

Can't Pay? Won't Pay!

(1974)

by Dario Fo



*Liberated from
capitalist control
to educate the masses
by
Socialist Stories*

ANTONIA
MARGHERITA
GIOVANNI
SERGEANT/INSPECTOR/
OLD MAN/UNDERTAKER
LUIGI

ACT ONE

The living room and kitchen area of an old, worn second-floor flat in a tenement block. It is clean and neat.

The door bangs open and ANTONIA staggers in breathless and burdened with four or five plastic bags overflowing with food. MARGHERITA follows, likewise breathless and even more heavily burdened with shopping.

ANTONIA: Blimey, home at last. My feet are killing me. I'll never get use to those stairs. Thank goodness I met you Margherita.

MARGHERITA: Christ, Antonia, what happened? Where did you get all this stuff? Won the pools have you?

ANTONIA: That's right.

MARGHERITA: Come off it.

ANTONIA: No, tell a lie. I got it all with Green Shield stamps.

MARGHERITA: Pull the other one.

ANTONIA: All right I'll come clean. I swopped it for a two-for-the-price-of-one off-peak return to Florence. It came with the coupon with the cornflakes.

MARGHERITA: What, Brekki Wheat?

ANTONIA: No. After Germ.

MARGHERITA: Get away.

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ANTONIA: All right, seeing as you're my best friend, and you keep it to yourself, I've got a rich lover.

MARGHERITA: That's it. I'm off.

ANTONIA: Where are you going?

MARGHERITA: Home.

ANTONIA: Come on then. Shut the door. I was only kidding.

MARGHERITA: Is this going to be one of your stories?

ANTONIA: Margherita how could you. This is not a story. This is an epic.

MARGHERITA: Right, out with it then.

ANTONIA: You're not going to believe this. I went to the supermarket as usual and there were a load of women making an almighty row about the prices going up again.

MARGHERITA: What's new?

ANTONIA: Well, quite. I mean, spaghetti, sugar, bread, cheese, macaroni.

MARGHERITA: Never mind meat and butter.

ANTONIA: Where was I?

MARGHERITA: Anchovies.

ANTONIA: No, I wasn't. Oh yes, anyway, everyone shouting the odds about the price of things, and the manager's trying to be reasonable and calm everyone down.

MARGHERITA: How'd he do that?

ANTONIA: Shouting his brains out and snatching bog rolls out of people's baskets.

MARGHERITA: O, very calming. Very reasonable.

ANTONIA: Well, quite. 'It's not my fault,' he kept saying. 'It's head office. They decide the increases. They're dictated by market forces.' 'We're the market forces.' 'It's free enterprise,' he says, 'competition.' 'Competition?' I says. 'Competition? Can we enter?' So everyone starts, don't they? 'Competition?' 'Where's my entry form?' Then this big woman starts. You know her, Mrs Manzi.

MARGHERITA: Mrs Manzi?

ANTONIA: Yeah you know. Big woman. Wears a big hat.
Spanner in her hand-bag.

MARGHERITA: Ah Mrs Manzi.

ANTONIA: Well she says 'We've had enough. From now on we decide the prices. We'll only pay a fair price and no more. And you don't like it we'll nick the stuff.'

MARGHERITA: Oooooer.

ANTONIA: 'Hang on,' I said, 'hang on Mrs Manzi.' 'Nick? Nick?' I say. 'Leave it out, we'll liberate the stuff.' 'You're mad the lot of you,' says the manager, going red as a beetroot.

MARGHERITA: Did you get some?

ANTONIA: No, they looked a bit raddled. By now he's surrounded by women, so he starts to push. Well, that was it! A woman falls down. Then Mrs Manzi yells, 'Coward, attacking a pregnant woman, if she loses her baby, we know who's to blame.' Then I start, don't I? 'Murderer, pervert, paediatrician!'

MARGHERITA: I wish I'd been there. What happened then?

ANTONIA: What do you think? He copulated immediately, We all paid exactly what we wanted. Some people went over the top, of course. Insisted on taking all their stuff on credit.

MARGHERITA: What's wrong with that? I always shop on tick.

ANTONIA: Without leaving your address? 'No, we're not giving you an address, you'll only give it to the police,' they said. 'Isn't business based on trust?' they said. 'Well, you'll have to trust us. Ta Ta.' Just then someone shouted 'Police!' Panic stations; and everyone made for the door.

MARGHERITA: Oh my good Lord!

ANTONIA: Lucky, it was a false alarm.

MARGHERITA: Thank God for that.

ANTONIA: Some workers from the factory opposite told us not to worry about the police. 'It's your right to pay your own price. It's like a strike.' They said. 'In fact, it's better

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than a strike. Instead of the workers losing out this time the bosses lose out.'

MARGHERITA: What happened then?

ANTONIA: By now everyone is chanting 'Can't pay, won't pay. Can't pay, won't pay'. Doing a rhumba y'know up and down the supermarket and the manager's lying around somewhere and so we scarpered. I came out, head held high, my chest stuck out like a peacock. Everyone's still chanting 'Can't pay. Won't pay!' all up and down the street. It was like a carnival.

MARGHERITA: Sod it, and I wasn't there.

ANTONIA: Then the police arrived.

MARGHERITA: Thank God, I wasn't there!

ANTONIA: We just stood there rooted to the spot. Not moving a muscle. The cops came running up, and of course couldn't make out what was going on. They're looking for a riot and all they could see was a bunch of housewives loaded down with shopping. For a minute we just stood there. Face to face. High Noon. Nobody knew what to do. Then I said, 'At last you're here. There's a load of robbers in there. Frightened the life out of us. They've highjacked the supermarket.' Then we really scarpered.

MARGHERITA: Marvellous. Must have been like the storming of the Bastille or the Winter Palace in Leningrad, and I could have got Luigi his kippers.

ANTONIA: It was a marvellous feeling. Not because we got away with something, but because we were all in it together. Men and women doing something against the bosses.

MARGHERITA: They'll be so bleeding scared. Now they'll put the prices down tomorrow.

ANTONIA: Started already, I shouldn't wonder.

MARGHERITA: Yea well. Never mind all that. What are you going to tell Giovanni? He won't like it one little bit.

ANTONIA: I'll think up a story.

MARGHERITA: Like what?

ANTONIA: You think he'd swallow the off-peak return to Florence?

MARGHERITA: Not a chance.

ANTONIA: Green Shield stamps?

MARGHERITA: Come off it.

ANTONIA: You're right. That's the trouble with Giovanni.

MARGHERITA: What?

ANTONIA: He respects the law. Trouble is I've already spent the money he gave me. I haven't a bean to pay the gas and electric. Mind you, I'm not worried about the rent.

MARGHERITA: Why not?

ANTONIA: I haven't paid it for five months.

MARGHERITA: Same here.

ANTONIA: Ooh, naughty.

MARGHERITA: Oh, I wish I'd been with you. At least I'd have something for my old man's tea.

ANTONIA: You can have some of this. I can't hide it all anyway.

MARGHERITA: Ooer. I couldn't.

ANTONIA: Ah go on. Do us a favour.

MARGHERITA: Oo no. Luigi'd know, where could I put it? And there's Mama and Papa and Auntie Clara.

ANTONIA: Stop clucking. When you can, pay me. When you've got the money, you can give me for what I've paid for and no more and the rest you can have free.

MARGHERITA: Eh?

ANTONIA: Half of this I've half paid for fully, the other half is half free. Oh forget it. Just take it.

MARGHERITA: You're forgetting my husband. He's as bad as yours. He'll half kill me if I tell him it's only half paid for.

ANTONIA: My old man'll just nag me to death. That's it, cover my name in mud, I've always paid my way, I can hold

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my head up anywhere, poor, but honest blah blah blah,' until he rabbits me to death. (*Pulls a tin from the nearest bag*) Hello! Dog food?!

MARGHERITA: You haven't got a dog.

ANTONIA: I know I haven't got a dog. Supermeat! What's Supermeat? I must have grabbed it in all the confusion. (*Another packet*) Look at this. Millet for birds.

MARGHERITA: Let's have a look.

ANTONIA: It's just as well I didn't pay for this lot otherwise we'd have to live on frozen rabbits' heads. (*Third packet*)

MARGHERITA: You what? Rabbits' heads?

ANTONIA: Here you are. 'Enrich your poultry's diet with best frozen rabbits' heads.' At least they're the best. 'Two hundred lira.'

MARGHERITA: And you want me to take this muck for my Luigi?

ANTONIA: You've got a point. Look I'll take this stuff and you have the rest.

MARGHERITA: What if the police search the house?

ANTONIA: There's ten thousand families in this area. Most of them were at the supermarket today. It'd take the police forever to search us all. Sssshhh. Sod it, it's him. He's home. Take this lot under your coat . . . That's it, so it's not sticking out.

She starts to stash the shopping under the couch, running between the couch and the kitchen table. MARGHERITA, in panic, hovers between, clutching the millet and getting in the way. ANTONIA hangs one bag round MARGHERITA's neck and buttons her coat.

I thought you were helping me. Dozy cow. Button your coat. That's it . . . Help me put my share under the sofa. No, forget it. This stuff in the cupboard, you put that in the sink. Hurry up! Now get going. Act natural.

Enter GIOVANNI, who freezes when he sees MARGHERITA's coat billowing like a bell tent.

MARGHERITA: Oh Giovanni! Hello. How are you? Well, Antonia, must be going. Be seeing you.

ANTONIA: Mind how you go, Margherita. Give my love to Luigi.

MARGHERITA: Bye. Tra la la. (*Exits*)

ANTONIA: Tra la la. She can be such a gossip. I haven't the time to chit chat about drinking coffee all day. Have you heard about thingy . . . What's wrong with you? And why are you late?

GIOVANNI: Did you notice that?

ANTONIA: What?

GIOVANNI: Margherita.

ANTONIA: Yes, that's Margherita.

GIOVANNI: No, I mean, did you notice her . . . (*He gestures*)

ANTONIA: Oh that. Yes, that's her belly. Don't worry. She's married.

GIOVANNI: You mean she's pregnant?

ANTONIA: Yes. Miraculous.

GIOVANNI: No. It's a miracle. I mean last Sunday she was this size and suddenly she's out here somewhere.

ANTONIA: Last Sunday is what it is, last Sunday. More things happen in a week. Anyway, since when have you understood anything about women's plumbing?

GIOVANNI: Look, I'm not stupid -

ANTONIA: No?

GIOVANNI: Luigi didn't say anything about this and he tells me everything.

ANTONIA: Everything?

GIOVANNI: About his wife and, you know -

ANTONIA: And?

GIOVANNI: And, well, blimey, we work on the same line.
What are you supposed to talk about?

ANTONIA: Maybe Luigi wants to keep some things secret.

GIOVANNI: Secret? What does he want to keep it a secret for? Anyone would want to tell everybody if they were expecting.

ANTONIA: Well, perhaps he doesn't know yet. He could hardly tell you if he didn't know.

GIOVANNI: Doesn't know? Doesn't know?

ANTONIA: Perhaps she doesn't want to tell him yet.

GIOVANNI: Who would she not want to tell yet?

ANTONIA: Him! Luigi! He was always on at her. 'It's too early, we're too young, there's the economic crisis.' And if they found out at work she was pregnant she'd get the sack. So he got her to take the pill.

GIOVANNI: But if she took the pill, how did she get pregnant?

ANTONIA: Maybe it didn't work in her case.

GIOVANNI: Well, she can't help that, that's not her fault.
Why not tell Luigi?

ANTONIA: Perhaps the pill didn't work because she didn't take it and if you don't take it, you know, it won't work.

GIOVANNI: Look, hold on -

ANTONIA: You know very well that Margherita is a good Catholic, I'm sure I don't know why. And if the Pope says it's a sin to take the pill, then it's a sin to take the pill and that's that as far as she's concerned.

GIOVANNI: Have you gone bananas? The pill that doesn't work? The Pope and her with a nine-month-old baby? And a husband who doesn't even notice?

ANTONIA: How could he notice it and her all bandaged up like that?

GIOVANNI: Bandaged up?

ANTONIA: Yes, such a shame isn't it, poor soul. Wrapped herself up with bandages just because of him. I told her, finally, if you don't undo them bandages you don't know what you'll get.

GIOVANNI: What would you get?

ANTONIA: (*Thinks*) A flat baby. Undo those bandages at once, I told her, and stop worrying about your job. Life's too important for that. Well, I couldn't leave her like that, now, could I? I was right to say that, wasn't I, Giovanni? Was I right?

GIOVANNI: Sure you were.

ANTONIA: Have I been good?

GIOVANNI: Yes yes. So what did she do?

ANTONIA: Well, she did as I told her and off came the bandages and out came the belly. Pouf! Like a barrage balloon. Then I told her if her husband makes a fuss, tell him to come over here and see Giovanni and he'll see him off. Giovanni, I was right to do that, wasn't I?

GIOVANNI: Very good. Well done.

ANTONIA: Have I been good?

GIOVANNI: OK, OK.

ANTONIA: OK, OK? What sort of answer is that? OK, OK! I knew you'd have a go at me. I knew it. So what have I done to annoy his lordship now. Don't tell me, I know, trouble at work.

GIOVANNI: As a matter of fact there was.

ANTONIA: Go on, you had a strike.

GIOVANNI: No. It was the canteen. I went up for my dinner as I always do at dinner time and there was a bunch of louts complaining about the food being so disgusting.

ANTONIA: What a shame. I bet the food was really nice.

GIOVANNI: No, it was disgusting. But what's the point of a mass meeting?

ANTONIA: Mass meeting? I thought you said it was a bunch of louts?

GIOVANNI: It was to start with. Then everybody joined in. And d'you know what they did? Everyone ate their dinner and went off without paying!

ANTONIA: Them too?

GIOVANNI: What do you mean, them too?

ANTONIA: Well, I meant not just the bunch of louts but all the others, too.

GIOVANNI: Even, I might add, the shop stewards.

ANTONIA: Well I never.

GIOVANNI: Yes. Shop stewards are supposed to set an example.

ANTONIA: Well, quite.

GIOVANNI: And that's not all:

ANTONIA: You mean there's more?

