THEN HE LETS OUT A HIGH-PITCHED, SELF-SATISFIED LAUGH AND WAVES HIS CLENCHED FIST IN THE AIR AS IF TO SAY: 'I WON THAT ONE!' HE RESUMES HIS WORK)

MARIANNA (ASTONISHED BY THIS EXHIBITION, AGAIN IN AN UNDERTONE) He's a bit nervous today. Be patient.

ANTONIO I always am...although there are times when I'm tempted to chuck it all up and leave. But how can I abandon him? What would become of him? My heart bleeds for him, poor old chap! (MARIANNA EXPLODES WITH LAUGHTER)

VALERIO Would you mind telling me what is going on? Whisper, whisper, whisper, then you both laugh like hyenas!

MARIANNA Anything wrong?

VALERIO No. Just a bit odd, that's all. I mean, what's so funny? (BACK TO HIS WORK IN AN EMBARRASSED SILENCE)

ANTONIO (WHISPERING) If you saw your dolls again today, would you recognize them?

MARIANNA Yes...I think so.

ANTONIO And would you remember all their names?

MARIANNA I don't know about all. Perhaps...it was so long ago.

ANTONIO How long?

MARIANNA Oh, years and years.

ANTONIO Why did you do it?

MARIANNA What?

ANTONIO Leave your parents.

MARIANNA I wanted to be free like all kids nowadays.

ANTONIO And you didn't take your dolls with you?

MARIANNA I'm just beginning to realize what a mistake that was.

ANTONIO They'll have cried a lot.

MARIANNA I'm afraid so.

ANTONIO How could you do it? Think of Olympiad, it must have been awful for her! It's as if I...I abandoned Curlylocks. He'd suffer terribly. Because...okay, he's a spy, he has that defect, I can't deny it...but we're friends, when I'm thirsty he says, 'You're thirsty' and I realize I'm thirsty, I didn't know it before. If it wasn't for Curlylocks, I'd already have died of thirst! (HE PICKS UP THE CURLYLOCKS TWIN.) He couldn't care less. He's teacher's pet, he's always clean, always punctual, always done his prep, but he only thinks of himself, doesn't give a damn about me, if he died I wouldn't shed a tear. (HE THROWS THE TWIN BEAR AWAY) But Curlylocks is my greatest, dearest, bestes friend. (HE PICKS UP CURLYLOCKS) He knows everything about me, as I do about him. We're like that! (HE INTERLOCKS THE FINGERS OF BOTH HAND WITH A THUD) I'd go anywhere with Curlylocks, across the Siberian steppe in a sled followed by wolves. (HE GETS UP, MOVED) But you grown-ups are heartless. You had a favourite doll and you abandoned her. Where are you going to find another Olympiad? (TEARS ARE STREAMING DOWN MARIANNA'S CHEEKS) You're crying? That means you're sorry. We'll tell your dolls that and they'll forgive you. But I'm not sure you deserve it.

VALERIO What is going on? (HE GETS UP AND MOVES TOWARDS MARIANNA)
Why are you crying?

MARIANNA I don't know, it's nothing.

VALERIO What do you mean, nothing? There must be a reason. One minute you're
laughing, the next you're crying!

ANTONIO It's like when it rains on a sunny day.

MARIANNA (SMILING) Exactly.

VALERIO (SUSPICIOUS) Hm! What's this Olympiad?

ANTONIO She was her favourite doll.

VALERIO With a name like that?

ANTONIO Her father gave it to her.

VALERIO (SITTING ON THE ARM OF THE CHAIR AND STROKING
MARIANNA'S HAIR) Don't let all his nonsense get to you. (ANTONIO MAKES TO HIT HIS
BROTHER, BUT MARIANNA PREVENTS HIM.)

MARIANNA It's not nonsense, it's the truth. (ANTONIO DRAWS BACK)

VALERIO Look if you want to play along with him, that's fine, up to a certain point. But I
don't want to see you crying. I'll punch his nose in! I know this character, I wouldn't put anything
past him. And you're here for me, not him! Get it? (HE GIVES ANTONIO A VIOLENT
SHOVE. ANTONIO CAN BARELY RESTRAIN HIMSELF)

MARIANNA What are you doing?

VALERIO He's supposed to be introducing you to his toys, right? (TO ANTONIO) Well
introduce them, and stop making trouble. Look...here's your top, your steamboat, your
Bugatti...tell her about the games you play with them, and let me get on with my work. Then
we'll have supper. (TO MARIANNA) He didn't twist your arm, did he'? He does, sometimes, to
his little friends in the gardens. He twists their arms, and he doesn't know his own strength. Why
don't you answer me?

MARIANNA I just felt sad for a moment. (NEITHER OF THEM NOTICE THAT
ANTONIO HAS TAKEN VALERIO'S PLACE AT THE TABLE)

VALERIO Sad! You were crying your eyes out.

MARIANNA (WIPING AWAY HER TEARS, TO ANTONIO) Shall we go on?

ANTONIO No.

VALERIO There! You see?

MARIANNA Don't you want to'?

ANTONIO I'm just feeling sad for a moment.

VALERIO See what I mean? (HE TWISTS HIS FINGER AGAINST HIS FOREHEAD TO INDICATE A SCREW LOOSE) You tell me what I should do. Common sense, patience, they're not enough. I keep on trying to open him up, and he just shuts you out.

ANTONIO Cro...cro...cro...

VALERIO What's that?

ANTONIO Alaska crickets. They weigh nearly a pound and they go cro cro.

VALERIO (SCORNFULLY) Alaska crickets! (ANTONIO TAPS WILDLY ON THE CALCULATING MACHINE AND MESSES UP ALL THE PAPERS) Look, I'm trying to work! (HE HURLS HIMSELF AT HIS BROTHER WHO TAKES REFUGE IN THE KITCHEN. THE PAPERS FLY ALL OVER THE PLACE) You know how much tax I have to pay'? Just have a guess! (HE KNEELS DOWN TO PICK UP SOME OF THE PAPERS)

MARIANNA What's tax got to do with it? I thought we...

VALERIO What's tax got to do with it? As long as I have to pay the damn thing, I think I have a right to mention it. (SLAMMING THE PAPERS DOWN ON THE TABLE) These are the accounts. You wouldn't believe it!

MARIANNA We were talking about toys, we were talking about my dolls.

VALERIO Ah yes, of course! Olympiad! World championships! You mustn't humour him too much.

MARIANNA If you stopped talking for a moment, you might be able to hear what I'm saying.

VALERIO I'm not deaf.

MARIANNA Oh God!

VALERIO All right. I'm blind, I'm deaf! And in the meantime he twists your arm.

MARIANNA He didn't twist anything.

VALERIO Ah no? So you were crying...just to pass the time!

MARIANNA Would you shut up for a minute?

VALERIO All right, I'm listening, I'm listening.

MARIANNA I was crying because I suddenly remembered my childhood.

VALERIO Ah, you too!

MARIANNA When I was a child I had a lot of imagination and my parents were always telling me to come down to earth. The higher I tried to fly, the more they'd call to me: 'Come down, come down! And I came down so far I ended up here.

VALERIO (WHO HASN'T UNDERSTOOD MUCH OF THIS, COMING TO STAND BY HER CHAIR) Meaning you don't see much future in the business?

MARIANNA Business?

VALERIO (KNEELING BESIDE HER) Look, things really aren't going at all badly. Profits have increased this year, I've just been going over the accounts. It's thanks to the Xeroxes. Photocopies are big business. We may eat less bread these days and drink less milk, but we consume mountains of photocopies. (HE CLENCHES HIS FISTS, AS THOUGH TO SAY: 'AND I SAW IT COMING!') Better now? Feel better? (MARIANNA SMILES. ANTONIO HAS RE-ENTERED UNSEEN AND IS HIDING BEHIND THE ARMCHAIR.) I wonder where he's got to?

ANTONIO (POPPING UP) Crunk crunk...German crickets.