GIOVANNI: I left the canteen and went for a walk right past this supermarket.

ANTONIA: You mean the one by your work?

GIOVANNI: And blow me if there weren't hundreds of women -

ANTONIA: Yes?

GIOVANNI: Walking out of the store loaded up with goods.

ANTONIA: Yes?

GIOVANNI: And d'you know what they told me?

ANTONIA: No.

GIOVANNI: They hadn't paid for a thing!

ANTONIA: Well, what a turn out.

GIOVANNI: Did you ever hear such a thing? They left without paying!

ANTONIA: Them too.

GIOVANNI: What d'you mean, them too?

ANTONIA: Well, them, just like the bunch of louts and the mass meeting in the canteen. Them too.

GIOVANNI: And, what's more, they roughed up the manager.

ANTONIA: Which, the supermarket or the canteen?

GIOVANNI: Both.

ANTONIA: I don't know what to say.

GIOVANNI: No wonder. These layabouts, these louts, ultra-left extremists play right into the hands of the ruling class. And they'll start calling us decent responsible working men thieves and scum of the earth.

ANTONIA: But I thought it was all women who did the supermarket?

GIOVANNI: Same thing. How d'you think the men will react when they get home?

ANTONIA: No, tell me, I'm all ears.

GIOVANNI: They'll probably congratulate their wives for nicking all that gear. 'Very well nicked, my dear,' they'll say, and off down the boozier to have a good laugh. Instead of . . . instead of . . .

ANTONIA: Instead of what?

GIOVANNI: Instead of teaching the wife a lesson. That's what I'd do. I'd chuck the lot at her head, then I'd make her eat everything without opening a can, the key and all and then I'd give her a good talking to.

ANTONIA: You would, would you?

GIOVANNI: Certainly I would. So don't get any fancy ideas, because if I found so much as a tin of anchovies in the cupboard that hadn't been paid for or that had been nicked I'd -

ANTONIA: Don't tell me, I know. Key and all.

GIOVANNI: No, worse. I'd leave, I'd pack and leave and never come back. No, I'd kill you first and after apply for a divorce.

ANTONIA: Now look, if you feel that strongly about it you can pack and leave right now. Divorce or no divorce. How can you suggest such a thing! Me! I'd let you starve to death rather than make you eat stolen food. I'd let you starve to death first.

GIOVANNI: Right! I'd rather starve than eat stolen food. Which reminds me, I never got any dinner. With all the fuss at the canteen I couldn't risk eating anything in case I got it free. What's for tea?

He sits at the kitchen table. ANTONIA nervously selects a can at random and puts it in front of him.

ANTONIA: Here you are.

GIOVANNI: What's that?

ANTONIA: It's good.

GIOVANNI: I know it's good, but what is it?

ANTONIA: Supermeat.

GIOVANNI: Supermeat?

ANTONIA: Supermeat for dogs.

GIOVANNI: What?

ANTONIA: It's very good.

GIOVANNI: It may be, for dogs!

ANTONIA: Nourishing, full of protein, prolongs active life. It says so. There wasn't anything else. And it's cheap.

GIOVANNI: You're joking.

ANTONIA: Who's joking? Ever tried shopping lately? You any idea of the prices nowadays? Everything's double what it was a few months ago. If they stock it. They're hoarding everything, it's the black market all over again. It's worse than wartime.

GIOVANNI: Don't overdo it. Worse than wartime! Anyway, I'm not having that. I'm not a dog yet! Give us a drink of milk then.

ANTONIA: There's no milk.

GIOVANNI: What do you mean, no milk?

ANTONIA: Apparently. Milk's gone up again, so this morning when the milkman came round, a whole bunch of louts – including CP friends of yours –

GIOVANNI: Not our branch.

ANTONIA: – jumped on the float and started giving out the milk at one hundred lira a litre.

GIOVANNI: Did you get some?

ANTONIA: What? Me? Buy half stolen milk? And would you have drunk it?

GIOVANNI: No, you're right.

ANTONIA: Good, then don't drink it.

GIOVANNI: I can't, can I?

ANTONIA: That's what I'm saying.

GIOVANNI: Isn't there anything else?

ANTONIA: Yes. I'll make soup.

GIOVANNI: Sounds good. What kind?

ANTONIA selects a packet at random and puts it in front of him.

ANTONIA: Millet.

GIOVANNI: Millet? What millet?

ANTONIA: Millet for canaries.

GIOVANNI: Millet for canaries?!

ANTONIA: Yes. Good for you. Great for diabetes.

GIOVANNI: I haven't got diabetes.

ANTONIA: Stops you getting it. Builds up a barrier. Anyway it costs half as much as rice. Which you don't like anyway.

GIOVANNI: Millet! First you try and turn me into a dog. Now into a canary.

ANTONIA: Well Gloria – you know the fourth floor – she makes it every day for her old man. She swears by it. The

secret is in the flavour. Luckily I've got the rabbits' heads and if you give them a good boiling –

GIOVANNI: Rabbits' heads!

ANTONIA: Of course rabbits' heads! Blimey, if you don't know that! Millet soup is made with rabbits' heads. Only the heads, mind you, not the bodies, and they're frozen. That's so they won't rot. Don't tell me you're against frozen food now?

GIOVANNI: That's it. Goodbye. (*He starts to go*)

ANTONIA: Where are you going?

GIOVANNI: Where d'you think? The caff.

ANTONIA: What about money?

GIOVANNI: Oh yes. Give me some money.

ANTONIA: What money?

GIOVANNI: What do you mean, what money? You're not going to tell me you've run out already?

ANTONIA: Have you forgotten tomorrow we have to pay the gas, electric and rent? Or do you want to be evicted as well as cut off?

GIOVANNI: Course not.

ANTONIA: Well then, the caff is out. But don't worry, I'll see to it.

GIOVANNI: Where are you going?

ANTONIA: To Margherita's. She's been shopping. I'll borrow from her.

GIOVANNI: But no rabbits' heads, please.

ANTONIA: Don't worry. I'll bring you the paws next time. Bring you luck.

GIOVANNI: That's it. Have a good laugh! Go on. Blimey, I'm starving. (*He picks up the tin*) 'Supermeat for dogs. Homogenised, tasty.' Wonder what it tastes like? Hello, she's lost the key, as usual. Wait a minute. Screwtop. (*He*

opens the tin) Doesn't smell too bad. Bit like pickled jam with a soupçon of truffled kidneys, laced with cod liver oil. A dog'd be a madman to eat this crap. Think I'll have a drop of lemon on top against the cholera. *(Police sirens)* What's all that? *(He calls out the window to neighbour opposite)* Aldo, what's going on? . . . Which supermarket? . . . No, my wife wasn't there! She's dead against these riots, even bought me rabbits' heads to prove it . . . No, she wasn't out at all today. She had to undo a friend's belly . . . Not like that! No, she made her undo the bandages . . . It's her husband, Luigi, he doesn't want her to get pregnant. But she listened to the Pope and so the pill didn't work and she swelled up overnight . . . You don't understand? Thick burk . . . Hello, they're really storming all over the place. Well, if they come here they'll get what for. This is just intimidation, sheer provocation!

SERGEANT *appears in window at rear, clinging to swaying drainpipe.*

SERGEANT: Oi!

GIOVANNI, *back to window, shoots arms up.*

GIOVANNI: O my good God. I'll get shot in the back resisting arrest.

SERGEANT *sways across window again.*

SERGEANT: Oi!

GIOVANNI: All right, all right. I'll come quietly.

SERGEANT *sways back into view.*

SERGEANT: Oi. You. Desist. *(He hooks a foot over window sill)*

GIOVANNI: Desist? Desist? I am desisting, aren't I? What more can I desist?

SERGEANT: Does this flat belong to you?

GIOVANNI: Yes.

SERGEANT: I order you to assist me.

GIOVANNI: Oh yeah? How? Beat myself up? Punch myself in the nuts?

SERGEANT: Help!

GIOVANNI: Stop mucking about.

SERGEANT: Help!

GIOVANNI: What a sense of humour. (*Now GIOVANNI turns round and sees policeman clinging to drainpipe with foot in saucepan on window sill*) I don't believe it. What are you playing at?

SERGEANT: Help! EEEEEK!

GIOVANNI: (*Out front*) Now that's the law all over. Popping round to do you over they can't come in the door like everyone else. No: door's not good enough for the like of them. Oh no. Tell you what, there was this copper who wanted to get a new pair of boots – this'll kill you –

SERGEANT: No. It'll kill me. HELP!

GIOVANNI: Don't interrupt. Oh sorry.

SERGEANT: Get me out of this.

GIOVANNI: What's wrong with the door?

SERGEANT: Get me out of this.

GIOVANNI: What are you doing out there?

SERGEANT: It's a search.

GIOVANNI: Oh yeah? Find anything?

SERGEANT: We're searching your flat.

GIOVANNI: Oh yeah? Got a warrant?

SERGEANT: IF YOU DON'T GET ME –

GIOVANNI: All right. All right. Don't get shirty. (*Ad libs*)

SERGEANT *drops onto balcony and comes through french windows. Goes up behind GIOVANNI.*

GIOVANNI: (*Not realising who he's talking to*) There's a copper hanging out of the window.

SERGEANT: Oh really?

GIOVANNI: He wants to come in.

SERGEANT: Why doesn't he use the door?

GIOVANNI: (*Realising*) What do you want?

SERGEANT: It's a search.

GIOVANNI: Where's your warrant?

SERGEANT: Here's the warrant.

GIOVANNI: What for?

SERGEANT: What for? What for? Thousands of liras' worth of goods were looted from the supermarket today. And he asks me what for?

GIOVANNI: And you dare to come through my window without a shred of evidence? That's character assassination.

SERGEANT: Call it what you like.

GIOVANNI: I will.

SERGEANT: Suit yourself. Nothing to do with me. I follow my orders. That's all.

GIOVANNI: I see. I see. All right. All right then, do your worst.

SERGEANT: Right, I will.

GIOVANNI: But I warn you, this is intimidation, provocation and what's worse . . . it's not very nice. Oh yes. You keep us in a state of subjugation and starvation, then you come round here to take the piss. Look at what I've got to eat. Supermeat for dogs.

SERGEANT: I beg your pardon?

GIOVANNI: Yes, you see. Go on, have a look. Have a sniff of that. And you know why I have to endure this shite? Because real food costs a fortune. Yeah. And look at this. Rabbits' heads. Get your laughing gear around that.

SERGEANT: All right, all right. You've made your point.

SERGEANT looks carefully round the room, then lifting the flap to his tunic pocket, he lifts two inches of The Little Red

Book out for an instant, then swiftly stuffs it down again.
GIOVANNI starts.

GIOVANNI: What's that?

SERGEANT: All reactionaries are paper tigers.

GIOVANNI: Well knock me sideways with a feather! Sergeant, if I didn't know better I'd say that was a little red book.

SERGEANT: (*Looks round flat*) Not a word. (*Slips pack of cards to GIOVANNI*) That, my old son, is a source of comfort to me on a cold night.

GIOVANNI *perplexed. Fans out cards.*

SERGEANT: That, sonny jim, represents the high point of Eastern political thought. If you pardon the phrase.

GIOVANNI: Ace?

SERGEANT: Precisely. I knew you'd cop it. Well what do you say to that?

GIOVANNI: Four no trumps?

SERGEANT: (*Noticing*) Oh sorry. Wrong box. Listen, you working classes have got to stop seeing us police as ignorant twits. You see us as creatures of habit with no brain. 'Here boy, down boy, sit, sit, seize him!' A guard dog who can't disagree or have an opinion. 'Heel, heel, lie down, down, Rover.'

VOICE: (*Outside*) Sergeant!

SERGEANT: Up here, second floor! Next floor, lads.

GIOVANNI: All right, I take your point. Maybe we do see you as thick as pigshit. Present company excepted. Of course. After all we all started in the same class. Right? Sons of the soil as we - as the Communists say.

SERGEANT: Sons of the soil. That's a laugh. Guard dogs for the ruling class, defending their property, their right to exploit, their fiddles, kickbacks.

GIOVANNI: Well, blimey, if you think like that, why did you choose the job?

SERGEANT: Choose, choose? Did you choose to eat this crap, the rabbits' heads and the canary millet?

GIOVANNI: Course not. But there's no choice. There's nothing else.

SERGEANT: Exactly. Exactly. My point precisely. What choice did I have? Emigrate, sweep the streets or join the police. What would you do?

GIOVANNI: Must be terrible. But wait a minute. You've got to have the law, after all.

SERGEANT: Oh yeah? Really? Have you? What if the law's purely for the benefit of the rich? Eh? Eh?

GIOVANNI: Well, then you've got your democratic procedure. Laws can be reformed, you know.

SERGEANT: Oh really? Reform? Reform? Don't make me laugh. We've been hearing that for 30 years. Reforms. No mate. If the people want change they'll have to do it themselves. They'll have to melt the shackles of capitalism and the iron fist of oppression with the boiling blood of Karl Marx. 'Where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish of itself.' Know what I mean? Anyway, comrade, I better continue with this search or I'll get shot.

GIOVANNI: You see! Blimey, what a turn up. First you're talking like a raving subversive and next you're getting down to your job of turning over innocent people's homes. You kill me!

SERGEANT: Yeah, well, not today. Look, I'm only human. Obviously, at the moment, at this precise moment I haven't got the commitment and courage and the sheer get-up-and-go. Know what I mean?

GIOVANNI: 'At this moment.' At this moment I know what you mean. You're all left talk. You're all wind, mate. Giving me all this bollocks about having no choice but get into the police and sorry about that, but I can't help it smashing people over the head, but there you go! You should have taken the other road; emigrate or road sweep. Least you'd

have your bleeding dignity intact. Know where you'll be tomorrow?

SERGEANT: No.

GIOVANNI: Beating me up on the picket line. That's where you'll be.

SERGEANT: You're so right. So terribly, tragically right.

GIOVANNI: Too right, I'm right.

SERGEANT: But. But. Nevertheless. The police have stood back on occasions, you know. Even dare I say, thrown themselves on the other side.

GIOVANNI: Oh yeah when?

SERGEANT: Venice Water Riots. August the 5th.

GIOVANNI: (*Impressed*) Oh.

SERGEANT: 1723.

GIOVANNI: Oh very relevant. Very topical. I won't hold me breath till it happens again.

SERGEANT: Ah ye of little faith. But remember 'A revolution is not a dinner party nor is it doing embroidery.' 'The wheel of history is turning.' Well I better get underway. Comrade.
(*He exits*)

GIOVANNI: And good night! Well, fuck a brick! Whatever next. The died-in-the-wool, raving, steeped-in-Marxism out-and-out red copper! Right in there with the lunatic fascists, psycho bullies and subnormal everyday street coppers. Well that's where the bleeding extremists fetch up, obviously. In the police! And he's got the neck to stand there in front of me, twenty years a member, and criticise the CP! From the left too! Wait a minute! He was trying to get me going. That's it! That sly bastard. He was just trying to provoke me. Get me talking. 'Assault the bastions of Capital! Rebellion in the Police!' And if I fell for it and agreed with him: Wallop! 'Freeze. Red Brigade. You're under arrest.' Yeah, well, this little fish didn't fall for it. Not me. Not

interested in the bait, mate. You'll need a better baited hook to catch this fish. Ah well, back to the dog food.

Enter ANTONIA and MARGHERITA. MARGHERITA hides behind the door.

GIOVANNI: What are you doing?

ANTONIA: Have they been here?

GIOVANNI: Who?

ANTONIA: They're searching every house.

GIOVANNI: Oh yes. I know.

ANTONIA: They've already arrested Mandetti and Fossani. They found stuff in their cisterns.

GIOVANNI: Good. That'll teach them.

ANTONIA: Oh very nice. They also took a load of gear that had been properly paid for. I suppose that's good too?

GIOVANNI: Well, that's what happens when unprincipled louts go grabbing stuff at random. The innocent suffer, too. At least we don't have to worry. They've been here already.

ANTONIA: They've been?

GIOVANNI: Sure.

ANTONIA: Did they find anything?

GIOVANNI: What was there to find?

ANTONIA: Nothing. I mean, you think you've got nothing and it turns out -

GIOVANNI: Turns out what?

ANTONIA: It turns out they've planted stuff on you to frame you. It's not the first time it's happened, you know. As they were searching Rosa's son's room - Rosa on the fifth floor - they planted a gun and a pile of leaflets under his bed.

GIOVANNI: Don't be daft. You think they're coming round here planting packets of cornflakes under our sofa.

ANTONIA: Well, I don't know. Not exactly under the sofa, I wouldn't say. It was just for argument's sake.

GIOVANNI: Come to think of it, you may be right! I better have a look.

ANTONIA: No!

GIOVANNI: Why not?

ANTONIA: Well, it's silly, it's daft. What's the point, mmmm, ummm, see? And keep your dirty mitts off of my cushions. I'll have a look. No. Nothing there. See?

GIOVANNI: Well I better check the cupboards.

ANTONIA *squeals.*

GIOVANNI: What was that?

ANTONIA: Margherita.

GIOVANNI: Margherita? Where?

ANTONIA: Outside. (*A quick look under the sofa*)

GIOVANNI: What did you leave her outside for? What's she doing out there? (*He opens the door*) Margherita, what are you doing there? Are you all right? Come in. What are you crying for?

MARGHERITA: Aoooooouuu!

ANTONIA: She's speechless.

GIOVANNI: I can see that.

ANTONIA: It's the shock of the police raid. She was on her own at home, when they came storming all over the kitchen. She was terrified. Then this inspector wanted to inspect her stomach.

GIOVANNI: The bastards. How can they – He wanted to *what?*

ANTONIA: He had this mad idea that she had food, packets of pasta and stuff, stuffed up there and she wasn't pregnant at all. I ask you!

GIOVANNI: Callous swine! How do you feel now?

ANTONIA: She's still speechless. Come on Margherita, sit down for a minute. I had to bring her round here, didn't I? I mean, I couldn't leave her.

GIOVANNI: Course not. Let's get her coat off.

MARGHERITA: No!

GIOVANNI: She's getting better already. She spoke! Just make yourself at home, dear.

ANTONIA: Leave her alone. She doesn't want to take her coat off. She's cold.

GIOVANNI: It's hot in here.

ANTONIA: It's hot for you. It's cold for her. Maybe she's got a temperature?

GIOVANNI: A temperature? Has she got something?

ANTONIA: What do you mean? Has she got something?
Course she's got something. She's got a baby! What should she have?

MARGHERITA: Aaah!

GIOVANNI: What's that?

ANTONIA: In fact she's in labour.

GIOVANNI: Already?

ANTONIA: What do you mean already? What do you know?
Half an hour ago he didn't even know she was pregnant.
Now he's surprised she's in labour.

GIOVANNI: Well, it just seemed a bit quick. You don't think she's premature?

ANTONIA: You don't half go on. What would you know about her being premature or not? Suddenly you're the world's expert and know all about it and, I suppose, much more than we do! Stay there! Now dear, you get under the blankets. And you. Turn round. She's getting undressed.

MARGHERITA: No I'm not!

ANTONIA: Ssshhh. There there. It'll soon be over. Don't cry, we'll get out of this.

MARGHERITA: How?

GIOVANNI: Mmmm?

MARGHERITA: Owoowww.

GIOVANNI: Look, if she's in labour, we'd better get a doctor.
Or better still an ambulance.

ANTONIA: Oh you're full of bright ideas you are. We call an ambulance and then drive all round Milan looking for a free bed. You know you have to book months in advance.

GIOVANNI: Why didn't she book then? You get nine months' warning with a pregnancy.

ANTONIA: Typical. Of course, it's down to us. Run the house, do the washing, have the babies, and book the beds. And why didn't Luigi do it?

GIOVANNI: He didn't know, did he? What was he supposed to do? Guess?

ANTONIA: Good excuse: 'He didn't know!' Ooo, that's so typical. You give us the pay packet, 'You'll have to manage on that,' insist on your conjugal rights, God forbid you should go without that, then we get pregnant, surprise, surprise, 'Well, go on the pill,' and not a thought for the poor woman who's a Catholic who has double feature nightmares every night, starring the Pope looming up and warning her: 'You're sinning, you know. You should bear children!'

GIOVANNI: Hang on a minute, never mind the conjugal whatsits and the Pope who, I agree is always trying to break our balls too, you know, in our dreams, never mind all that and the pill and the pay packet. When is she supposed to have got pregnant?

ANTONIA: What's it got to do with you? Prying sod! Then he complains about the Pope.

GIOVANNI: No, I meant, they've only been married five months.

ANTONIA: Why couldn't they have done it before? People do, you know. Or are you a bleeding moralist, worse than the Pope? Have you forgotten?

GIOVANNI: Of course not.

ANTONIA: I have.

GIOVANNI: No. But Luigi told me they only made love after they were married.

MARGHERITA: My Luigi has told you all these things? My God!

ANTONIA: There, you've upset her with your gossip. Fancy people telling all and sundry the intimate details of their life.

GIOVANNI: I'm not all and sundry. I'm his best friend! He asked my advice because I'm more experienced.

ANTONIA: Oh yeah. What at? Don't answer that.

A knock at the door.

ANTONIA: Who is it?

INSPECTOR: Police. Open up.

MARGHERITA: Oh my God, aaaaooouuu.

GIOVANNI: It's all right. We've been done.

Enter INSPECTOR, who is the same actor as the SERGEANT, only he wears a moustache.

GIOVANNI: Oh good evening. Hello, it's you again.

INSPECTOR: What do you mean, again?

GIOVANNI: Sorry. My mistake. For a minute I thought you were the one who was here before.

INSPECTOR: A likely story.

GIOVANNI: Yes there was. A police sergeant.

INSPECTOR: Well, I'm an inspector in the carabinieri.

GIOVANNI: I can see that, you've got a moustache –

INSPECTOR: Are you being witty at my expense?

GIOVANNI: No, no.

INSPECTOR: Right. We're searching here.

GIOVANNI: I told you. We've been done already.

INSPECTOR: Well, we'll do it again, won't we?

GIOVANNI: Oh I see, you're checking on each other. Then we'll have the customs police, the railway police, the Alpine regiment –

INSPECTOR: That's enough of that! We'll just get on with the job. (*He heads for the sofa*)

ANTONIA: Oh, we all have to get on with that. In our case sweating eight hours a day on the assembly line, like animals, and in your case making sure we behave and – most of all – pay the right price for everything. You don't ever check, for example, that the bosses keep their promises, pay what they've agreed, that they don't kill us with piecework, or by speeding up the line, or screw us with their three-day weeks, that they comply with the safety regulations and pay the proper compensation, that they don't just up the prices, chuck us out in the street or starve us to death!?

INSPECTOR *exits into wardrobe.*

GIOVANNI: That's pitching it a bit strong. Where's he gone? They don't all think like that you know.

ANTONIA: Whose side are you on?

GIOVANNI: Yours, of course, but the previous search party, the sergeant had had a bellyful of being ordered about. 'I'm just a doggy,' he said, 'who can't disobey. Down, boy, lie down, Rover.' So they're not all the same.

INSPECTOR: (*Emerging from cupboard suddenly*) What's all that? Rover? Where does this dog come into it?

GIOVANNI: He doesn't come into it at all. The sergeant said we think all policemen are ignorant twits, you see, servants of the most brutal exploiters, catspaws and watchdogs with no brains –

INSPECTOR: Right. That does it. Handcuff him!

GIOVANNI: What for?

INSPECTOR: For offending and insulting an officer of the law. And causing an affray.

GIOVANNI: What affray? What insults? You've got it wrong. I was merely making the point to my wife that the police

aren't all the same and that the previous sergeant, the other one, took the view that *you* were all brainless servants of . . . of . . . of . . .

INSPECTOR: Who's you? Me? The police?

ANTONIA: Yes. No. I dunno. Giovanni.

GIOVANNI: I said, no *he* said, you, meaning them, the other police – the carabinieri.

ANTONIA: No!

GIOVANNI: *Not* the carabinieri. Naturally. Course not. I mean, would he?

INSPECTOR: Well, as his lot probably are brainless servants to the public. And quite right. Let him go. You be careful in future.

GIOVANNI: I will be. Don't worry.

INSPECTOR: Where was I? (*The INSPECTOR approaches sofa to finish search*)

ANTONIA: Moan. Go on moan.

MARGHERITA: Aaaaouuu.

ANTONIA: Louder.

MARGHERITA: AAAAAOOOOOUUUUIII.

INSPECTOR: My God. What's that? What's the matter with her?

ANTONIA: Can't you tell?

INSPECTOR: Not really.

ANTONIA: She's in labour, poor soul.

GIOVANNI: Premature birth. Five months, at least.

ANTONIA: She had a trauma earlier when the police wanted to check out her stomach.

INSPECTOR: Check out her stomach?

GIOVANNI: That's right. To see if she was hiding rice and spaghetti packets up there. I ask you! But of course she's just a working woman without any influence. She's not

Pirelli's wife who could cause a lot of trouble for you. So go ahead. How about an all round strip search -

MARGHERITA: Aaaaoooouuu!

GIOVANNI: You see? Go on, turn the place over, wreck everything, fingerprint the place, turn everything out, the wife's undies, why not? Turn the whole place upside down. X-ray the place.

INSPECTOR: Oi. Cut it out! This is incitement.

ANTONIA: Yes. Cut it out. You're overdoing it.

MARGHERITA: Aaaaoooouuu!

ANTONIA: And don't you overdo it, either.

INSPECTOR: Have you called an ambulance?

GIOVANNI: An ambulance?

INSPECTOR: Well, that's the minimum facility you need to get her to hospital. In any case she might die on you. And if it's premature, she might lose the child.

GIOVANNI: He's right. I told you we should have called an ambulance.

ANTONIA: Yeah, and I told you she hasn't got a bed booked. She'll be driving round every hospital in town. She'll kick the bucket on the road.

Siren.

INSPECTOR: There's the ambulance we called for that woman who felt sick upstairs.

ANTONIA: Not Rosa? From the fifth floor?

INSPECTOR: I don't know. This is a real emergency. Come on, let's carry her down.

ANTONIA: Don't touch her. She's too nervous. She won't go.

MARGHERITA: No, I don't want to go to hospital!

ANTONIA: See, she doesn't want to go.

MARGHERITA: I want my husband.

ANTONIA: She wants her husband.

MARGHERITA: Luigi.

ANTONIA: Her husband, Luigi.

MARGHERITA: Luigi, Luigi.

ANTONIA: You see. She wants her husband. Who wouldn't? And him on nights. We can't take the responsibility without her husband's consent.

GIOVANNI: Now that's true. We can't.

INSPECTOR: Who can't. Will you take the responsibility when she dies on you?

ANTONIA: Why? What difference does it make at the hospital?

INSPECTOR: It'd be negligence. Their responsibility. You could sue.

GIOVANNI: But it's premature.

MARGHERITA: Yes, yes, I'm premature. Aaaaoooui!

ANTONIA: And with the jolting of the ambulance, she'll give birth. It can't survive in the back of an ambulance.

INSPECTOR: You've clearly no notion of the advances of modern medicine. You must have heard of oxygen tents.

GIOVANNI: What's a five-month premature baby going to do with an oxygen tent? Camp?

INSPECTOR: In extreme cases, they can even transplant them.

GIOVANNI and ANTONIA: Transplants?!

INSPECTOR: Yes. Easy as pie. They perform a caesarian operation . . .

MARGHERITA: Aaaaooouuu!

ANTONIA: Now look what you've done.

INSPECTOR: . . . and transfer the whole shebang, baby, placenta, the lot to another woman who's had another caesarian.

GIOVANNI: Another mother?

INSPECTOR: Exactly. Then they sew everyone up and Bob's your uncle. Five months later out it pops safe and sound and fit as a fiddle, yelling fit to bust.

ANTONIA: Sounds very dodgy to me.

GIOVANNI: A baby born twice. A child of two mothers.

MARGHERITA: No! I don't want to! Aaaaooooouuuu!

ANTONIA: She's right, poor girl. I'd never give my baby for another woman to deliver.

MARGHERITA: No I don't want to. Ugh. No, no.