VALERIO (GETTING UP) Good, that's it. Introduce her to the German crickets which go crunk crunk and then we'll have supper. (TO MARIANNA) Bear with him just five minutes. (HE GOES BACK TO WORK)

MARIANNA (CRAWLING ON ALL FOURS TO ANTONIO WHO'S SQUATTING BEHIND THE CHAIR) Crick crick...do you mind?

ANTONIO Crunk crunk...not at all.

MARIANNA Sadness over?

ANTONIO Yes, but now I've got an itch.

MARIANNA Want me to scratch it?

ANTONIO It's a heart-itch. A good sign...it means Christ-mas is coming. (HE LAUGHS)

MARIANNA I'm beginning to feel it too.

ANTONIO You have to scratch your-self.

MARIANNA How do you scratch your heart?

ANTONIO I'll show you.

MARIANNA You know how'?

ANTONIO Of course, Curlylocks taught me. Now watch: lift your arm, like this. (HE LIFTS HIS ARM) Go on! (MARIANNA IMITATES HIM)

VALERIO What are you doing?

ANTONIO And now say lobster until the itching stops. Go on!

MARIANNA Lobster.

ANTONIO Not just once, ten, twenty times. Lobster, lobster, lobster...

MARIANNA Lobster, lobster, lobster...

ANTONIO That's it, keep it up...Lobster,lobster think of lobsters.

MARIANNA (TO VALERIO, WHO'S WATCHING THEM INCREDULOUSLY) Go on, say lobster!

VALERIO Me? Why?

MARIANNA Oh why, why, why! Say it!

VALERIO (RESIGNED) Lobster.

MARIANNA And smile! (SHE GOES BACK TO THE GAME AS VALERIO SHAKES HIS HEAD) Lobster! Lobster!

ANTONIO Very good! Has it gone?

MARIANNA Yes!

VALERIO Has what gone?

MARIANNA Heart-itch. Haven't you ever had it? It's not possible!

VALERIO I'm sorry. I've had stomach ache, earache, toothache

ANTONIO Because you're a common or garden, averagely healthy adult. (VALERIO SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AND RESUMES TAPPING THE CALCULATING MACHINE)

MARIANNA Thanks for teaching me that system.

ANTONIO Don't thank me, thank Curlylocks.

MARIANNA Thank him for me, will you, when you next see him?

ANTONIO (WITH A WORLDLY-WISE AIR) I'll be seeing him this evening, actually.

MARIANNA This evening?

ANTONIO Yes, we're going to the Trocadero. Do you know it?

MARIANNA No, I've never been there.

ANTONIO Oh, it's nothing special, the Troc you know, couple of drinks, girls if you want them not a bad place for a chat...Curlylocks knows everyone

MARIANNA Projects?

ANTONIO Well could be but I'd rather not talk about it you know, bit superstitious.

MARIANNA Of course. Anyway, just in case (SHE CROSSES THE FINGERS OF BOTH HANDS)

ANTONIO (IMITATING HER) Whatever happens, it's by sea. I hate flying.

MARIANNA So do I. Sea's much better.

ANTONIO Much much much better.

MARIANNA (STANDING UP) Valerio...

VALERIO (WITHOUT LOOKING UP) Lobster.

MARIANNA (LAUGHING) No. Would you like me to... (SHE NODS TOWARDS THE KITCHEN)

VALERIO Oh yes, please. Thanks.

MARIANNA You hungry?

VALERIO Well...I could do with a bite... work stimulates the appetite. (MARIANNA GOES INTO THE KITCHEN)

ANTONIO (ON HIS FEET, CARRIED AWAY) Aaaah...the feel of the deck beneath your feet!...(TAKES A DEEP BREATH) no land in sight...And hair flowing in the breeze! Who'd have thought it, Curlylocks? All the Trocadero girls are on board!...Captain! ...hard to star-board!...Whooooooo!...Blow, northwester, blow!...(HE GOES ON IMITATING THE SOUND OF THE WIND AS VALERIO CONTINUES TO PUNCH HIS CALCULATOR AND ...

THE LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM

Scene Three

A FEW DAYS LATER, EARLY AFTERNOON. ANTONIO IS WRITING WITH OBVIOUS DIFFICULTY IN AN EXERCISE BOOK. AT THE OTHER END OF THE TABLE, VALERIO IS PLAYING CHESS ON AN ELECTRONIC MACHINE. EVERY NOW AND THEN WE HEAR A 'BLEEP'. ANTONIO SUDDENLY SLAMS HIS FIST DOWN ON THE TABLE.

ANTONIO Aaargh!

VALERIO (PROTECTING HIS ROCKING CHESS PIECES) Careful!

ANTONIO I got it wrong again. I forgot the double letter.(HE SHOWS VALERIO THE PAGE)

VALERIO You're ruining my game! (ANTONIO CRUMPLES THE PAGE INTO A BALL) And I was aiming for mate in three. (ANTONIO THROWS THE BALL ON TO THE CHESSBOARD, SCATTERING THE PIECES.

ANTONIO Checkmate!

VALERIO No! You little bastard! (PICKING UP THE PIECES, SOME OF WHICH HAVE FALLEN TO THE FLOOR) I'll ram them down your throat!

ANTONIO (OPENING HIS MOUTH WIDE, AS IF TO RECEIVE FOOD) Aaaahhh!

VALERIO I was in a very favourable position. (PUTTING BACK THE PIECES, BUT IT'S CLEAR HE DOESN'T REMEMBER EXACTLY WHERE THEY WERE) And I'm playing at the fourth level!

ANTONIO I can't write.

VALERIO Oh, come on!

ANTONIO I couldn't write 'fourth level'. I have a friend in America. To let him know that I'd won a fourth level game on your electronic garbage of a chessboard, I'd have to ring him. Get it? on the telephone! (LOOKING AT HIS CHEST UNDER HIS SHIRT) Hullo? Hullo? Is Hank there? Or Spike? or Clint?

VALERIO Listen, Clint, you'd never win a game on this chessboard at the fourth level in a hundred years. Or at the second level, or at the first. All you can win at is snakes-and-ladders.

ANTONIO That's not true. I beat you once.

VALERIO That's because I let you win.

ANTONIO (AFTER A PAUSE) I don't know whether kids are a blessing to grown-ups any more. People used to think so, it's there in the titlepage book. Grown-ups used to teach children things, pass on their accumulated wisdom. How you catch hedgehogs. Do you sow wheat when the moon is waxing or waning? Why you don't bottle tomatoes in a high wind.

VALERIO (SARCASTICALLY) Are there more cats' hairs or dogs' hairs in the world? Which weighs more, an elephant or three hippopotamuses?

ANTONIO Do you have any secrets to hand on to me? For instance, how do you know when to write double letters? Can you tell me that?

VALERIO You have writing problems not because you don't know how, but because you've forgotten. Remember what the doctor said? It's difficult for you to recover certain skills because there's a refusal.

ANTONIO You mean there's someone inside me saying no when I'm saying yes.

VALERIO That's more or less it. (HE RESUMES PLAYING)

ANTONIO When Curlylocks says no, Curlylocks says yes.

VALERIO Sure, now ,look, be a good lad and write hippopotamus ten times. With two p's. (EXAGGERATING) Hippppopotamus.

ANTONIO Did you really let me win that time?

VALERIO Yes. Sorry, I didn't mean to tell you, it just slipped out.

ANTONIO Why?

VALERIO Because sometimes you have to humour children. Didn't it make you feel good?

ANTONIO Do you really want to know why you let me win?

VALERIO All right, let's hear it.

ANTONIO Because you realized I was winning anyhow. So in order not to lose, you let me win.

VALERIO (WITH AN AMBIGUOUS LAUGH) Well, well, well...so that was it, was it?

ANTONIO That was a rancid green laugh.

VALERIO Shut up and write hippopotamus!

ANTONIO I'd taken your queen.