ANTONIA: See? She doesn't want to. We can't cart her off if she doesn't want to go.

INSPECTOR: I can. On the grounds of diminished responsibility due to extreme pain. Never let it be said the carabinieri are unhelpful or turn their back on suffering.

ANTONIA: I protest. This is out and out violence. First they frisk us, then they wreck the place, then they handcuff us, now they want to load us on to ambulances without a by-your-leave. If they won't let us live as we want, at least let us die where we choose.

INSPECTOR: No. You can't die where you choose.

GIOVANNI: I knew there'd be a law against it.

INSPECTOR: Watch yourself.

ANTONIA: Leave off. Giovanni, it's no good, let's get her down.

INSPECTOR: I'll get the stretcher.

ANTONIA: No she'll walk. She's got enough troubles. You can walk, can't you?

MARGHERITA: (*Getting up*) Yes, yes. (*Lying down quick*) No, no. It's slipping.

ANTONIA: Damn it. Would you mind getting out a minute. My friend is a little bit naked and I've got to dress her.

INSPECTOR: Right. All out.

The men exit.

ANTONIA: Quick, pull up your bags! Typical, isn't it? You need a cop they're nowhere in sight. Then when you don't

want them they're swarming all over the place. It's the same with the ambulance. I dunno.

MARGHERITA: I'm scared stiff. I knew it was going to end like this. What's going to happen when I get to the hospital and they find out I'm pregnant with shopping?

ANTONIA: Nothing'll happen. We're not going to the hospital.

MARGHERITA: You're right. We're going to prison.

ANTONIA: Oh stop whining. Pessimist. When we get into the ambulance we'll talk to the driver. They're good blokes. They'll help us.

MARGHERITA: And if they don't. If they drive straight round to the nearest nick?

ANTONIA: Oh, cut it out. They won't. They wouldn't dare.

MARGHERITA: It's slipping. Another bag. It's coming out.

ANTONIA: Hang on to it! Ooo, you're such a pain.

MARGHERITA: Don't shove! You'll bust something. (*They freeze*) Oh! You've bust something.

Olives shower down from a split bag.

ANTONIA: What?

MARGHERITA: A bag of olives has split and it's leaking all over me.

ANTONIA: You are a nuisance!

Re-enter men.

GIOVANNI: What's going on, now?

MARGHERITA: It's coming out, it's all coming out!

GIOVANNI: The baby's coming already. Don't panic. Inspector, quick, help me carry her!

INSPECTOR: (*Behind him*) I'm here.

GIOVANNI: Oh.

INSPECTOR: Stand aside, you haven't got the training.

ANTONIA: Now keep her horizontal, for God's sake.

GIOVANNI: Might it come shooting out?

INSPECTOR: She's dripping.

ANTONIA: Yes, she's broken water.

GIOVANNI: Is that good?

INSPECTOR: It means she's near her time! Hurry.

ANTONIA: All right, calm down. Gently with her.

MARGHERITA: Very gently! It's coming - Oooo it's coming!

ANTONIA: Hang on. Wrap her in this blanket. (*Wraps her in blanket*) Gently, Inspector, please.

GIOVANNI: I'll get my coat and come too.

ANTONIA: No. You stay here. This is women's business. You mop the floor.

GIOVANNI: Right. Right. I'll mop the floor. Don't worry about a thing. (*They've gone*) What a bleeding riot! Poor old Luigi'll get back knackered from the night shift and find himself a dad. He'll have a heart attack. When he finds out his child's been transplanted to another woman, he'll have a counter-attack. I'll have to break it to him gently. A really roundabout way. I'll start with the Pope. That's roundabout enough. (*Mopping*) Blimey, all this water. (*He's now crawling on all fours, mopping up the floor with the rag*) Blimey, all this water! But, what a strange smell, like vinegar . . . yeah, sort of brine, that's it. I'll be damned, I didn't know that before being born we spent nine months in brine?! Hello? . . . what's this now? An olive? Olives and brine? I can't believe it! No, I must be crazy. Olives don't come into it! Oh, look, there, another one! Two olives? If it wasn't for their rather uncertain origin, I'd eat them . . . I'm so hungry! I almost feel like making myself some millet soup. It might even be good. I'll stick in two stock-cubes . . . a head of onion . . . (*He opens the fridge*) What's my welding equipment doing here? I've told her not to use it to light the gas. (*He lights gas with it*)

LUIGI: Can I come in? Anybody home?

GIOVANNI: Hello, Luigi. Why aren't you at work?

LUIGI: (*Gasps*) This'll kill you.

GIOVANNI: There's a Cuban?

LUIGI: (*Gasps*) This'll kill you!!

GIOVANNI: A Cuban wants to kill me?!!

LUIGI: Something's happened. We all got to the factory gates this morning . . . This'll kill you – tell you in a minute . . . first, you seen the wife? I've been home, doors wide open, nobody there.

GIOVANNI: Ah. That's because she was here.

LUIGI: Oh good.

GIOVANNI: But she's popped out with Antonia. Ten minutes ago.

LUIGI: Oh. Where to? And what to do?

GIOVANNI: You know. Women's things.

LUIGI: What women's things?

GIOVANNI: You know. Women's business. None of our business.

LUIGI: What do you mean it's none of our business? It's some of my business.

GIOVANNI: Oh it is, is it? Suddenly, all of a sudden. Then how come you never booked a bed when you should have?

LUIGI: Booked a bed? What for?

GIOVANNI: What for? What for? Dear oh dear oh me. That's it. That's men all over. We give them the pay packet, 'You'll have to manage on that,' insist on the conjugal rights, get pregnant, 'Take the pill,' and nightmares, if you're a Catholic, featuring the Pope. Then it's the nappies and the nurseries . . .

LUIGI: Er. Giovanni. What are you talking about?

GIOVANNI: I'm saying we exploit them as surely as we are exploited by our boss!

LUIGI: Oh, that's what you're saying? But what has this to do with Margherita being out, leaving the door wide open, without so much as a little note and disappearing just like that?

GIOVANNI: Why should she leave a note when she expects you to be at work until breakfast time? Tell me that? And why aren't you at work?

LUIGI: The train was held up.

GIOVANNI: Broken down!

LUIGI: No. We held it up.

GIOVANNI: I know there's always breakdowns on that - You what?

LUIGI: Well, they put the season tickets up by thirty per cent!

GIOVANNI: How can you stop a train?

LUIGI: It's easy. You just pull the alarm. There's me, Tonino, Marco, we got down on to the tracks and held up all the other trains. You should have been there. Middle of nowhere.

GIOVANNI: What other trains?

LUIGI: All of them. Even the inter-city and the Paris Express.
(*Eats olive*)

GIOVANNI: Oh, brilliant. Why couldn't I have thought of that? Ticket prices go up, so the entire European railway network has to be disrupted. Marvellous! Don't you realise these wild-man guerrilla tactics disrupting industry play right into the hands of the reactionaries?

LUIGI: Quite right. That's what I told the others. Totally senseless. Not worth trying to reduce the fares. We've got to abolish them completely.

GIOVANNI: No fares at all!?

LUIGI: Just what I said. The firm ought to pay. And they ought to pay us from the time we leave home. We're not sight-seeing when we're getting to work, we're getting to work.

GIOVANNI: What are you babbling about? I know. You've been talking to a lot of maniac provocateurs, infiltrators and police agents.

LUIGI: What, Tonino? Marco? Police agents? No. I thought them up myself. It wasn't difficult, you know. What is quite clear is that it's no good working people waiting for the government to do something, the union's intervention and a good word from your party. We have to stop expecting a white paper from the government and a strongly worded declaration of intent from the union every time we want to turn round and have a piss! If we don't do things for ourselves, then no one will.

GIOVANNI: You haven't been talking to a copper without a moustache?

LUIGI: You what?

GIOVANNI: That extremist copper that goes round trying to incite supermarket riots.

LUIGI: Never heard of him. (*Tasting dog food*) Here. Nice this. What is it?

GIOVANNI: Have you been eating that?

LUIGI: Yes, it's not bad. Sorry. Were you saving it?

GIOVANNI: You had it without lemon?

LUIGI: Should I put some lemon on it?

GIOVANNI: I don't know. Are you sure it tastes all right?

LUIGI: Yeah. Lovely.

GIOVANNI: Let me taste.

LUIGI: All right, innit?

GIOVANNI: Not bad. Want to start on this one? (*Passing other tin*)

LUIGI: Certainly. What is it?

GIOVANNI: A sort of pâté for rich cats and dogs.

LUIGI: Pâté for cats and dogs! Are you barmy?

GIOVANNI: No. A gourmet. Here. Taste this. (*Puts soup saucepan on the table*)

LUIGI: What is it?

GIOVANNI: Speciality of mine: millet soup garnished with frozen rabbits' heads.

LUIGI: Frozen?

GIOVANNI: That's so they won't rot. Speciality de la maison.

LUIGI: The millet's a bit underdone.

GIOVANNI: That's the secret of the recipe. Underdone millet, medium-done rabbits' heads. Oi. Who's gone and eaten that olive?

LUIGI: What olive? Oh, that olive. Shouldn't I have?

GIOVANNI: No, you shouldn't have. It was your wife's olive. Blimey, he even nicks the food from his baby's mouth.

LUIGI: My wife's olive. The baby's mouth. Here. What are you talking about?

GIOVANNI: Don't you know nothing? You heard of natural childbirth, the rhythm method? You have heard of biology?

LUIGI: No. Not a lot.

GIOVANNI: When you're born, there's all this brine sort of stuff, dribbling about, see? Wait a minute. I'll start from the beginning. Right. Take it step by step. Now there's Pope Paul, right, nagging all the women and scaring the pants off them with pregnancy -

LUIGI: The Pope's pregnant?

GIOVANNI: Not him. Your wife. I'm talking about your wife.

LUIGI: Has my wife been seeing the Pope?

GIOVANNI: I see, pretend you don't know.

LUIGI: No, I don't know! What's all this about the Pope?

GIOVANNI: You know what the Pope says in your wife's dreams?

LUIGI: I've no idea.

GIOVANNI: 'Don't take the pill,' my son.

LUIGI: But she doesn't take the pill.

GIOVANNI: So you *do* know.

LUIGI: Know what?

GIOVANNI: She doesn't take the pill.

LUIGI: I just told you.

GIOVANNI: Who's told you?

LUIGI: Nobody's told me. I know already. No point in the pill. She can't have kids, something wrong with the waterworks.

GIOVANNI: Nothing at all wrong with her waterworks, mate. I've just had to mop it all up.

LUIGI: You've mopped up my wife's waterworks?!

GIOVANNI: Well, not exactly water, more like brine. And a few olives. You've just eaten one.

LUIGI: You've lost me. Can we go back to the Pope?

GIOVANNI: No thanks. Look, Margherita had herself all bandaged up and Antonia made her undo it and, wallop, out it popped.

LUIGI: My Margherita?

GIOVANNI: Now they've gone off to hospital in an ambulance as she was about to give birth in here.

LUIGI: Here?

GIOVANNI: No there. (*Pointing to couch*)

LUIGI: Don't piss about. Where's my wife?

GIOVANNI: Told you, in hospital.

LUIGI: Which hospital?

GIOVANNI: Who knows. If you had booked it, we'd know, wouldn't we? As it is the poor little bleeder will probably be born in the ambulance on the way there with all them olives.

LUIGI: Will you leave the olives out of this! Tell me which hospital she's gone to.

GIOVANNI: It's the gynaecological clinic.

LUIGI: Do you mean the baby clinic?

GIOVANNI: Where they transplant the premature baby from one belly to another.

LUIGI: Transplants?

GIOVANNI: Yeah?

LUIGI: Baby transplants??

GIOVANNI: Oh. You've heard of it.

LUIGI: No.

GIOVANNI: That's it. It's obvious you're totally ignorant of modern techniques of premature delivery.

LUIGI: Yes, I am.

GIOVANNI: They get a baby tent, blow it up, like, with oxygen, then they put the mothers under . . . No, it's the fathers . . . No, I mean the kid, then they take the other mother after she's had her caesarian, fully automatic . . .

LUIGI: Cut it out will you!

GIOVANNI: Exactly what they do!!

LUIGI: I don't give a monkey's about no baby tent, transplant or fully automatic caesarian. I want to know where this gynaecology place is. Where's the phone book?

GIOVANNI: I haven't got one.

LUIGI: Why not?

GIOVANNI: No phone.

LUIGI: I'm going down the bar. They've got one.

GIOVANNI: Hold it. Niguarda! Niguarda clinic!

LUIGI: Niguarda. Blimey, that's the other side of town. Why have they taken her that far?

GIOVANNI: I told you. It's where they've developed this special technique. The transplant. They get the other woman. The first one prepared to take the child off the donor, a friend perhaps, and they take her into the hospital - some dozy old cow who's loony enough to contemplate the idea in the first place. Anyway they get this woman - My wife! She's so stupid she'll say yes straight away. Come on we've got to make this phone call. Luigi, I'm sorry to say this, but I can't give my permission.

LUIGI: Who's asking?

GIOVANNI: But I'm the next of kin.

LUIGI: Not to me you ain't.

GIOVANNI: I am the husband.

LUIGI: No, no, no. You're the husband to the second mother.
I'm the husband to the first mother.

GIOVANNI: But the transplanted mother is mine!

LUIGI: I don't give a monkey's. I'm giving my permission and that's that.

GIOVANNI: Are you sure?

LUIGI: No.

GIOVANNI: I tell you if you go ahead with this, I'll pack her off to live with you.

LUIGI: She already does.

GIOVANNI: *My wife*, I mean. You can keep her. If she's going to feed your kid, you can keep me too.

LUIGI: Why you too?

GIOVANNI: I'm the other father, ain't I?

LUIGI: Yeah, but I'm the first father.

GIOVANNI: Yeah, but I'm the first other other father.

They exit ad libbing.

ACT TWO

ANTONIA: (*Off*) Giovanni? Giovanni? Can I borrow your spanner? (*Enters*) Thank God. He's not in. Blimey, look at the time, we've been gone for more than four hours. Come on Margherita, come in. He must have already gone to work, he can't even have had a kip yet poor old sod. Y'know Ma . . . (*Opens door*) You dozy cow.

MARGHERITA: Is he in?

ANTONIA: No he's not. Come in.

MARGHERITA: It's all your fault. You never listen to me. Look at the mess we're in.

ANTONIA: Oh, stop whining. Blimey what a pain. We haven't been caught out yet. The ambulance men were great.

MARGHERITA: Yes, they were.

ANTONIA: And you were worried about it! You've got to trust people. Who's nicked the butter? (*Looking in fridge*) Oh, here it is. I'll make some soup. Hello, what's this? (*Tastes*) Oh, Giovanni. He's made some soup. Ohh. Can your Luigi look after himself when you're not around? Mmmm nice aroma. Oh millet! Very experimental. Wonder what else he's put in it . . . Rabbits' heads!!! You can't even tell a lie without him swallowing it. I'll make some proper soup. You should hear the fuss when I put something in front of him.

Well, I'll show him. Rabbits' heads with raspberry yoghurt. Rabbits' heads with custard. Rabbits' heads with chicken liver and brown sauce. It'll be curried rabbits' heads from now on. Here, you've gone all green, Margherita.

MARGHERITA: Listen, if you're only making the soup for me, don't bother.

ANTONIA: Oh go on.

MARGHERITA: I'm not hungry suddenly. My stomach is all knotted up.

ANTONIA: This'll unknot it for you. You shouldn't be so nervous. Most people are decent underneath. Not everybody, of course. But people like us. Working people having a job making ends meet. People like that are on our side, as long as you show them you won't let the bosses kick you in the teeth, that you're prepared to fight for your rights, and don't wait for St Peter to leave his pearly gates and come down and do it all for you. I remember when I worked at the biscuit factory. What a bloody job. But it was a living. Then suddenly the owners decided to 'rationalise' the place, as they call it, because profits were down. In fact, they were only kicking us out because they were planning to close it completely. So we occupied the place. Three hundred of us. Then we started to run the place, we formed a co-operative. Especially the union leaders. 'It's a losing battle, brothers,' they told us. But do you know what? All of us put every penny we could spare into the factory. Some people put their savings in and one bloke even sold his flat. All of us pawned silver and stuff that we never saw again. Sheets and blankets even. That's how we got our first bag of flour. We went round the shops ourselves with the biscuits and sold them at the factory gates. Plenty of people bought biscuits they didn't need, just to help us out. And to show solidarity. Then when things got bad for us, thousands of workers collected money for us. I'll never forget when they brought the money in. We were all kneading the dough as usual and they put the money on the table. All wrapped up in a big dishcloth - a great big pile, and all the women

started to cry like rain into the dough. Nobody moved and nobody spoke. We just went on mixing tears and dough for biscuits. What are you crying for now?

MARGHERITA: It's the story . . .

ANTONIA: Well what about it?

MARGHERITA: It's so moving. I'm dripping everywhere.

ANTONIA: Yeah, well, before we all get drowned, just you have a think about what I'm saying. It's not just a fairy story, you know. It ain't got a happy ending.

MARGHERITA: What happened?

ANTONIA: The CP moved in, didn't they? 'You can't last out,' they said. So they persuaded us to negotiate with the management. That was the end of it. Two months later the factory closed down. Another 300 jobs up the spout. The fights I had with Giovanni about that. I nearly left him. Reformist git. Anyway, enough of all that. What are you doing?

MARGHERITA: Unloading. (*She is taking the shopping off*)

ANTONIA: Not here. We'll stash the stuff in Dad's allotment shed. It's only round the corner. The gear'll be safe there. I'll make myself a big belly, too. In two or three trips we'll be done.

MARGHERITA: No. No. No, no, no, no. I'm dead tired and I'm not going on. I'm leaving the lot here. I don't want any of it.

ANTONIA: You dozy cow.

MARGHERITA: I see, I'm a dozy cow, am I? Well, you with all your bright ideas can work out what I'm going to tell my old man when he discovers that I'm not pregnant after all.

ANTONIA: That's simple. We'll tell him you had a phantom pregnancy.

MARGHERITA: What's that?

ANTONIA: Happens all the time. A woman thinks she's pregnant, her belly swells up and then, when the baby's about to come out, she just gives birth to a lot of wind.

MARGHERITA: That's not very nice. How could that happen to me?

ANTONIA: Simple. Because of the Pope keeping coming into your dreams and telling you: 'Havea da child, my childa.' And you made a child, only it was a lot of hot air. Like the Pope.

MARGHERITA: Antonia! How can you drag the Pope into this business?

ANTONIA: Well, he's always dragging us into his business, isn't he? Do this, do that, all you wops keep off my grass. Why can't women be priests? You could be a good priest Margherita. You're a good listener.

MARGHERITA: Do you think so?

ANTONIA: Right, I'm ready. I'll be back in ten minutes. Keep an eye on the soup.

MARGHERITA: Why can't we forget the belly business and take the shopping bags over in one trip?

ANTONIA: And what will you do when the law stops you? Now watch the gas and if it goes out light it with that thing.

MARGHERITA: What's that?

ANTONIA: It's Giovanni's welder. Light it like this.

(ANTONIA shows her)

MARGHERITA: Doesn't it get red hot?

ANTONIA: No. It's not iron. It's some stuff called antimony and it gets really hot without ever glowing. So don't touch it. Now let's see if the coast's clear.

They go to the window.

MARGHERITA: That's Maria.

ANTONIA: From the third floor.

MARGHERITA: She's pregnant, too.

ANTONIA: The men'll be at it soon.

MARGHERITA: What, pregnant?!

ANTONIA: No hunchbacks. Right. I'm off. Don't forget this.
(Starts for the door)

MARGHERITA: I've changed my mind. I'm coming with you.
(Loads up)

ANTONIA: Good. You've been thinking about my biscuit factory.

MARGHERITA: Yes. But I'm willing to co-operate.

ANTONIA: You know, all this out here reminds me of my baby.

MARGHERITA: Your baby?

ANTONIA: Nearly a man now. Couldn't wait to get out and get a job. He got out all right, but he's still waiting for a job.

MARGHERITA: What's a job? I've forgotten what it was when you could get one.

ANTONIA: Yeah, mind you, they won't break his spirit. He'll just get cross. If they get on the wrong side of him they'll know what for. Right! Are you ready?

Both exit.

The street. LUIGI enters, walking determinedly, followed by the exhausted GIOVANNI.

GIOVANNI: Luigi, I'm knackered. (He sits) If they say on the phone that your wife isn't at their hospital, do we have to check it out? Don't you trust them?

LUIGI: Would you? With baby transplants?

GIOVANNI: Now you mention it, no. But my feet are killing me.

LUIGI looks skyward.

LUIGI: Oh no.

GIOVANNI: What?

LUIGI: Rain.

GIOVANNI: Shit.

LUIGI: Bloody government.

GIOVANNI: Look, let's give up. I'm getting off to work. I've lost time already.

LUIGI: (*Remembering*) Oh yeah. I wanted to tell you something about that. About the firm.

GIOVANNI: (*Loud crash*) What's that? Hold it. Wait a minute. Look at that!

LUIGI: Jesus. What a mess.

GIOVANNI: It's a juggernaut.

LUIGI: Must have skidded and jack-knifed.

GIOVANNI: Someone better watch all them sacks or someone's liable to nick them.

Enter SERGEANT from right.

SERGEANT: All right. Keep calm. Don't panic. Stand back. It's all right. No one's hurt. Don't panic. (*Exit left*)

LUIGI: Who's panicking?

GIOVANNI: Hello. Keep meeting, him and me.

LUIGI: Know him?

GIOVANNI: Good mates. I can't work him out. He's either a Maoist or an agent provocateur . . .

LUIGI: Agent provocateur. Definitely.

GIOVANNI: Just what I said.

Enter SERGEANT.

SERGEANT: Stand back, there. That's dangerous stuff. It could blow any time.

GIOVANNI: That won't blow. That's caustic soda. That's what it says on the lorry.

SERGEANT: Yes. Well. That's what it says on the outside. But appearances can be deceiving.

GIOVANNI: You don't trust anything do you?

SERGEANT: I know you, don't I?

GIOVANNI: Yeah. You was round my house.

SERGEANT: Oh yeah. Anyway, things aren't always what they seem.

GIOVANNI: Blimey, mate. We're talking about clearly labelled International Road Transport. We're talking about Common Market regulations! We're talking about border certificates in triplicate! And I'm talking about something else. When this rain gets into that soda it's going to smoulder into a right smelly old pudding. So someone ought to get that stuff out of the rain.

SERGEANT: You're right. How we going to do that?

LUIGI *taps GIOVANNI's shoulder.*

GIOVANNI: Shouldn't be too much of a problem.

LUIGI: Giovanni.

GIOVANNI: Well, let's have a look.

LUIGI: Giovanni.

GIOVANNI: Best thing is form a chain . . .

LUIGI: Giovanni.

GIOVANNI: . . . mobilise those fellows over there, get all the stuff back over there.

SERGEANT: Very good idea. I'll get them going, you man this area. Brilliant idea. (*Goes off left*) Oi! You lot! Give us a hand here.

GIOVANNI: Fuck me and my big ideas.

LUIGI: You'll never listen and never learn, will ya?

SERGEANT *re-enters.*

SERGEANT: (*Organising*) OK, spread out. Pass them along. That's the way!

Sacks are thrown from left to LUIGI to GIOVANNI and off right.

GIOVANNI: See that? You ask for help and you've got it. You shouldn't be such a pessimist. Look at that. All mucking in.

SERGEANT: I never said people weren't generous.

GIOVANNI: No, but you're still a mistrustful old berk. I had a boss once like you. He couldn't trust anyone except this mangy old dog of his. He loved this dog and he decided to buy him a deaf-aid.

LUIGI: A deaf-aid?

GIOVANNI: That's right.

LUIGI: For a dog?

GIOVANNI: That's right. So he bought this deaf-aid and he strapped the battery to the dog's belly.

LUIGI: So what happened?

GIOVANNI: The first time the dog cocked his leg to have a piss, he pissed on the battery and electrocuted himself to death.

They laugh. SERGEANT looks puzzled.

SERGEANT: There's a moral to that story. Can't think what.

LUIGI: Where's the drivers?

GIOVANNI: Gone for help?

SERGEANT: No, done a bunk.

GIOVANNI: Why?

SERGEANT: Let's have a look.

They all poke a finger into the neck of a sack and taste the contents.

SERGEANT: Sugar.

LUIGI: Flour.

GIOVANNI: Rice! Someone's made a mistake with the labelling.

LUIGI: Fancy that.

SERGEANT: Just as I thought. It's containered at the depot and the seals aren't broken till they get there. They're flogging it round Europe. You get better prices in Switzerland. Just a bit of funny book-keeping, a few forged papers and no one's the wiser.

50 CAN'T PAY? WON'T PAY!

LUIGI: Unless they happen to turn over on the road. They're telling the truth for once when they talk about shortages. They're running it all out of the country. No wonder there's a shortage.

GIOVANNI: Shortage? Shortage? What about the butter mountain? The Beaujolais lake? The Leaning Tower of Pizza? That's not shortage. That's excessage.

SERGEANT: You clearly don't understand the working of your Common Market.

GIOVANNI: I certainly don't. Fill me in, *do*.

SERGEANT: It's to do with the Greek and Portuguese economy.

GIOVANNI: They're not in the Common Market.

SERGEANT: Exactly. But they will be and then you need a strong Deutschmark.

LUIGI: O yeah?

SERGEANT: Course. Your German economy is dependent on the car industry, but hardly anybody can afford them dirty great German Mercedes and BMWs.

LUIGI: So?

SERGEANT: Simple. You pay your French farmer dirty great subsidies to pay for the dirty great German cars.

GIOVANNI: You've lost me.

LUIGI: It's simple. It's like the Irish pigs.

GIOVANNI: Course it is.

LUIGI: They keep driving them backwards and forwards over the border of Northern Ireland picking up Common Market subsidies every time. They call it 'take your pick, every trip'.

SERGEANT: That's it. See? Simple.

LUIGI: Only thing is the British Army get annoyed. Every time the pigs stampede they get trampled underfoot.

SERGEANT: Take this lorry, for instance. You drive all over Europe and every time you cross a border you pick up your

subsidies. *And* you save labour costs because you never have to unload it.

GIOVANNI: You'll have to take action.

SERGEANT: Oh, I will! Most definitely.

GIOVANNI: What's the matter now?

SERGEANT: Do you want to know what'll happen from here?

I shall write a full report, a model of brevity and procedure, the result of which charges will be laid. A brief item on News at Ten will allude to a brilliant police operation where contraband has been seized and men are sought. Duly alerted by the said item the industrialists will take a quick fortuitous trip over the border. Having laid my evidence before the judge, he will, with a pained expression, because it's a bit like welching on your own kind, sentence them to four months. The industrialists will hear about this whilst sunning themselves on the beaches of St Tropez and will immediately appeal to the President who will commute the sentence to a stiff fine.

GIOVANNI: And that's the end of it?

SERGEANT: By no means. They'll appeal the stiff fine and get off with a stiff talking to.

LUIGI: You what?

SERGEANT: And they get their sugar, rice and flour back.

(Looks off left) Oi! Where are you going with them bags?

(Exits)

GIOVANNI: It's criminal, that's what it is.

LUIGI: Mr Gullible. *(Making a decision)* Grab a bag.

GIOVANNI: What for?

LUIGI: We're going to whip a couple.

GIOVANNI: Oh yeah?

LUIGI: Oh yeah!

GIOVANNI: Are you out of your mind? Are you descending to the level of that rabble over there?

LUIGI: That's right. That rabble over there! Blimey, what is all this middle-class shit? You sound like a Social Democrat – all right, not that bad.

GIOVANNI: I don't steal what isn't mine.

LUIGI: Well you're all right, because it is yours. So steal away. Blimey, do I have to spell it out to you? Who produces it? Who sows it? Who reaps it? Who processes it and packs it? Who cooks it and eats it?

GIOVANNI: Luigi. You're looking after Number One. It's a slippery slope you're on. You won't have a principled bone left in your body soon. That's just the excuse they want.

LUIGI: Who?