VALERIO I let you take it.

ANTONIO oh no! I think fast, like lightning! I heard an 'ah!', you went 'ah!', but it wasn't even an 'ah!', it was more like an imperceptible little groan and I heard it! You hadn't realized that your queen was in danger. Because you play by the rules, you must do this, you mustn't do that, but I don't give a damn about the rules, when I see a rule I know how to deal with it. You a rule? Pam! Pow! (HE MIMES PUNCHING A STOMACH) Come out and show yourself, rule, if you're man enough! (VALERIO PUTS HIS HANDS OVER HIS EARS AND TRIES TO CONCENTRATE ON HIS GAME) All, there's your little rule! Split! Splat! (HE MIMES SLAPPING A FACE) Don't recognize him any more, do you? And I take your queen and you go 'ah!' under your breath but I hear, it! Because I think crick crick, I see crick crick, I hear crick crick. You hadn't realized and I...woooooommm! Your queen! I've won the World Cup crick crick!

VALERIO If it makes you happy to see it that way, go ahead. But now do me a favour and keep quiet!

ANTONIO I have to learn to write so I can make a list of secrets to hand down. I'll go round the world looking for grannies and grandpas who know how many hops you need to make a bottle of beer. (HE GOES BACK TO WRITING) Hippppopotamus...titlepppage...

VALERIO No, titlepage only has one p.

ANTONIO Ah, the more the merrier. Eddducation, mathemmmatics...(WE HEAR THE FRONT DOOR OPENING)

VALERIO Here's Marianna.

ANTONIO She opppens the door, walks along the corriiddor and heresheheresheheresheis! (MARIANNA APPEARS, SMILING, IN THE ARCHED SPACE. SHE HAS A RED SHAWL OVER HER SHOULDERS AND HAS DYED HER HAIR BLONDE)

MARIANNA Hi! (VALERIO IS SPEECHLESS)

ANTONIO (GIVES A HIGH-PITCHED LAUGH) 24-carat-gold laugh! (HE RUSHES FORWARD TO HUG MARIANNA, BUT SHE SLIPS ROUND THE TABLE TO AVOID HIM, ALSO LAUGHING. ANTONIO CATCHES UP WITH HER AND GENTLY TAKES HER LEFT HAND, WATCHED BY A DUMBFUNDED VALERIO) Da da dadà...da da

dadà...(HE SINGS THE WEDDING MARCH AND MIMES PUTTING ON A WEDDING RING. THEY BOTH LAUGH) It goes without saying you can go out alone, see your girl friends, shop at the supermarket, I won't mind a bit, I promise you! (HE TURNS ROUND, TAKES THE MIRROR OUT OF HIS POCKET AND STARTS TO SCRUTINIZE HER AS IN ACT ONE)

MARIANNA (TO VALERIO) How do I look?

VALERIO You said that blonde didn't suit you.

MARIANNA Oh I was sixteen then, what did I know? Now I like it.

ANTONIO (LOOKING IN THE MIRROR) Of course it'll have to grow longer, for the north-wester. Marianna'll agree, you just have to ask her.

VALERIO If I'd asked you, you wouldn't have done it.

MARIANNA You're not jealous, are you? I did it to please everyone, including me. (SHE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN AND COMES BACK WITH AN APPLE)

ANTONIO You know something, brother? There are women who give off an odour for, you, and you sniff away and wag your tail, but just try and touch them! They slip out of your paws like soap and slam the gate in your face. (A DIRTY LAUGH) And we stand on the shore looking at the mermaid, with our hands guess where! And she laughs and swims off to make love with a dolphin. The Scarlet Woman of the Seven Seas! (HE LAUGHS VULGARLY AND TURNS TO MARIANNA, WHO DOESN'T LIKE IT)

MARIANNA Why do you talk like that? Stop it! (SHE SITS DOWN BESIDE VALERIO)

ANTONIO Bite into life, my little one. 'Ma petite'....(ANOTHER EVIL LAUGH) And away she went...away she went...(HE SITS IN THE ARMCHAIR RIGHT WITH CURLYLOCKS IN HIS ARMS. MARIANNA EATS HER APPLE)

VALERIO (TO MARIANNA) He was always a bit vulgar....before. Bit of a dirty mind. These are regressions. He had his good sides too, no denying that. (ANTONIO LAUGHS) Yes, laugh away! He managed to get two girls pregnant. One in France. He lived in France for a year when he was young. Played at being an artist. Then he met Elizabeth and quietened down a little. But always a bit of a misfit, a drifter, you could never rely on him. He was only consistent about one thing: he always liked blondes.

MARIANNA And you don't?

VALERIO (TAKING HER HAND) I like you any way...dark, fair, whatever. I like you because you're you. Even if you were grey-haired. (MARIANNA LOOKS AT HIM IN SURPRISE) Yes, I sometimes think of you like that. White as snow. Surprised? I've often imagined you old. Me too. A nice old couple. And you know something? You won't be expecting

this. I'm happy as a lark!

MARIANNA You?

VALERIO Yes. Smiling grinning like a Cheshire cat! (HE MANAGES A WEAK SMILE)

MARIANNA But why think of old age? Think of butterflies, ladybirds...think of me young, please! Think of me picking flowers, gobbling ice-cream! (SHE TAKES THE APPLE CORE INTO THE KITCHEN)

ANTONIO (GETTING UP) The gardens are full of burrows. I've listed over a thousand. I know a goldfinch too. (MARIANNA COMES BACK IN) Stay where you are! (HE DOES THE MIRROR ROUTINE) Don't turn round! That's it. Your lips are frozen. Glacés! Bad for the flowers. Don't move, I'll be back. I'll be back with the wind, the drying wind. (HE EXITS DOWN THE CORRIDOR LEFT, STILL LOOKING IN THE MIRROR. AFTER A FEW SECONDS, WE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE MIRROR SMASHING ON THE FLOOR)

VALERIO There we go! Seven years bad luck!

MARIANNA Do you believe in those things? (SHE STROKES HIM)

VALERIO This is the first time you've been nice to me for days.

MARIANNA It's not easy, you know. When I'm involved with him, I get so caught up that's it's hard to switch over to you, to us.

VALERIO That's because you've made up your mind to cure him.

MARIANNA No

VALERIO Oh yes, you have. You may not know it, but I do. But he can't be cured, only looked after. He's incurable.

MARIANNA I'm not so sure. There are moments

VALERIO It's the doctors' opinion, not mine.

MARIANNA He's so disconcerting. He confuses me, I can't get him out of my mind.

VALERIO Crazy people are disconcerting. Want me to try? It's easy, you just open the window, throw the fridge out and yell, 'The moon is blue!'...and immediately you're interesting. Because this is what you really mean when you say 'disconcerting'. You mean interesting. To have women find you attractive, you have to wet your- pants and say the moon is blue. 'The moon is blue! I love you! The moon is blue!' Ah, what an interesting man! How disconcerting!

(HE HUGS HER) Okay, Marianna, the moon is blue...but...with the odd yellow stripe here and there.

MARIANNA I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

VALERIO If you're going to laugh at me, I'd rather you cried. I've never made a woman cry, it must be rather exciting.

MARIANNA Hold me tight.

VALERIO Tighter than this'?

MARIANNA Tight as you possibly can.

VALERIO I'm afraid of hurting you.

MARIANNA I'm not that fragile. Squeeze me.

VALERIO Like this?

MARIANNA Harder. With all your strength.

VALERIO This is all my strength.

MARIANNA Harder still!

VALERIO Harder than all my strength?! (HE MAKES A LAST MAXIMUM EFFORT) Whew! (HE RELAXES HIS GRIP AND LIFTS HER FACE) You don't look very happy.

MARIANNA (WITH A WEAK SMILE) I guess I don't know what I want any more.

VALERIO You could start by wanting me.

MARIANNA I'm getting scared. I know you so little. And not because I haven't known you long but because perhaps I don't know how to know. In depth. I'm too easily pleased. 'Come down, come down!'