GIOVANNI: The military? That's who! They only have to call this a breakdown in law and order and they can roll out the troops and the tanks, suspend the constitution, and before you can say fettuccine, we have fascism.

LUIGI: Oh? What do you suggest then?

GIOVANNI: Legal action through the unions.

LUIGI: Oh, terrific.

GIOVANNI: Against the unions are we? All right. All right. Who mobilised the entire workforce at Fiat's to strike in the dinner hour?

LUIGI: Who organised the women today? Not the unions. The women rioted because they can't take any more. See these hands? They want what's theirs. But your union leaders and your precious party tie them behind our backs. And that's when the army take over. Not when you're on the offensive, but when you're being led up the garden. No. What we want's leadership, mate. Oh, by the way, that reminds me, I was going to tell you about the firm.

GIOVANNI: Yes?

LUIGI: What's the union doing about that?

GIOVANNI: Doing about what?

INSPECTOR approaches unobserved.

INSPECTOR: What's going on here?

LUIGI: Do you mind not interrupting?

INSPECTOR: What's going on?

LUIGI: Bugger off. (*Seeing INSPECTOR*) Oh! We're slogging away here for the balance of payments.

GIOVANNI: Blimey, don't he look like the other one?

LUIGI: You're right. The one without the moustache.

INSPECTOR: What you on about?

LUIGI: Forget it.

INSPECTOR: What are you doing holding them bags?

LUIGI: These?

INSPECTOR: I don't see any other type of bags littering the place.

LUIGI: Oh. We're moving them to a safe place.

INSPECTOR: Where did they come from?

LUIGI: Fell off the back of a lorry.

INSPECTOR: I bet.

GIOVANNI: Trying to be helpful, that's all.

INSPECTOR: Yeah. Helping yourself.

GIOVANNI: Ask the sergeant. He said to move them. He asked us to.

INSPECTOR: Which sergeant?

GIOVANNI: Over there.

INSPECTOR pulls pistol and LUIGI and GIOVANNI shoot their hands up.

INSPECTOR: Don't you move a muscle. You'll get shot. (*Off left*)

LUIGI: Now we'll go and get shot.

GIOVANNI: Yeah. The police have a funny habit of accidentally shooting people on purpose.

LUIGI: Bastard.

GIOVANNI: Mind you, he's all right. He's the one who helped your wife into the ambulance with the olives.

LUIGI: Stuff the olives. (*Remembering*) Oh yeah. The firm. I've been trying to tell you. We've been made redundant.

GIOVANNI: We haven't. Nobody told me.

LUIGI: We have. Everyone in the night shift got a dear John from the management. You'll get yours. They're closing down and moving somewhere else.

GIOVANNI: We're supposed to have a full order book.

LUIGI: They're going to move somewhere where the labour is cheaper.

GIOVANNI: Labour doesn't come any cheaper than us!

LUIGI: It does now.

GIOVANNI stands thinking, hands up. Then dropping them suddenly.

GIOVANNI: That's it. I'm finished. Pass me my bag.

LUIGI: You can't do that.

GIOVANNI: Who can't? It's ours, ain't it?

They start to exit right with bags. INSPECTOR enters left.

INSPECTOR: Oi. Freeze!

Pause.

GIOVANNI: Inspector. Catch.

GIOVANNI throws bag high in the air. LUIGI throws a bag to GIOVANNI and grabs another.

LUIGI: Run! – (*Exit pursued by INSPECTOR*)

Another part of town. GIOVANNI cycles on with LUIGI and two sacks on the crossbar.

GIOVANNI: Another hundred yards and we've made it.

LUIGI falls off.

Stop mucking about.

LUIGI: I still think you shouldn't have nicked the bike.

GIOVANNI: I haven't nicked it. I told you. I've liberated it.

LUIGI: Liberated? What if it belongs to a poor blind granny?

GIOVANNI: What's a poor blind granny doing on a bike?

LUIGI: Forty miles an hour.

GIOVANNI: Blimey, a police van. Outside my house.

LUIGI: Here, look, those two women. Isn't that your old lady?

GIOVANNI: No. Looks like yours though.

LUIGI: They're going into your block. That one's pregnant.

GIOVANNI: You're right. No look. They're both pregnant.

LUIGI: Oh yes. It can't be them. It must be two others completely.

GIOVANNI: Shit. Look.

LUIGI: What. What?

GIOVANNI: That bleeding copper has been following us. With half the town doing all the nicking why does he have to pick on us?

LUIGI: He knows where you live. That's why. He'll be waiting round your house for when you get there.

GIOVANNI: You're right. All right, we'll go round your house. He won't think of that.

They exit right. After a moment the INSPECTOR puffs across the stage still carrying his bag. Blackout.

ANTONIA's flat. ANTONIA and MARGHERITA are discovered hanging shopping round their necks and buttoning their coats over it.

ANTONIA: Come on Margherita. Let's load up. This is the last trip.

MARGHERITA: Thank goodness. Load up. Unload. Load up. Unload. I feel like a lorry.

ANTONIA: Stop moaning.

MARGHERITA: Look, enough salad to last a month.

ANTONIA: Yes, I went a bit mad on the salad. I hope we don't get caught this trip. I'd hate to get frisked with a belly full of celery.

MARGHERITA: You've got a point there.

ANTONIA *at the gas stove.*

ANTONIA: Oh shit. The soup hasn't cooked. They've cut the gas off. It'll be the electricity next. Bloody bastards.

Knock, knock.

Who is it?

INSPECTOR: (*Off*) I've a message from your husband.

ANTONIA: Oh my God, something happened! (*Starts to the door*)

MARGHERITA: Antonia! The salad!

ANTONIA: Stuff it! (*They hastily conceal bags of salad*) Can you wait? I'm only half-naked.

INSPECTOR *enters carrying bag of flour.*

INSPECTOR: Stop. Turn round. Don't touch a thing. Caught red-handed. You can't fool me with those bellies of yours.

ANTONIA: What you on about?

MARGHERITA: Here we go. I knew it. Aaaaouuu!

INSPECTOR: Madam, congratulations. I'm happy to see you didn't lose your child. (*To ANTONIA*) And to you too, madam. In five hours you've made love, got pregnant and appear to be about in the ninth month of your confinement! It's a miracle.

ANTONIA: You better watch it cos my husband will . . .

INSPECTOR: Will what?

ANTONIA: Be home soon.

INSPECTOR: Right, open up. Let's have it.

ANTONIA: Have what?

INSPECTOR: Persistent little jailbird, aren't we? Don't think I haven't worked out the *modus operandi* with the belly.

There was a point today when I thought that I was going mad. Every single woman – from nymphets of eight to great-grandmothers of eighty-eight – pregnant!

ANTONIA: Well, exactly. There you are. That explains it. Doesn't it. (*Improvising*) Surely you have heard of the Feast of St Eulalia.

INSPECTOR: I can't say I have and what's that to the point?

ANTONIA: Yes. St Eulalia, the patron saint of fertility.

INSPECTOR: St Eulalia? Fertility? What's all this fertility? St Eulalia . . .

ANTONIA: Er.

MARGHERITA: St Eulalia, the woman who was barren until she was sixty and then was miraculously blessed with a child by our Lord.

INSPECTOR: Sixty years old?

ANTONIA: Yes. Her old man was eighty. Not up on our saints are we? Mind you, he did die. To celebrate this miracle the women in this area go about with fake stomachs.

INSPECTOR: What a touching tradition. And the tradition gives you *carte blanche* to loot supermarkets, what's more. Amazing, the power of religion in this day and age. Right, that's enough nefarious twaddle. Open up.

ANTONIA: Oh yes, have the clothes off our backs! That's it! Go ahead! If you lay one finger on our bellies a terrible thing will happen to you.

INSPECTOR: Like what?

ANTONIA: Yes . . .

MARGHERITA: The curse of St Eulalia.

ANTONIA: Yeah, that.

INSPECTOR: What curse?

ANTONIA: The same curse that befell her old man. When he first saw her with child. 'You pregnant? Do us a favour! Show us what you've got under there! And if you *are*

pregnant I'll do you in because I can't be the father, that's for certain.' So St Eulalia exposed herself, so to speak, and out poured a cascade of roses.

INSPECTOR: What a lovely little story.

ANTONIA: Wait for it. I haven't finished yet. Soon after a heavy darkness fell on his eyes. 'I can't see,' he shouted, 'I'm going blind.' And then a minute later, 'I am blind!' Then St Eulalia said, 'See what God does to unbelievers.'

INSPECTOR: This gets better and better.

MARGHERITA: Yes, it does.

ANTONIA: Really?

MARGHERITA: Of course!

ANTONIA: Well, all right then. And then there was a third miracle. From out of the masses of roses pops a little child ten months old already. Speaking perfect Italian with a perfect set of teeth. 'Papa,' he says, 'the Lord forgives you.' Then he touches the old man, who was quite surprised, on the head, who falls down dead there and then. But peacefully.

INSPECTOR: You finished? Right, come on, let's see the roses.

ANTONIA: Well that's enough isn't it?

INSPECTOR: Right, come on, let's see the roses.

ANTONIA: So you're a disbeliever?

INSPECTOR: Yes. Very.

ANTONIA: You're not afraid of the curse?

INSPECTOR: What curse? Do me a favour!

ANTONIA: Right you've asked for it. Margherita, we'll expose ourselves together. Do the poem.

MARGHERITA: The poem?

ANTONIA: Yeah, the poem.

MARGHERITA: *The poem.*

ANTONIA: Yes, the exposure poem.

MARGHERITA: Oh, the exposure poem. St Eulalia, pregnant saint,
 He that says that there ain't
 In your deeds no miracles,
 In your words no oracles.
 Make his vision dark and thick,
 Make the bastard bloody sick.
 St Eulalia touch his head,
 Make him fall down completely and utterly dead!

ANTONIA: Right, Margherita.

They throw open their coats and reveal string bags bursting with salad.

INSPECTOR: Gor'blimey. What's all that?

ANTONIA: Good Lord. It's salad. Fancy that.

INSPECTOR: It's salad.

ANTONIA: You're right. Lettuce, chicory, celery, carrots, cabbage.

MARGHERITA: I've got cabbage, too. And a teensy bit of parsley.

ANTONIA: So you have. You know that's really difficult to get . . .

INSPECTOR: What's going on? What's all those greens for? Why are they so hid?

ANTONIA: They're not so hid. It's a miracle.

INSPECTOR: Oh yes? The cabbage miracle. Where's the roses?

MARGHERITA: Who can afford roses? They're very expensive.

ANTONIA: In hard times, one makes what miracles one can. With the veg you've got handy. Anyway, miracles aren't illegal, you know.

INSPECTOR: Don't be so sure of it.

ANTONIA: Also, there's no law that says a person can't carry a mixed salad à la carte on their belly.

INSPECTOR: Don't bank on it.

ANTONIA: A few crudities, can't hurt.

INSPECTOR: Don't be filthy. But what does it all mean?

ANTONIA: Mean? Mean? I've told you. To celebrate St Eulalia. We have to carry a belly around for three days on pain of some fearful, terrible . . . pain. You can be struck –
The lights flicker for a moment and die.

INSPECTOR: It's getting dark.

ANTONIA: Oh really?

INSPECTOR: There's something wrong with your light.

ANTONIA: What light? What's wrong with my light?

INSPECTOR: It's gone out. It's dark.

ANTONIA: No it hasn't. What a funny idea! It's as light as day – oh, I see, you're a comedian. He's having us on.

INSPECTOR: No. No, it's dark.

ANTONIA: I can see perfectly well. Can't we Margherita?

MARGHERITA: Not really, no. (*ANTONIA kicks her*) Yes, yes. Clear as day.

ANTONIA: Yes, we can both see – oh blessed saint he's going blind.

MARGHERITA: Oh no!

INSPECTOR: Look, don't muck about. Switch on the light, please.

ANTONIA: Of course, but it won't help. Look. Off. On. Off. On. See?

INSPECTOR: No! See, see. No I can't see. D'you see?

ANTONIA: Oh my God, the Lord has punished this man.

MARGHERITA: Yes he has.

INSPECTOR: Open the window. Quick.

ANTONIA: It's open already.

MARGHERITA: He can't see it.

ANTONIA: Come and have a look. (*Moves chair in his path*)

MARGHERITA: Over here.

ANTONIA: Mind the chair.

INSPECTOR: Oooooowwww! My shin!

ANTONIA: He's bumped into the chair. What a tragedy. Mind the broom.

INSPECTOR: What?

ANTONIA: Never mind. (*Hits him with broom*)

MARGHERITA: I'll get you a plaster.

ANTONIA: Mind the drawer.

INSPECTOR: (*Crash*) Thanks.

MARGHERITA: Sorry.

ANTONIA: Here's the window. Here, here's the window sill. Open up. See? Isn't it light outside.

INSPECTOR *peers into the cupboard.*

MARGHERITA: It is. Definitely. There's a lot of light.

INSPECTOR: Oh no. I can't see. What's happening to me? Light a match.

ANTONIA: I'll do better than that. I'll use my husband's blowlamp. There you are. What a bright flame!

ANTONIA *proffers the welder to the INSPECTOR.*

INSPECTOR: I can't see no flame! Let me feel.

ANTONIA: Are you barmy? You'll burn yourself.

INSPECTOR: No. I won't burn myself.

OoooOooooWWWwww!!!!

ANTONIA: What's up?

INSPECTOR: I burnt myself.

ANTONIA: That comes of unbelieving.

INSPECTOR: Yeeeoow.

ANTONIA: Now do you believe?

INSPECTOR: I'm blind! My eyes!

MARGHERITA: That's what we've been telling you.

INSPECTOR: Let me out, show me the door!

MARGHERITA: Over there. (*Pointing to door*)

ANTONIA: No over here. (*Pointing to wardrobe*) Here it is.

INSPECTOR *bangs head in cupboard as he enters. He reels out clutching his head.*

INSPECTOR: Ouuu! My head . . . the pain . . . I'm dying . . . my head!

MARGHERITA: He's smashed his head I think.

ANTONIA: It's the child, he's touched you.

INSPECTOR: I'll wring his neck. The bleeding little bastard.

ANTONIA: Language, Inspector, language. (**INSPECTOR faints**) Blimey, he's fainted.

MARGHERITA: Are you sure he's not dead?

ANTONIA: No I'm not.

MARGHERITA: Is he breathing?

ANTONIA: He is . . . Not. He's not! My God he's stopped breathing. His heart's stopped too.

MARGHERITA: Antonia. We've killed a policeman.

ANTONIA: Yeah, we overdid it a bit, didn't we. Never mind. What are we going to do?

MARGHERITA: What are we going to do? You did it. Don't ask me. Include me out. Where's my keys? (*Searching her pockets*)

ANTONIA: Great! The solidarity!

MARGHERITA *finds keys on the table. ANTONIA unloads her coat and salad meanwhile.*

MARGHERITA: Here they are. Wait a minute. I've got another set in my pocket! These must be my old man's! He been here!

ANTONIA: Don't panic. He'll be back when he realises he's left them.

MARGHERITA: Don't you see? If he's been here he must have seen Giovanni -

ANTONIA: Not surprising. He lives here.

MARGHERITA *rushes out the front door in a panic re-entering immediately.*

MARGHERITA: No! Giovanni will have told him everything. About me being pregnant, and the ambulance and the clinic and the transplant. Everything! What can I say? Oooooahhh! Sod it, I'm not moving out of here. You'll have to tell one of your stories, I can't do them like you can. You'll have to get me out of this mess.

ANTONIA: All right, all right. I'll think of something.

MARGHERITA: What?

ANTONIA: I can't think what. Look at him. Miserable sod. It's all his fault.

MARGHERITA: No it's not, it's all your fault.

ANTONIA: He shouldn't have believed me. He fell for it, you know, dozy bugger. Let's have a look.

MARGHERITA: What you up to now?

ANTONIA: Artificial respiration. What does it look like?

MARGHERITA: You don't do it like that! You have to give him the kiss of life.

ANTONIA: What? Kiss a copper. There are limits. And what if my old man comes in? You kiss if you want.

MARGHERITA: You must be joking. We should have some oxygen for this.

ANTONIA: Of course. Why didn't I think? Quick, help me with Giovanni's welding gear. Look, one is oxygen, the other's hydrogen. We'll stick the nozzle in his gob. *(She has dragged the equipment over to the body)*

MARGHERITA: Are you sure it'll work?

ANTONIA: Of course. I've seen it on the films.

MARGHERITA: Oh well, that's all right then. It must be OK.

ANTONIA: It's working! Look, his chest is going up and d - up and up and up! It'll go down in a second, don't worry.

MARGHERITA: I'm not worried! Who's worried? Is his belly meant to go up and d - up and up and up?

ANTONIA: Oh dear. I think we got it wrong. It's the hydrogen! He's biting on the pipe. I can't get it out of his gob. Help me pull it out! No. Pull! Tell you what, I'll turn it off. No that's the wrong way round. That's it.

MARGHERITA: Done it.

ANTONIA: Blimey, look at the size of him! We've got a pregnant dead copper on our hands now.

Blackout.

Street outside LUIGI's house. LUIGI and GIOVANNI are sitting dolefully on their sacks.

GIOVANNI: Oh wonderful. Aren't we a clever boy. Locked out of your own house with two tons of sugar and half the police forces in the country on our heels!

LUIGI: Don't look at me.

GIOVANNI: What sort of thief loses his door key. Go on, pick the lock.

LUIGI: I have picked the lock.

GIOVANNI: Kick the door down.

LUIGI: I can't. It's got three bolts. On the inside.

GIOVANNI: What for?

LUIGI: My wife is scared shitless of thieves.

GIOVANNI: What's she worried about? *You* can't get in and you live here!

LUIGI: Wait a minute. I've remembered! I left my keys on your kitchen table.

GIOVANNI: We can't go back there!

LUIGI: Why not? Give us your keys. I'll go.

GIOVANNI: That Inspector will be waiting for us.

LUIGI: He'll have got fed up and gone home.

GIOVANNI: Not him. He's a bleeding terrier. They never let go. (*Sound off*) What's that?!

LUIGI: Calm down. Just a neighbour.

GIOVANNI: Hide the sacks!

Mild panic for a moment.

LUIGI: Stand on them.

GIOVANNI: That's it. They won't notice them. Act casual.

Enter UNDERTAKER. Very grave. Played by the same actor who plays the SERGEANT and the INSPECTOR.

UNDERTAKER: I wonder if you . . . What are you standing on them sacks for?

LUIGI: What sacks?

UNDERTAKER: Those ones. There. On the ground. Underneath your feet.

GIOVANNI: Oh, *those* ones.

LUIGI: We were keeping our feet dry. Rain. See?

UNDERTAKER: Oh. Anyway, do you know a Sergio Prampolini?

LUIGI: Third floor. But he's away in hospital. Very ill. Goodbye.

UNDERTAKER: No he's not there no more.

LUIGI: He must have discharged himself.

UNDERTAKER: Er. Not really.

LUIGI: He must be better. That's good.

UNDERTAKER: No he's dead.

LUIGI: Dead? That's bad. Jesus, that's terrible!

UNDERTAKER: I know, I know, I never get used to it and I've been in the packing business for twenty years.

GIOVANNI: Packing?

UNDERTAKER: Yes, I pack coffins.

GIOVANNI and LUIGI touch wood, touching crotch.

GIOVANNI: Sorry mate, force of habit.

UNDERTAKER: It's all right. Everybody does it. When I look in the mirror, I do it myself.

LUIGI: Charming.

UNDERTAKER: Twenty years and I'm still not used to death and grief and sorrow, the weeping widows, the distraught children. Dearie me. I mean, if you're any sort of human being you never get used to it. When will the family be back?

LUIGI: What good will they be? They won't want the body will they?

UNDERTAKER: Well, it wasn't at the hospital so the relatives must have it and if they don't have it God knows where it is. No, the problem is what am I going to do with the coffin?

GIOVANNI: Leave it in the hall.

UNDERTAKER: And have kids aerosoling political statements all over it? What do you take me for? Besides, I've got to get it signed for.

GIOVANNI: What about -

LUIGI: We can't help, mate.

UNDERTAKER: You live here don't you?

LUIGI: Who me?

UNDERTAKER: Only you could sign for it, keep it till the family come back and pass it on to them.

LUIGI: I've only a little flat.

UNDERTAKER: It's only a little coffin.

LUIGI: Can't help you, mate, anyway I'm locked out. See.

UNDERTAKER: Oh well. Back to the parlour.

LUIGI: Giovanni. (*Tapping GIOVANNI's shoulder*)

GIOVANNI: Er, tell you what, I'll take it off your hands.

LUIGI: Giovanni.

UNDERTAKER: Can I trust you?

GIOVANNI: I live round here.

UNDERTAKER: It's a deal. Right I'll go and get it. (*Exits*)

LUIGI: Giovanni, are you barmy? We've got enough to cope with apart from looking after people's coffins.

GIOVANNI: Luigi, answer me this: how did the Vietcong get their weapons into Saigon?

LUIGI: I'm sorry Magnus. I'll have to pass on that one.

GIOVANNI: In coffins!

LUIGI: Terrific. Thanks for that bit of socialist history. That's not going to help us get rid of the bags . . . Oh!!

GIOVANNI: See?

UNDERTAKER: (*Off*) Ready!

GIOVANNI: I'll be the corpse. You be the widow. You can carry it with the undertaker.

LUIGI: I don't think widows carry coffins very often. They haven't got the legs for it. Neither have I.

GIOVANNI: There's no answer to that.

LUIGI: Tell you what. I'll borrow his hat.

They start to go.

GIOVANNI: Here. Don't he look like the one with the moustache?

LUIGI: No. The one without.

GIOVANNI: Really?

Blackout.

GIOVANNI and ANTONIA's flat.

ANTONIA re-arranges bags and buttons coat. SERGEANT lies where he fell.

MARGHERITA: Oh, sod you, Antonia. Here we are with a dead copper on our hands and you're still playing silly buggers with the salad.

ANTONIA: What else can we do? This'll be our last trip anyway and, as for him, if he's dead he's dead and if he's alive he'll wake up soon enough and thank the Lord for getting his sight and health back and for getting pregnant.

MARGHERITA: Very funny.

ANTONIA: Now let's hide him under the sofa.

MARGHERITA: Do we have to touch him?

ANTONIA: No. The cupboard. I've seen it in films.

MARGHERITA: Oh well then. (*They lift him*) Jesus he weighs a ton.

ANTONIA: My God, my back's killing me. Get him upright. That's it. (*They drag him into the wardrobe*) Stick a hanger in his jacket. Now hang him on the bar. There. Shut the door. Let's see if it's raining.

MARGHERITA goes to window.

MARGHERITA: Yes. It is raining.

ANTONIA: I'll get my wellies and a broolly.

ANTONIA exits into bedroom. **LUIGI** enters.

LUIGI: Anybody home?

MARGHERITA: No.

LUIGI: Eh?

MARGHERITA: Nobody's home.

LUIGI: You're here.

MARGHERITA: I am.

LUIGI: I think so.

MARGHERITA: So I am. (*Laughs*)

LUIGI: What are you laughing at?

MARGHERITA: I'm getting hysterical. Where did you get that hat? Where did you get that hat?

LUIGI: Isn't it a lovely . . . Forget the hat. What about you? I've tramped half of Milan looking for you. Are you all right, love, and the baby, you haven't lost it?

MARGHERITA: Don't worry. Everything's all right.

LUIGI: Are you sure? Tell me everything.

MARGHERITA: Everything?

LUIGI: Of course!

MARGHERITA: Tell you what. Antonia is much better than me at explaining things. I'll go and get her.

LUIGI: All right.

UNDERTAKER: (*Off*) Ready.

MARGHERITA: What was that noise?

LUIGI: What noise?

MARGHERITA: A voice.

LUIGI: A voice? I can explain everything.

MARGHERITA: So can I.

LUIGI: You can?

MARGHERITA: I'll get Antonia. (*MARGHERITA exits to bedroom*)

LUIGI: (*At front door*) OK. Bring it in.

LUIGI and UNDERTAKER bring coffin in.

MARGHERITA: (*Off*) Antonia! Come out quickly.

GIOVANNI: (*In the coffin*) The women are in!

ANTONIA: Can't I even piss in peace?

LUIGI: She noticed my hat.

UNDERTAKER: I've got four more deliveries to make.

Goodbye. I don't know, what a life. Weeping widows, distraught children. All these quick changes . . . (*Exits*)

LUIGI: I preferred him as the Inspector.

GIOVANNI: Yeah. Now, what are we going to tell Antonia?

LUIGI: I know. Lock the bedroom door, we'll stuff the sack under the sofa and stand the coffin in the cupboard.

GIOVANNI: Good idea.

MARGHERITA: (*Off*) Antonia, I have to talk to you.

ANTONIA: (*Off*) Sod it! It's all slipping out.

LUIGI pushes sacks under couch.

GIOVANNI: Push them well out of sight.

LUIGI: Christ, I didn't think we had this much.

GIOVANNI: It's the yoga effect.

LUIGI: Course it is.

GIOVANNI: When you look at things upside down.

LUIGI: What are you on about?

GIOVANNI: When Indians have nothing to eat they stand on their heads and imagine as much food as they can eat.

LUIGI: Does it help?

GIOVANNI: No. They're still starving.

They stash the coffin in the wardrobe.

LUIGI: 'Scuse me, mate. (*Stops*) Funny that.

GIOVANNI: What's that?

LUIGI: It works.

GIOVANNI: What does?

LUIGI: That yoga effect. First the food doubles in quantity. Then I get this silly notion that there's an Inspector in the cupboard. Silly old me.

MARGHERITA: (*Off*) Antonia, that's it. I'm going in. Don't blame me if I let it all out.

GIOVANNI: Quick, unlock the bedroom door.

LUIGI unlocks the door. The men run to the sofa and sit casually. Enter MARGHERITA.

Margherita! How are you! You look well. Is the baby well?

MARGHERITA: Good question. Ah –

ANTONIA: (*Enters*) What the bloody hell is – Oh. Giovanni! You're back!

GIOVANNI: Yes. I'm back.

LUIGI: Ha. He's back. See. It's Giovanni.

ANTONIA: And Luigi.

LUIGI: Yes. Me. Luigi.

ANTONIA: Hello Luigi.

LUIGI: Hello Antonia.

ANTONIA: How nice.

MARGHERITA: I'm here too.

GIOVANNI: You've had it!

ANTONIA: Have I?

GIOVANNI: The transplant.

LUIGI: The transplant.

MARGHERITA: The transplant.

ANTONIA: But only a little bit.

GIOVANNI: Which bit?

ANTONIA: Well. It wasn't big, you know.

GIOVANNI: I knew it. She's such an idiot. She's only gone and done a caesarian!

ANTONIA: Only a little one.

GIOVANNI: How little?

ANTONIA: Little enough to work.

GIOVANNI: You see?!

LUIGI: And what about you, dear?

MARGHERITA: Ah. Yes. I don't know. Antonia?

LUIGI: What you asking her for? Don't you know?

ANTONIA: How could she, poor little pet. She was under the anaesthetic.

GIOVANNI: Weren't you under the anaesthetic?

ANTONIA: What is this? Some kind of third degree?

Cupboard door swings open. GIOVANNI leans on it.

And why are you leaning on that door?

GIOVANNI: What door?

LUIGI: Yes, what door?

ANTONIA: He's leaning against the door. The cupboard door.

MARGHERITA: *Our* cupboard door?

ANTONIA: You are leaning.

GIOVANNI: (*Moving away*) No I'm not.

ANTONIA: I saw you leaning.

GIOVANNI: Post-natal shock Luigi.

Both cupboard doors open. GIOVANNI and ANTONIA lean.

ANTONIA: What was that?

LUIGI: What was what?

Sink cupboard door opens. MARGHERITA leans.

LUIGI: What was that?

Front door opens. LUIGI leans.

ANTONIA: You're leaning now.

LUIGI: What me? Ha Ha Ha.

There follows a mad panic-stricken circus of doors and windows flying open, ending with the collapse of the cuckoo clock in a cloud of feathers.