VALERIO I don't understand exactly what's happening to you, but I do know it's because of my brother with his olympiads, his rambling speeches which seem like some sort of philosophy. I fell for it at first, but then I got wise. He's planted a little seed in there. (HE TAPS MARIANNA'S FOREHEAD) Be careful it doesn't sprout into some monstrous growth that will take over your entire brain!

MARIANNA (SITTING IN THE ARMCHAIR RIGHT) I've had a simple life, made up of

simple dreams and simple convictions I got from my parents, I'll spare you the details. I've been engaged twice and had a few lovers. I've never known passion. Before you I hadn't had a man for a long time...by choice. I wanted to stand back and...you know, look at myself. But I became too detached...observing myself from a great height, like from a helicopter, and seeing the inevitable disaster creeping up on me down there. Loneliness. 'Come down, come down!'...I was conditioned to think of loneliness as a disaster.

VALERIO (SITTING ON THE ARM OF HER CHAIR) Is that why you started going with me?

MARIANNA I was looking for a husband. (SHE PATS HIS KNEE) Girls still do. Or didn't my poor old airhead know that?

VALERIO Try and bear with me. I'm a middle-aged stationer with a lot of headaches.

MARIANNA You were Mr Right. Kind, affectionate, honest, with a problem brother, okay, but also a good solid situation...the shop, this flat...I could rely on you. And you helped me to fly low. (SHE KISSES HIM ON THE LIPS AS ANTONIO ENTERS, WEARING A SUIT FROM HIS OLD WARDROBE)

ANTONIO (BUTTONING THE JACKET) It's a bit tight, but not by much. Just have to move the button...right, Elizabeth?

VALERIO Don't answer.

ANTONIO (AUTHORITATIVELY) Right, Elizabeth?

MARIANNA (STANDING UP) Yes...the button (VALERIO LOOKS DISAPPOINTED)

ANTONIO (MACHO) Trousers need to be let out a bit. Got something to write with?

VALERIO (AGGRESSIVE) There's pen and paper on the table.

ANTONIO (IGNORING HIM) Good. Take a note. An inch and a half for the trousers. Got that? And move the button an inch...or a fraction more, for safety. How does it look?

MARIANNA Tailor-made.

ANTONIO (TRYING TO LOOK BEHIND HIS BACK) Isn't there a mirror in this house?

VALERIO There was one. Where did you put it?

ANTONIO I can't find it anywhere. Have you seen it? A pocket mirror with a black frame, when you drop it it breaks and goes 'shling!' No one seen it? (TO MARIANNA) This was your

favourite suit, remember? I haven't put on much weight. Gone easy on the bread and potatoes. (RUMMAGING IN HIS POCKETS) What's this? (HE'S FOUND AN OLD PHOTO) Well, what do you know!

VALERIO What is it?

ANTONIO It's us. Me and my little blonde.

MARIANNA Can I see? (SHE TAKES A STEP TOWARDS HIM)

ANTONIO No! (HE TEARS THE PHOTO IN FOUR) It's black and white. (HE PUTS THE PIECES IN HIS MOUTH AND CHEWS) Mustn't talk when your, mouth's full. (HE SWALLOWS) Mmm, yummy! You don't get photos like that any more...(SMILING AT MARIANNA) Lost your tongue! I'll find it for you. I'll bring it back...with grazed knees. (HE LAUGHS, TAKES MARIANNA'S ARM AND DRAGS HER UPSTAGE. THEY TURN BACK TO VALERIO, SEEMINGLY POSING FOR A PHOTOGRAPH) Ready? Cheese! Flash! (THEY BOTH LAUGH) Tell me, brother o'mine...don't we make a handsome couple? (THEY FREEZE FOR A MOMENT)

BLACKOUT

Scene Four

SUNDAY EVENING. OUTSIDE, IT'S ALREADY DARK. THERE ARE FLOWERS IN A VASE ON THE TABLE. VALERIO IS SITTING IN FRONT OF THE TV. THE ONLY LIGHT IN THE ROOM COMES FROM THE SCREEN. AN ANNOUNCER IS READING THE RESULTS OF SOME FOOTBALL MATCHES. VALERIO, CLEARLY AGITATED, IS LISTENING DISTRACTEDLY. AFTER A FEW SECONDS HE JUMPS UP, GOES TO THE TELEPHONE BUT STOPS BEFORE PICKING UP THE RECEIVER, TURNS ON HIS HEEL, PACES ABOUT, PEERS AT THE CLOCK BY THE DIM LIGHT OF THE TV AND SITS DOWN AGAIN. THE ANNOUNCER DRONES ON. VALERIO GETS UP AGAIN, GOES BACK TO THE TELEPHONE AND STARTS TO DIAL. BUT AFTER THE FIRST TWO NUMBERS, HE PUTS THE RECEIVER DOWN AND GOES OUT ON TO THE TERRACE. HE LEANS OVER, LOOKING DOWN. AT THAT MOMENT, THE FRONT DOORBELL RINGS, WITH LONG, ARROGANTLY REPEATED BLASTS. THEN A KEY TURNS IN THE LOCK. WE HEAR THE DOOR OPENING AND ANTONIO AND MARIANNA'S LAUGHTER.

ANTONIO (OFF) Ding, ding! Anyone at home? Can we come in? Hope we're not intruding! (PEAL OF LAUGHTER FROM MARIANNA) Is it tea time or- coffee time?

MARIANNA (OFF) Anyone know what time it is? (ROARS OF LAUGHTER)

ANTONIO (OFF) Oh, brother!!! (TOGETHER) Valerio!!!

MARIANNA (OFF) He's turned all the lights out.

ANTONIO (OFF) Don't turn them on, he might get mad.

MARIANNA (OFF) Right! It's known as small domestic economies! (THEY ENTER, LAUGHING, OSTENTATIOUSLY HAPPY, PERHAPS A LITTLE DRUNK.) He's not here. He's abandoned us!

ANTONIO May he be forgiven! He should have braked sooner.

VALERIO SEIZES THE VASE OF FLOWERS AND HURLS IT AT THEIR FEET. THE GLASS SHATTERS, MAKING A TREMENDOUS DIN, AND MARIANNA LETS OUT A SHRIEK.

MARIANNA Ah...there you are! (VALERIO TURNS ON THE LIGHTS)

ANTONIO (LOOKING AT THE FRAGMENTS OF GLASS ALL OVER THE FLOOR)
Oh brother, what have you done? Now you'll have to sweep up, mop up, dry up...(HE SNIGGERS)

VALERIO Stop laughing!

MARIANNA Nobody's laughing.

ANTONIO It's true, brother. I've carried out a poll of all the neighbours: everyone's dead serious.

VALERIO Shut up! (TO MARIANNA) Where have you been? Why are you so late?

MARIANNA Ah, so it's going to be a full-scale scene, is it?

VALERIO Why shouldn't it be'? (ANTONIO LAUGHS) You keep quiet! (ANTONIO SITS IN FRONT OF THE TV. FROM NOW ON WE HEAR IN THE BACKGROUND SOUNDS AND VOICES FROM THE VARIOUS CHANNELS THAT ANTONIO IS ZAPPING) I've waited and waited, and not a sign from you. Three o'clock, four, five...it's now after eight. What am I supposed to think? You tell me. Because I sure as hell don't know.

MARIANNA Think whatever you like! If you're going to be so thick, I couldn't care less what you think.

VALERIO Ah, so I'm thick, am I? Now we're getting some straight talk at last!

ANTONIO (LAUGHING) Thick, thick, thick!

VALERIO I told you to keep quiet!

MARIANNA Not straight enough. I'll give it you even straighter. Listen to me, Mr Thick: this time I'm really leaving. (SHE HEADS FOR THE CORRIDOR, BUT VALERIO BARS THE WAY)

VALERIO You left at two-thirty saying you were going for an ice-cream.