GIOVANNI: Never mind who's leaning. Who's had the caesarian? Who's had the transplant?

LUIGI: And who's had the baby?

ANTONIA: Cowards! Not a blessed thought for us. We get up from our sick-beds to be with our husbands in this time of crisis and that's the thanks we get! What should I have done, Giovanni? She was in trouble – about to lose her baby – so I helped her out, didn't I? Don't you always say we should help each other? Luigi, tell him.

LUIGI: (*Lost for words*) I'm speechless. Margherita –

MARGHERITA: Antonia – You tell him.

ANTONIA: I'm going to cry.

GIOVANNI: No. (*Moves to comfort her*)

ANTONIA: I'm all right.

GIOVANNI: You look beautiful with that belly. It takes me back.

ANTONIA: I'm going to cry again.

MARGHERITA: Me too.

LUIGI: Is it moving? Can I feel?

MARGHERITA: No Luigi!

LUIGI: It's my baby.

MARGHERITA: But it's her belly!

LUIGI: But we're relatives now.

GIOVANNI: That's right!

MARGHERITA: I don't come into this, I suppose? I'm rubbish. A nothing. (*Cries*)

ANTONIA: How can you treat her like this? Cheer her up. I've got to go out.

GIOVANNI: Are you out of your mind? With all this weather? You'll freeze. Think of the child! Lie down.

Enter OLD MAN, played by the same actor, of course.

OLD MAN: Can I come in?

GIOVANNI: Dad! Come in.

ANTONIA: Hello, Dad.

GIOVANNI: These are my friends. Margherita. Luigi. This is my father.

LUIGI and MARGHERITA: How do you do?

LUIGI: Giovanni, did you know your dad looks like –

GIOVANNI: Don't say it. I know. Without a moustache.

OLD MAN: (*To MARGHERITA*) Antonia how young you're looking.

GIOVANNI: Dad. That's Antonia on the sofa.

OLD MAN: Is she sick? Are you sick?

GIOVANNI: No. She's expecting.

OLD MAN: Who?

GIOVANNI: A child.

OLD MAN: Why? Where's he gone to? Oh you're back already. (*To LUIGI*) Hello, lad. You shouldn't keep your mother waiting. He's a big lad, ain't he? Oh I've got a letter for you. Sent to me by mistake.

GIOVANNI: Who from?

OLD MAN: The bleeding owner of this block. He says you haven't paid the rent for four months. Here's another letter from the gas, they want their money and so do the electric.

GIOVANNI: What!? Give me those! What is this!? They can take a run, I've always paid my way, haven't I, Antonia?

ANTONIA: Oh yes. Oh yes. We've always paid our way, Dad. I can't understand it for the life of me.

GIOVANNI: They've got it wrong! Definitely. Here, turn the light on, Luigi.

MARGHERITA: Oh no.

LUIGI: On, off, on, off.

GIOVANNI: What's wrong here? Funny. Funny. (*Stops and looks at ANTONIA*) Antonia, we have paid those bills . . . Antonia, tell me we've paid!

ANTONIA: Look at him. Screaming at a pregnant woman. Carry on like that and I'll have this baby premature. Then we'll start all over again with the transplants.

MARGHERITA, LUIGI and OLD MAN: Oh no.

LUIGI: Don't do that. Don't let's start –

GIOVANNI: All right. I'll speak softer. Just answer me.

ANTONIA: What was the question?

GIOVANNI: Have we paid the gas and the rent and the electric?

ANTONIA: Oh that question. It's come back to me.

GIOVANNI: Well?

ANTONIA: No.

GIOVANNI: (*Shouting*) You old cow.

LUIGI, MARGHERITA and OLD MAN: (*Pointing to their stomachs in warning*) SSssshhhhh!

GIOVANNI: What have I been working all my life for? Tell me that? Eh? (*Shouting*) Have I been working so I just get cut off –

MARGHERITA, LUIGI and OLD MAN: SSssshhhhh!

GIOVANNI: Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. The baby. Of course.

Margherita has paid, Margherita has, haven't you, Margherita? Paid.

LUIGI: Of course she has. Haven't you, Margherita? Tell him.

MARGHERITA: Oh dear. As it happens, I haven't.

LUIGI: (*Shouting*) What!

GIOVANNI, MARGHERITA and OLD MAN: SSssshhhhh!

ANTONIA: Well, now you know. Margherita and me and the other wives on this floor, and on the other floors in the block, and the flats opposite, and come to that all the wives and women in this area are just a bunch of old slags. Instead of paying our gas bills we've been buying jewellery and taking day trips to Rome to buy the latest Paris creations –

GIOVANNI: But why didn't you ask for more money?

ANTONIA: You didn't have any more to ask for. What was the point? Would you have stolen to pay the gas?

GIOVANNI: Never! But why didn't you tell me?

ANTONIA: Why didn't you ask? (*Starts to cry*)

OLD MAN: Aaah. There there. Everything will turn out for the best.

GIOVANNI: Who says?

OLD MAN: I says.

ALL: SSssshhhhh!

OLD MAN: Now lay off your wife for a minute.

ANTONIA: Yeah. (*Sob*) Lay off.

OLD MAN: Anyway, there's always a silver lining. I've brought back all that stuff of yours. So even if you don't have a roof over your head at least you can eat.

LUIGI: What's he on about?

MARGHERITA: Haven't the faintest.

OLD MAN: Yes. You know. All that food and stuff you forgot about in my shed. Well, I've brought it back. Here, I'll bring it in. (*Fetches stuff in from outside the door*)

GIOVANNI: Dad, you've got it wrong. It's not ours. Antonia.
Is it?

ANTONIA: Don't look at me.

OLD MAN *puts shopping bags on kitchen table.*

OLD MAN: Well, I never. I saw you coming out of my shed
and I thought –

MARGHERITA: No!

LUIGI: What?

MARGHERITA: No.

OLD MAN: Well, that is a puzzle, ain't it.

ANTONIA: All right. It's just something I picked up at bargain
prices at the supermarket.

GIOVANNI: How bargain?

ANTONIA: Very bargain. Look I only paid half price for half
the stuff and the other half I half nicked.

LUIGI: What's she talking about?

GIOVANNI: Nicked? Have you started nicking now?

ANTONIA: Yes, I have.

MARGHERITA: No, she hasn't!

ANTONIA: It's no use, Margherita. They had to find out.

GIOVANNI: I can't get over it. I'm going barmy. My wife a tea
leaf.

LUIGI: Yeah, well. It's not that barmy. Let's have less of the
moral indignation. (*Pointing under couch*)

GIOVANNI: Why not? I'm entitled. It's all right for you, but
I'm up to here in debt due to this totally irresponsible tea
leaf here.

ANTONIA: That's it. Call me a thief. And what about 'whore'
while you're at it? (*Undoes belly, revealing shopping bag*)
All this ain't a kid. It's veg, and spag and rice and sugar and
spag and spaghetti. All of it nicked.

LUIGI: (*Peering in and under shopping bag*) What happened to the kid? The transplant?

GIOVANNI: The baby tent? The fully automatic –

LUIGI: Belt up for once. Margherita?

MARGHERITA: Yes??

LUIGI: (*Thinks, looks at MARGHERITA and ANTONIA*)
It's all a con. The whole thing.

GIOVANNI: To think I was worried to death about your health. The whole thing was a pack of lies.

LUIGI: Even me being a father.

ANTONIA: Yeah. It's all lies. The whole thing.

GIOVANNI: I'm not half going to give you one. (*Starting towards ANTONIA*)

LUIGI: Don't be hasty. (*Holding him back*)

GIOVANNI: All right I won't. I'll kill her slowly. I'll mangle her into little pieces.

OLD MAN: Well, I'm off. I think you've had all the news. Look after yourself. Ta ra.

They all wave politely.

GIOVANNI: Ta ta.

LUIGI: Yes. Nice to have met you.

OLD MAN *exits.*

GIOVANNI: Right, let me at her.

LUIGI *again restrains GIOVANNI with difficulty.*

ANTONIA: Let him go, Luigi. Let him kill me. I'll just sit here and let him whack my brains out. I'm tired of this shitty life. I'm tired of all the running around trying to scratch a living out of nothing with no help at all. All you get from him is moral indignati . . .

LUIGI: Indignation.

ANTONIA: Yes. That. And a lot of wind. Our kids are chucked on the scrapheap, a whole generation of them

without the hope of getting a job. The right laying waste and who's standing up to them? Him and his party. Like a dead haddock. I've had enough of it. Luigi. I've changed my mind. I'm not giving in. Don't let him go after all.

LUIGI: Oh, all right. (*Grabs GIOVANNI*)

ANTONIA: I'm leaving home instead.

LUIGI: That's good.

ANTONIA: I'm going to live round your place, Luigi.

LUIGI: That's bad.

MARGHERITA: Help!

GIOVANNI: You can't leave. You're my wife.

LUIGI: See?

GIOVANNI: Keep out of this! She's my wife.

ANTONIA: I'm your wife. But are you my husband?

GIOVANNI: What are you on about?

ANTONIA: Well, you're not the bloke I married, that's for certain. You're not the Giovanni I knew. You were a fighter then. Don't rock the boat. Where's the real Giovanni Bardi? Millet soup!

GIOVANNI: All right, if that's how you feel. Go on. Go and leave and live at Luigi's. And take the bleeding sugar with you.

ANTONIA: What?

GIOVANNI: Yeah. Might sweeten you up a bit. And the rice and the flour.

ANTONIA: What's he talking about?

GIOVANNI: It's under the sofa. We nicked it today.

MARGHERITA: No that's our stuff. We nicked it.

LUIGI: No. He's right. We nicked it. Three sacks' worth.

ANTONIA *pulls sack from under couch.*

ANTONIA: You blooming old hypocrite. 'I'd rather starve than eat stolen food.' You two-faced sodbox.

GIOVANNI: Leave it out.

ANTONIA: Well, I'm well out of it. Let's go, Luigi, Margherita. (*Exits*)

LUIGI: Don't let's be hasty.

GIOVANNI: Just because you're right you don't have to stand around gloating. Go on, the lot of you.

LUIGI: (*Calling down the hall*) Hear him out, Antonia, you might change your mind.

MARGHERITA: Yeah!!

Re-enter ANTONIA.

ANTONIA: Wait a minute. Did you say 'because you're right'?

GIOVANNI: You heard. I'm not going to repeat myself.

ANTONIA: Are you feeling all right?

GIOVANNI: No I'm not. I feel sick.

ANTONIA: What about?

GIOVANNI: About today. About tomorrow.

ANTONIA: What are you on about?

GIOVANNI: None of your business.

ANTONIA: Suit yourself.

GIOVANNI: It's the women today and Luigi on the train with Marco and Tonino and the youngsters in the canteen (and even the shop stewards) and the guys at the lorry with the sacks of flour and rice.

LUIGI: Anybody you left out?

GIOVANNI: Yeah me.

LUIGI: You don't come into it.

ANTONIA: He does.

GIOVANNI: No. I don't. That's it. That's what gets me in the goolies.

LUIGI: See?

GIOVANNI: What were the women doing?

LUIGI: Nicking.

GIOVANNI: No they weren't.

ANTONIA: He will argue.

GIOVANNI: They were making a stand. Where've I been all my life? I don't know. I'm confused.

LUIGI: No? Really?

GIOVANNI: All right! Twenty years, Luigi. Twenty years to learn what I've learnt.

ANTONIA: And what have you learnt?

GIOVANNI: I don't know!

LUIGI: You are a slow learner.

GIOVANNI: Sneer you may. But I've fell in. (*Tapping temple*) That's what I've done. Fell in, finally. All those people today milling about the streets with groceries up their jumpers are looking for a bit of leadership, that's what. They're saying, 'Get in there, old cock, there's a fight on.' And they're saying it to their unions. The right are on the rampage and they're saying, 'We've had a bellyful of it,' and they're saying, 'If you don't take hold, we will!' And they're saying to the politicians, 'We want the bread *and* the biscuits, so shut your cake'ole!' And us, the so-called opposition, is wobbling in its boots. Well, we're going to have to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, and roll our sleeves up and get weaving up to our elbows otherwise someone'll nick the carpet out from under our feet and we'll be up the spout without a paddle.

Pause.

MARGHERITA: I know exactly what you mean.

GIOVANNI: Yes, well. Buzz off, the lot of you. I've got some thinking to do.

ANTONIA: What about?

GIOVANNI: About today. About you.

ANTONIA: Are you asking me to stay?

LUIGI: I think he is. Aren't you, Giovanni?

MARGHERITA: I think he is, too.

GIOVANNI: I didn't say that.

ANTONIA: Well, I will.

GIOVANNI: You will?

ANTONIA: Course I will. Don't argue.

GIOVANNI: I'm not arguing. I was just —

ANTONIA: Oh belt up. Give us a kiss.

They kiss.

MARGHERITA: Innit lovely?

LUIGI: It won't last.

Knocking.

MARGHERITA: Oh my God!

LUIGI: Who is it?

INSPECTOR: Police! Open up!

ANTONIA: Quick, hide everything!

MARGHERITA: Aaaaaaooouuu!

ANTONIA: Dozy cow!

General panic as they run hither and thither concealing everything.

GIOVANNI: Hold it. Hold everything. What is this? They've been giving us the run-around all day. I'm not running any more. We'll face the bastards.

INSPECTOR: (*Entering from cupboard*) I can see! I can see! St Eulalia be praised. Merciful Saint! And look at me. I'm pregnant! Oh what a bonus. I'm a mother! I'm a mother.

GIOVANNI: What's got into him?

Pause. They look at each other.

ANTONIA: There's only one thing for it, Margherita. We'll sing the song.

They sing the song (vocal and instrumental depending on the cast's musical talents).

Sebben che siamo donne

Paura non abbiamo

Per amori dei nostri figli

In leghe ci mettiamo

E voi altri signorini

Che ci avete tanto orgoglio

Abbassate la superbia

E aprite il portafoglio

They say we should be moderate

Not stirring up class war

But we're bent on being obdurate

We'll take it all we don't ask more

We'll defeat their aims for starters

We'll foil their dastardly plan

Can we have their guts for garters?

We say fucking right we can!

Fade to blackout.