MARIANNA I said I was leaving.

VALERIO You were supposed to be gone half an hour, and then we were all going to the cinema. Like we do every Sunday.

MARIANNA We changed our minds. We forgot about you. It was a lovely day, and on lovely days I forget about you.

VALERIO You could at least have telephoned.

MARIANNA I didn't have the right change.

VALERIO Ah, you didn't have the right change! In six hours you could perhaps have gone into a shop and got the right change. Or used your phone card. Or a credit card. Telephones work with all sorts of things these days. You could probably have made contact with a hairpin, if you'd wanted to...if you'd wanted to!!! (ANTONIO EXAGGERATEDLY RAISES THE VOLUME)

MARIANNA But I didn't want to. And nor did your brother.

VALERIO Leave my brother out of this! (TO ANTONIO) Turn that thing down! (THE VOLUME GOES EVEN HIGHER) I said turn it clown! (HE THROWS HIMSELF ON HIS BROTHER, TRYING TO WRENCH AWAY THE REMOTE CONTROL, BUT ANTONIO GRABS HIS ARM AND TWISTS IT BEHIND HIS BACK. THE NOISE FROM THE TV IS DEAFENING. VALERIO, UPSIDE DOWN ON THE CHAIR, YELLS WITH PAIN. ANTONIO LEANS OVER HIM)

ANTONIO You want me to break it? Eh? You want me to break it?

MARIANNA No! Let him go! (ANTONIO GIVES A FURTHER TWIST AND VALERIO YELLS AGAIN) Let him go, please! (ANTONIO RELAXES HIS GRIP AND MARIANNA TURNS DOWN THE TV)

ANTONIO You can thank her. (HE FLEXES HIS MUSCLES LIKE A BODY-BUILDER, THEN SITS DOWN AGAIN IN FRONT OF THE TV. VALERIO HAS SAT DOWN AT THE TABLE AND IS RUBBING HIS ARM. MARIANNA GOES OVER TO HIM AND GENTLY PUTS A HAND ON HIS SHOULDER)

MARIANNA Did he hurt you?'

VALERIO You heard what he said. I have to thank you. Thank you very much, Marianna. Thank you for this wonderful Sunday. A really unforgettable day.

MARIANNA (AFTER A PAUSE) We walked for a long time in the park. There was a lovely soft light. Our feet swished through leaves of all colours, red, brown, gold...And he talked and didn't seem abnormal at all, not even childish. Or perhaps I'd entered his world and found I liked it so much I was happy to stay there. It was like a dream I always used to have; of meeting a man who made me lose all sense of time. The afternoon went by in a flash. We left the park and he said let's go here, let's go there...it's incredible how well he knows this town.

VALERIO Well, that's just wonderful! You make a fine couple. Congratulations, you've found your Prince Charming. When's the happy day? Oh, by the way, is it all right if I stay, or do you want the whole flat to yourselves?

MARIANNA You haven't understood a word I said. How Can I explain...?

ANTONIO Excuse me, could you keep your voices down a bit. Otherwise I'll have to turn up the volume

VALERIO We mustn't disturb the master of the house. (LOWERING HIS VOICE, TO ANTONIO) So sorry.

ANTONIO Not at all. (VALERIO GETS UP AND GOES TOWARDS THE KITCHEN)

MARIANNA How can I explain things to you which aren't even clear to me?

VALERIO Oh, I think they're pretty clear. All you need to do is look at the clock. (HE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN) You've been away seven hours. In seven hours you can get to...Istanbul. (HE COMES BACK WITH DUSTPAN AND BRUSH AND STARTS TO SWEEP UP THE GLASS)

MARIANNA Even further, if you want to. The past is much further away than Istanbul. I've been going back a long way these last few days. Have you ever tried? You've no idea what you find by the roadside. The amount of things we leave behind us! And way way way back, there were my dolls, lying on the slope beside the railway line. And I remembered their names, one by one. All of them! Crazy, huh? While people names...some yes, some no. Probably seems odd to you, but I'd forgotten some people's names completely.

VALERIO Mine's Valerio, just in case...

MARIANNA I couldn't remember voices either. I shut my eyes and blocked my ears and concentrated like mad, but it was no use. That's the first thing you forget. Faces, too. They come and go, one minute you see them, the next you don't. If you can connect them with a dress or a tie you stand a better chance. But remembering a face above a naked body is almost impossible.

VALERIO (WHO HAS FINISHED SWEEPING UP THE GLASS) I remember you, perfectly.

MARIANNA Now, yes. But in a year?

VALERIO In a year, I'll be in a lunatic asylum and you'll be married to Prince Charming...and living in Istanbul. (HE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN)

ANTONIO Marianna?

MARIANNA Yes?

ANTONIO Could you bring me a cup of tea?

VALERIO (COMING BACK IN, COMBING HIMSELF) Ah, we're already at the tea and slipper's, are we'? You didn't say how many sugars.

ANTONIO Not too strong, please. Thanks. (HE GOES ON WATCHING THE TV)

VALERIO (TO MARIANNA) Well? What's stopping you? Why aren't you rushing?

ANTONIO Is this tea ever coming?

MARIANNA (AMUSED, PLAYING ALONG) Just a moment, I've put the kettle on.

VALERIO (SARCASTIC) Strong for me, please.

ANTONIO And I'd like plenty of milk. Kettle's boiling! Don't let it brew too long. That's it. Er, yes, two please. Stir it, would you. That's perfect. Thanks. (HE DRINKS FROM AN IMAGINARY CUP) Ooh, it's hot!

MARIANNA Blow!

ANTONIO (BLOWS AND SIPS) Mmm, that's better. Great cup of tea. You must tell me how you make it, mine never tastes this good. (DRAINS THE LAST DROP) Aah, just what I needed.

MARIANNA There's one other thing I didn't tell you.

VALERIO I know. That you've both gone stark staring bonkers.

MARIANNA (LAUGHING) He made me drink!

VALERIO I didn't notice.

ANTONIO With ice, please.

MARIANNA It was already dark and we went to a pub. We chatted and laughed, everyone was looking at us, your brother can be very witty. (LAUGHS) We had a couple of drinks, you know I never drink, we even got a little tight...

VALERIO A little?

ANTONIO A double for me, thanks.

MARIANNA And I liked it...

ANTONIO For the lady no ice.

MARIANNA (LAUGHS) It was a lovely Sunday because I finally felt something move here and I didn't want it to stop, I said, 'Go on, jump, skip, keep it up, whatever it is you're doing!' Don't ask me what it was, don't even try and guess, I say this for your own good, and I beg you, if there's anything else you want to ask me or say to me, leave me a loophole so that I can escape.

(SHE CRIES)

VALERIO So that's it.

MARIANNA That's it.

VALERIO You're in love with him.

MARIANNA No!

VALERIO Yes. (HE DESPERATELY AND PATHETICALLY MIMES FIRING A MACHINE-GUN) Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!...shot for being no longer a child!

ANTONIO (TURNING OFF THE TV AND JUMPING UP) Where are my toys? I asked a question. You have to answer yourself in this house. 'They're there, are you blind? Right under your nose!' Now we'll gather them up. (HE BENDS DOWN AND STARTS TO PICK UP THE TOYS SCATTERED ABOUT ON THE FLOOR) The steamboat of dreams, spinning-top of fantasies, the teddy-bear of lies...and you...and you...and you...(THE LAST TOY HE PICKS UP IS A PLASTIC DINOSAUR) The dinosaurs too vanished overnight from the face of the earth. Recent Studies have indicated that it was God himself who threw them down from the terrace. That's why one has to be ready for everything. Next time it could be your turn. (GOES OUT ON TO THE TERRACE) Off you go, boys! No one'll see you. Take the first left after the traffic lights. (HE THROWS THEM ALL OVER THE EDGE) Quick now, run, make a dash for it! (COMING BACK IN, TO VALERIO AND MARIANNA WHO SIT MOTIONLESS STARING AT HIM) if they get past the traffic lights, no one will ever lay a finger on them again!

BLACKOUT

Scene Five

MONDAY MORNING, VERY EARLY. OUTSIDE, THE FIRST GLIMPSES OF DAWN. ANTONIO IS SEATED AT THE TABLE, PAINSTAKINGLY WRITING, MUTTERING EACH SYLLABLE TO HIMSELF. HE IS WEARING THE TROUSERS OF HIS MORNING SUIT AND A VEST AND IS BAREFOOT.

ANTONIO Apppearance...unnnnatural..dommmminate... devvvvoted...(MARIANNA APPEARS IN HER DRESSING GOWN, LOOKING EXHAUSTED. ANTONIO WATCHES HER AS SHE HEADS FOR THE KITCHEN) Hi, Marianna.

MARIANNA (WITHOUT LOOKING AT HIM.) Hi, Antonio. (SHE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN, LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN)

ANTONIO Marianna

MARIANNA (OFF) Yes?

ANTONIO You know something? You're very beautiful when you've just got up.

MARIANNA (OFF) Liar!

ANTONIO No. Insomnia sort of softens you.

MARIANNA (APPEARING AT THE DOOR, HOLDING A GLASS OF MILK) You think so? (SHE DRINKS)

ANTONIO Yes. I love that blue vein you have here. (HE TAPS THE SIDE OF HIS FOREHEAD)

MARIANNA I have a blue vein?

ANTONIO It's an anxiety vein. It appears and disappears, like some islands.

MARIANA How weird! (SHE PUTS THE HALF-EMPTY GLASS ON THE TABLE AND GOES INTO THE BATHROOM, CLOSING THE DOOR)

ANTONIO Veins never lie.

MARIANNA (OFF) I'll bear that in mind.

ANTONIO (GETTING UP AND STANDING BY THE DOOR) Can I sit here outside the door?

MARIANNA (OFF) As long as you don't look in.

ANTONIO A keyhole without a key is a big temptation.

MARIANNA (OFF) It's not like you.

ANTONIO Oh yes it is! (MARIANNA LAUGHS, ANTONIO TAKES A CHAIR AND SITS BY THE DOOR) I promise I won't look.

MARIANA (OFF) How come you're up already?

ANTONIO I'm working on my double letters. I've got an exam coming up. (SOUND OF WATER RUNNING) Marianna?

MARIANNA (OFF) Yes?

ANTONIO Can you hear me?

MARIANNA (OFF) Yes, but talk, a bit louder.

ANTONIO How's this'? Hullo? Hullo? Calling Marianna, calling Marianna! Over!

MARIANNA (OFF) Hullo? Hullo? Marianna receiving, over!

ANTONIO I want to make love, guess with who'? Tinkerbell's all for it.

MARIANNA (OFF) I'm engaged to your brother .

ANTONIO If you need to cut the butter, it doesn't matter what sort of knife you use. A spoon would do just as well.

MARIANNA (OFF) Whaat?

ANTONIO I said a spoon would do just as well.

MARIANNA (OFF) For what?

ANTONIO For cutting the butter.

MARIANNA (OFF) You want to have breakfast?

ANTONIO It was an example.

MARIANNA (OFF) If you wait ten minutes, we'll make it together.

ANTONIO We will? Okay, I'll wait.

MARIANNA (OFF) In the meantime, take the butter out of the fridge. And the milk.

ANTONIO Scrick, scrack!

MARIANNA (OFF) What's that? The crickets?

ANTONIO No. It's the sound Time's shoes make when he's walking up and down the corridor.

MARIANNA (OFF) I see.

ANTONIO No, you don't. You can't even imagine what hell childhood is for us grown-ups! From my little hidey-hole, I observed the world. I catalogued thousands of expressions for every occasion, day or night. They were never enough, and I was only looking at eyes. Smiles, noses came later. That was how my life acquired features of its own. At last! While waiting for that blessed flood which never seems to make up its mind to arrive. And then the doctors, one after another, my brother made me see them, especially the first years, then naturally he accepted the inevitable, settled for a kiss, like mothers do with their children to console them for the appppalling disillllusionment which makes the mountains shake and the heavens rumble...December...January...February...and I listened to the storm the rain splattering on the tin roof, the noise riverberating around the hut...(HE GETS UP, GOES TO THE TERRACE DOOR AND LOOKS OUT) And I saw the chimney-tops take off and fly, and below my father scampering after his hat, because sometimes memories popped up...'Hey, Tony! It's us, your memories!'...there they were, clutching on to the window ledge and I hammered on their fingers to make them fall, like in the movies! But it wasn't the flood yet, so back to the window and look down and there they were, women with their hair flowing in the wind. Are you with me? (HE GOES BACK TO THE BATHROOM DOOR) Hey, my little blonde, I'm talking about me, come into my secrets! (HE SITS DOWN AGAIN) I've seen so many go by, and I've desired them all. I've even sharpened my hearing, yes, I can hear the ssslip of elastic against the skin and I've noticed that some knickers bouncing up and down make a noise like a goldfinch pecking at his mate, we have a lot of goldfinches in the tree in the courtyard. You see? This time I'm not lying. We know seven times seven is forty-nine, but there are days when everything seems so inadequate, especially around six, six-thirty...(HE STANDS UP AND TALKS WITH HIS NOSE PRESSED AGAINST THE BATHROOM DOOR) I want to make love with you, Marianna. Passionate, rashionate, smashionate love! How about it? Do you hear me? What harm is there? a minor infraction, you'll hardly notice and afterwards I'll ask you wonderful questions, here's one for starts, listen carefully: has God got a belly-button? Take your time, you don't have to answer right away. Hullo? Do you hear me? Hullo? (THE BATHROOM DOOR OPENS AND MARIANNA COMES OUT WEARING A SLIP) Ah, there you are! There's the ssslip of elastic...against your white firm little cheeks, your silky-smooth thighs where my brother's lips have never ventured, tell me the truth, Marianna, you enjoyed the porn film, didn't you? After all those lights in the park you know, I felt surrrrounded, trrrrapped, strrrranged by the light, it was

terrible, that's why I took you there, come on now, the truth, isn't the Harlequin much much much better than the soggy dollop of custard husbands pour over their puddings every day of their life? I'm like you, girl, we'll dance like dervishes on the high tension wire, do you hear me? Do you hear me? Hullo? Hullo?

MARIANNA That's enough, now. A moment of silence, please.

ANTONIO (STROKING HER HAIR AND FACE) Ah, yes. Silences. I've catalogued them too. There's one I love, it's my favourite really, it's a crick crick silence, the silence of dissolving, melting...The silence of an ice cube left in a glass on a marble table in the garden. (THEY KISS. ANTONIO CARESSES HER WHOLE BODY. THEN HE STOPS ABRUPTLY AND LAUGHS) You're not wearing knickers.

MARIANNA (ALSO LAUGHING) I never do at night.

ANTONIO Ah! (HE MOVES AWAY FROM HER)

MARIANNA (STILL LAUGHING) I wonder whose elastic it was you heard.

ANTONIO (HARD AND CRUEL) You're pretty when you laugh. The laughing insomniac. Turn-on doll. My little Olympiad. The tart got smart.

MARIANNA (UNEASILY) We must stop this. I'm late. (SHE GOES BACK INTO THE BATHROOM)

ANTONIO No, wait. I'll follow you. The thrill of the chase! (HE FOLLOWS HER INTO THE BATHROOM)

MARIANNA (OFF) Get out of here! (SOUND OF CRIES AND BLOWS. A BOTTLE FALLS AND BREAKS.) What do you think you're doing? Leave me alone! No! Noo! Help!

ANTONIO (OFF) I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Aah! Aaaaah!

MARIANNA (OFF) No...ughhhh!...get away from me!

THE BATHROOM DOOR BURSTS OPEN AND MARIANNA COMES OUT, DISTRAUGHT. VALERIO, HAIR STANDING UP, SHIRT HANGING OUTSIDE HIS TROUSERS, RUSHES IN FROM THE CORRIDOR LEFT. MARIANNA CRUMPLES TO THE FLOOR, NEAR THE ARMCHAIR RIGHT.

VALERIO What's happened? What's he done now? Are you all right? (MARIANNA TREMBLES AND DOESN'T ANSWER) Did he frighten you? What is it?

MARIANNA He tried to rape me.

VALERIO What?

MARIANNA He attacked me in the bathroom. He's soiled my (SHE GESTURES HELPLESSLY AT HER SLIP)

ANTONIO (STUMBLING AWKWARDLY OUT OF THE BATHROOM, BENT OVER AND CLEANING HIMSELF WITH A TOWEL) It's nothing, it's nothing. (HE EXITS DOWN THE CORRIDOR LEFT)

MARIANNA (YELLING) You filthy pig!

VALERIO (ALSO YELLING AND KICKING A CHAIR WHICH OVERTURNS) Bingo! The great love! Congratulations! Congratu-bloodylations!

MARIANNA No, please

VALERIO You wanted to cure him, didn't you'? Not even, you wanted to redeem him! You've done a great job. They'll be making you a saint any minute!

MARIANNA (COVERING HER EARS) No,no,no!

VALERIO I'm looking up because soon you'll be ascending to Heaven and I want to watch you as you go! (MARIANNA RUNS TOWARDS THE CORRIDOR, VALERIO STOPS HER)

MARIANNA Let me go! (SHE SHRUGS HIM OFF AND EXITS LEFT)

VALERIO (FOLLOWING HER) From the moment you set foot in this house, you've never stopped saying 'Let me go!'

MARIANNA (OFF) I need some fresh air. (VALERIO COMES BACK, BESIDE HIMSELF WITH IMPOTENT RAGE. HE SEIZES THE 'FATHERS'S' JACKET AND PUTS IT ON)

VALERIO I didn't expect this of you. You've been a big disappointment to me.

MARIANNA(OFF) I'm sorry!

VALERIO (TAKING OFF THE JACKET.) I don't want to tell you what I think of you. I don't want to tell you. (HE HURLS IT TO THE GROUND)

MARIANNA (OFF) Tell me anything you like, think anything you like.

VALERIO You were looking for a husband? You found one. Me.' I'd have made an ideal husband, in case you hadn't caught on. (PULLING THE FLOWERS FROM THE VASE) If, on the other hand, you were looking for a blue moon, you shouldn't have come here. (HE

BREAKS THE FLOWERS IN TWO AND THROWS THEM TO THE FLOOR)

MARIANNA (OFF) I made a mistake. No...more like, I changed my mind.

VALERIO That's the easy way out, isn't it? But be careful: it leads to spinsterhood!

MARIANNA COMES BACK IN JEANS AND T-SHIRT. SHE'S CARRYING THE TWO SUITCASES, WITH ITEMS OF UNDERWEAR TUCKED UNDER HER ARMS. VALERIO REMOVES THESE, AS THOUGH TO PREVENT HER FROM LEAVING. SHE DROPS THE SUITCASES ON THE FLOOR AND STUFFS VARIOUS OF HER THINGS LYING AROUND THE ROOM INTO THEM.

MARIANNA You're a little man, Valerio, and I want to fly high. High, high, high! At the risk of breaking my neck!

VALERIO The only neck you've broken is mine. And now off you go, without a care in the world.

MARIANNA I'm the one who's got hurt around here. Can't you understand that? Wake up, buster!

VALERIO Oh yes, wake up! Fly! Soar into the sky! Cuddle up to the clouds! (HE THROWS THE CLOTHES HE HAS TAKEN FROM HER TOWARDS THE SUITCASES, BUT THEY FALL ON THE FLOOR) Go on, pack your clouds. And pack my brother along with them. I won't cry if you take him with you, you know. On the contrary! I'll buy you both a season ticket for the Harlequin.

MARIANNA Thanks. See you there, then.

VALERIO Try not to for get anything, huh? I don't want you crawling back tomorrow with the excuse that you'd left something behind. (HE GOES INTO THE BATHROOM)

MARIANNA Not a hope.

VALERIO (OFF) Hurry up!

MARIANNA I'm doing my best. (SHE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN AND RETURNS WITH SOME JARS WHICH SHE PACKS)

VALERIO (COMING OUT OF THE BATHROOM AND THROWING HER A PACKET OF TAMPAX) Don't forget these! And take that revolting herbal tea away. And your soya steaks, you almost talked me into eating that mush. (YELLING) I don't like soya!

MARIANNA And I don't like the way I've lived my life up to now. And I don't like other

people's lives either. Least of all yours.

VALERIO I'd have given you everything...everything!

MARIANNA Thanks a million. What I'm looking for isn't included in your everything. Get it?

VALERIO No. I don't. Things have names. So give me an example. Just one. Come on, out with it! Tell me what you're looking for!

MARIANNA (WITH TEARS IN HER EYES) I don't know.

VALERIO Maybe I can help you. Could it be bulging wallets? Diamond rings? Chauffeur-driven limos? Eh? Am I getting warm? Let's hear you!

MARIANNA Innocence.

VALERIO I'm innocent.

MARIANNA No, your brother's right. You're just a common or garden, averagely healthy adult.

VALERIO Is that a crime?

MARIANNA Yes.

VALERIO All right, then, get the hell out of here! What's keeping you? (HE GOES TO THE CORRIDOR AND YELLS) Antonio, come and say goodbye. Marianna's leaving.

MARIANNA (KNEELING BESIDE THE SUITCASES) Yes, Marianna's leaving and she's not coming back. Marianna's looking for something that isn't there. (FOR THE REST OF 'THIS SPEECH, IT IS CLEAR THAT SHE IS QUOTING FROM MEMORY) To find what isn't there you have to travel far, learn languages, have many vaccinations. To find what isn't there you have to work for years, bleak years with few sunny days. You have to know this and persist nevertheless. To find what isn't there you need a fierce imagination and a meek heart...attributes which second-rate people do not possess. To find what isn't there you have to devote all your time, all your strength, all your joy. In looking for what isn't there you learn to know yourself and you discover that those who pursue are always happier than those who run away.

VALERIO You read that in the titlepage book.

MARIANNA Yes. It's a beautiful book. It's a pity you only used it to keep your brother docile. If you'd read it better maybe today we'd be leaving together. (ANTONIO APPEARS FROM THE CORRIDOR, DRESSED AS AT 'THE BEGINNING)

ANTONIO Marianna, my sweet, do you have a mirror? I've tried to do this (HE TURNS HIS BACK AND MAKES THE 'MIRROR GESTURE'), but without a mirror you don't see a thing. Neither with the right hand nor the left.

MARIANNA I'll give you mine. Wait a second. (SHE RUMMAGES IN ONE OF THE SUITCASES, OPENS HER NECESSAIRE, TAKES OUT A HAND MIRROR AND GIVES IT TO ANTONIO, WHO TAKES IT AND IMMEDIATELY LOOKS AT HER IN THE USUAL WAY)

ANTONIO Ah, that's better. I can finally see you again.

MARIANNA (CLOSING THE SUITCASE) It's a present.

ANTONIO Oh, thanks. Are you leaving?

VALERIO Yes. And she's in a great hurry. (MARIANNA PUTS ON A RAINCOAT)

ANTONIO Going far?

VALERIO Far isn't the word! She's going to look for what isn't there.

ANTONIO Ah, well you're sure to run into Curlylocks then. Say hullo to him from me. And tell him there's always a place for him in this house.

MARIANNA I'll tell him.

ANTONIO Should I try and stop you from going?

MARIANNA No, it would be useless. (SHE PICKS UP THE SUITCASES AND HEADS FOR THE DOOR)

ANTONIO I'd like to give you a present too. (HE PICKS UP THE OLD BOOK FROM THE DRESSER) The titlepage book. Take it. Compliments of the house. (MARIANNA LOOKS AT VALERIO, WHO TURNS AWAY. SHE TAKES THE BOOK)

MARIANNA Thank you. (SHE GOES OUT BY THE CORRIDOR RIGHT. ONLY NOW DO WE REALIZE THAT SHE HAS FORGOTTEN HER RED SCARF WHICH IS ON THE FLOOR BELOW THE COAT-STAND)

ANTONIO If you want to stay it's not too late to change your mind. (WE HEAR THE FRONT DOOR OPENING) Do, for my brother's sake! (THE DOOR SHUTS. ANTONIO PEEPS DOWN THE CORRIDOR) Ding dong, Marianna's gone! (A LONG SILENCE) Brother...(VALERIO DOESN'T REACT) Valerio...do you think Marianna will stay blonde all her life? (VALERIO MOVES TOWARDS THE TERRACE DOOR) Did you like her better

blonde or brunette? Blonde for me. And you? And you? And you?

VALERIO Shut up! (HE LOOKS DOWN INTO THE STREET)

ANTONIO You haven't answered me. Shall I repeat the question?

VALERIO Brunette.

ANTONIO Tt-tt. Blonde's better. That way they won't see her from the helicopter if she's hiding in a cornfield.

VALERIO She doesn't run away. She pursues. (ANTONIO LOOKS FOR SOMETHING IN ONE OF THE DRAWERS OF THE DRESSER) What are you looking for?

ANTONIO I was trying to see if there were any toys left.

VALERIO You threw them all away.

ANTONIO There's usually a surprise at the back of a drawer. Like in all those streets with 'No Exit' signs. I once got to the end of a 'No Exit' street and you know what I found? You'll never guess. An exit! (HE LAUGHS)

VALERIO I know everything that's in my drawers. I could make an inventory at any moment. From memory. I wouldn't need to look. (A PAUSE)

ANTONIO I'm hungry. Aren't you?

VALERIO No. (HE SITS IN THE ARMCHAIR RIGHT)

ANTONIO Not the least little bit?

VALERIO No. (HE'S FOUND A WALT DISNEY MAGAZINE ON THE SEAT)

ANTONIO Thirsty?

VALERIO No. (HE STARTS LEAFING THROUGH IT)

ANTONIO Not thirsty either? Not even the kind of thirsty when you say, 'I'll drink later'?

VALERIO Not even that. (ANOTHER PAUSE. VALERIO CONTINUES MECHANICALLY TO LEAF THROUGH THE COMIC BOOK)

ANTONIO When's Dad coming back'?

VALERIO I don't think he ever will. He left his hat here.

ANTONIO And Mum'?

VALERIO I don't think she will either.

ANTONIO And Mari and Elizabeth? (VALERIO DOESN'T ANSWER. ANTONIO GOES OVER TO THE COAT-STAND) Brother... mind if I play with these'? (HE POINTS TO THE HANGING CLOTHES) Just for a moment.

VALERIO Go ahead. Have fun.

ANTONIO PUTS ON THE GREY WIG, THEN THE 'FATHER'S' JACKET, THEN THE HAT. HE LOOKS AT HIMSELF IN THE MIRROR, LAUGHS, TAKES THEM ALL OFF AND PUTS ON THE BLONDE WIG. HE SEES MARIANNA'S RED SCARF ON THE FLOOR, DRAPES IT AROUND HIS SHOULDERS AND MOVES TOWARDS VALERIO, WHO'S STILL ENGROSSED IN HIS MAGAZINE.

ANTONIO Olympiad, Odyssey, Samothrace! (VALERIO LOOKS AT HIM IN ASTONISHMENT, BUT ALSO PERHAPS WITH A HINT OF CONSPIRATORIAL PLEASURE)

VALERIO Hullo, Marianna.

ANTONIO Better, huh?

VALERIO Yes, better.

ANTONIO Much better. Much, much, much better. (HE SITS IN THE OTHER ARMCHAIR. VALERIO HAS CLOSED HIS EYES) What are you thinking about?

VALERIO Hm? Oh, I was going over what I have in my drawers.

ANTONIO You really remember everything? Every, every, everything?

VALERIO Every, every, everything.

ANTONIO Even things tucked away in the back corners?

VALERIO The day before yesterday I had a moment's doubt. Would you say my first milk tooth was in the little oval box or the round one?

ANTONIO I haven't the faintest idea.

VALERIO (PROUDLY) In the round one. The oval one has a lock of your hair.

ANTONIO Incredible! (A PAUSE. VALERIO GOES BACK TO HIS MAGAZINE) It's raining. Clip! Clap!

VALERIO Just a couple of drops.

ANTONIO The flood began with a couple of drops. (A PAUSE) Do you think we'll be saved?

VALERIO Eh? Saved from what?

ANTONIO Nothing, nothing. (ANOTHER SILENCE. VALERIO TURNS THE PAGES. ANTONIO GIVES A SLIGHT START) Oh!

VALERIO What's the matter?

ANTONIO I heard someone crying.

VALERIO Where?

ANTONIO In my heart. (HE LOOKS AT HIS CHEST UNDER HIS SHIRT) There must be someone hidden in there. Buried alive. Hullo? Hullo? (THE LIGHTS BEGIN TO DIM) Hullo? Hullo? (VALERIO CONTINUES TO TURN THE PAGES WHILE...)

THE LIGHTS

THE END
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MATE IN THREE

Editions

First Italian edition: Bologna, Teatro Testoni, January 16, 1991 - Prod. Nuova Scena/Teatro Stabile del Friuli-Venezia Giulia - With Alessandro Haber, Vittorio Franceschi, Monica Scattini - Scenography and costumes by Sergio D'Osmo - Directed by Nanni Loy.

First edition abroad: Caen (France), "Théâtre de Caen", April 7, 1994 - Prod. Theatre de Caen/Compagnia "Latitude 45" - With Alain Trétout, Jean Claude Fernandez and Isabelle Gomez - Scenography by Jean Haas, costumes by Cecilia Da Costa, directed by Jean Louis Jacopin.

and more:

Kracow, June 19, 1995, "Teatr STU". With Krzysztof Globisz, Jerzy Gralek, Aldona Grochal - Scenography and costumes by Marek Braun - Directed by Krzysztof Jasinski.

Moscow, October 2, 1995, Massoviet Theater, "Roman Viktiuk Company", Directed by Roman Viktiuk.

Dresden, November 18, 1995, "Staatsschauspiel Dresden", during the Festival of the Nations - With Matthias Hummitzsch, Lars Jung, Joanne Gläsel - Scenography and costumes by Barbara Blaschke - Directed by Hasko Weber.

Marburg (Germany), March 31, 1996, Nordhessisches Landestheater "Marburger Schauspiel" - With: Herbert Wandschneider, Franck Damerius, Beate Debiel - Costumes by Renate Ostruschnjak - Scenography and direction: Peter Radestock.

Nordhausen (Germany), September 7, 1996, "Theater Nordhausen" - With Andreas Leupold, Peter Dreessen, Sigfrid Herforth - Directed by Andreas Büttner.

Oberhausen (Germany), December 7, 1997, Theater Oberhausen - With Albert Bork, Günter Alt, Anna Polke - Directed by Andrea Bettini.

Even in Germany: Lipsia (Kulturbund, 1997); Landshut (Theater Nikola, 1997).

In Switzerland: Biel/Bienne/Solothurn, "Ensemble Theater, November 12, 1997" - With Urs-Peter Wolters, Dietrich Schulz, Sabine Ehrlich - Scenography, costumes and direction: Bernd Bartoszewski.

In Scotland: Glasgow, "Tron Theatre Company", 6/3/1998 - With Andy Gray, John Bett, Fiona Bell - Scenography by Pamela McPain, costumes by Liz Boulton - Directed by Irina Brown.