

# The Virtuous Burglar

(1958)

by Dario Fo

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

## **Characters**

**BURGLAR**  
**BURGLAR'S WIFE**  
**MAN**  
**WOMAN**  
**ANNA**  
**ANTONIO**  
**SECOND BURGLAR**

*A BURGLAR, having forced open a window, is climbing into a third floor apartment in a well-to-do block of flats. On one side stands a classical shaded lamp. He looks around carefully. From the dark, we see furniture, rugs, old valuable paintings emerge. The BURGLAR closes the shutters, then switches on the light.*

*Just when he is about to pull open a drawer, the telephone rings. His first panic-stricken impulse is to make off as quickly as possible but then, realising that no one in the house comes to answer it and that he has nothing to fear, he returns to where he was. He would like to ignore the ringing of the phone but cannot. He makes his way stealthily over to the phone and leaps at it. He grabs the receiver and, almost as if he wished to suffocate it, presses it against his chest, covering it with his jacket. As though to make the act seem more criminal, an increasingly feeble and suffocated sound begins to emerge from the receiver:*

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Hello. Hello. Would you kindly answer... Who's speaking?

*The BURGLAR can finally let out a sigh of relief. The voice has stopped. The BURGLAR takes the receiver from under his jacket, raises it cautiously and puts it to his ear. Then he shakes it several times and hears a kind of groan.*

**BURGLAR:** Oh! At last.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Ooooh! At last... who's speaking?

**BURGLAR:** (*Surprised once again*) Maria. Is that you?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Yes, it's me. Why didn't you reply?

*At this point, lit up by one of the footlights, the figure of the woman who is speaking on the phone appears on the side of the stage which has so far remained in darkness.*

**BURGLAR:** You're crazy! Are you even phoning me at work now? Suppose there had been someone in the house. You're a great help you are.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** But you told me yourself that the owners were at their country cottage... anyway, I'm sorry, but I just couldn't stand it any more... I was worried about you... I didn't feel well... even a few moments ago, when I was ringing up, I could hardly breathe.

**BURGLAR:** Oh well, I'm sorry too, I didn't mean it, it never occurred to me that it might be you...

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** And just what do you mean by that?

**BURGLAR:** Nothing, nothing... but let me get on... I've already wasted enough time.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Ah, I'm wasting your time now! Thank you very much. Here I am in agony, nearly sick with worry... I don't know what to do with myself...

**BURGLAR:** What are you doing?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** I'm going through absolute hell, all because of you... and you treat me like this... charming, just charming that is... but don't worry... from now on I'm not interested... from now on don't even bother telling me where you're going, because as far as I am concerned...

**BURGLAR:** My dear, try and be reasonable... Can't you get it into your sweet head that I am not here for fun... just this once, couldn't you let me get on with my burgling in peace?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** There you go. You're at it again. Playing the martyr. There are plenty of people who burgle, shoplift, even go in for armed robbery without all this fuss. Just as well you stick to petty crime, otherwise God knows what sort of state I'd be in.

**BURGLAR:** (*Who has heard a strange noise behind him, instinctively putting his hand over the mouthpiece*) Quiet!

*Fortunately it was only the sound of the grandfather clock about to strike. It strikes midnight.*

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** What's that?

**BURGLAR:** (*Recovering from his fright*) It's only the grandfather clock, thank goodness.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** What a clear sound it has! – It must be quite old. Is it very heavy?

**BURGLAR:** (*Absent-mindedly*) ...Might be quite...  
(*Suddenly realizing his wife's intentions*) Come on...  
You're not really expecting me to bring it home...  
sometimes I wonder...

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Oh no, don't you bother your little head about me... How could you imagine that I'd ask anything like that... a nice thought from you! ...You giving a little present to me! ...The very idea!

**BURGLAR:** You're mad, that's what you are... If I try to carry off that box, you tell me where to put the silverware and anything else I find.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** In the box...

**BURGLAR:** (*Sarcastically*) You wouldn't like me to bring home a fridge? There's a nice big one through there, with a freezer department.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Don't raise your voice, please. You're not at home now.

**BURGLAR:** Sorry. I got carried away.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Besides, you might be overheard, and you'd look singularly ill-mannered.

**BURGLAR:** I've already said I'm sorry.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** And anyway, I didn't say I wanted a fridge, never mind one with a freezer compartment, I wouldn't know where to put it. But I would like a little something... it's the thought that counts. I'll leave it to you. It's you that's giving the present, after all.

**BURGLAR:** How am I supposed to know what you would

like. I've got other things on my mind right now.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** If that's all it is, I could come along and choose it myself.

**BURGLAR:** That's all I'd need!

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** I'd love to see what a real luxury flat is like. I'd make them die with envy at the coffee morning.

**BURGLAR:** It's me that'll die from something or other, not the women at the coffee morning... I'm here to burgle this house, can you not understand that? Cheerio, see you later.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** What's the rush? Is it too much for you to be nice to me once in a while? I am your wife after all. You even married me in church, not in a registry, like some whore, so you can't get out of it.

**BURGLAR:** (*Annoyed*) I've already said goodbye.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Just a little kiss.

**BURGLAR:** Oh all right.

*He purses his lips in a comic way and emits a loud kissing sound.*

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Do you love me?

**BURGLAR:** Yes I love you.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Very much?

**BURGLAR:** (*At the end of his tether*) Very, very much. But now will you put down the phone?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** You first.

**BURGLAR:** All right... me first.

*He is about to put the phone down when he hears his wife's voice assailing him loudly for the last time.*

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Don't forget the present!

*The BURGLAR replaces the phone, staring at it all the while with hatred. At that moment the figure of the woman disappears in the dark. Finally alone, the BURGLAR begins to look around the apartment in search of his booty.*

*He opens a drawer. He has clearly found the right one. He pulls a bag out of his jacket pocket and is about to start filling it when the sound of someone fumbling with the door lock makes him start. Voices are heard just offstage.*

**WOMAN'S VOICE:** There's a light in the living room. My God, I'm so frightened. Let's get out of here.

**MAN'S VOICE:** Calm down. I must have left it on myself. Who else do you imagine it might have been?

**WOMAN'S VOICE:** Suppose your wife has come back?

*Meantime the BURGLAR, in a state of terror, has attempted to climb out of the window but has lost too much time, so has no option but to dive inside the grandfather clock.*

**MAN:** *(Entering cautiously)* What do you mean... my wife? What could have brought her back to town? *(Peering into every corner)* She wouldn't come even if she knew they were stripping the place. Well, are you satisfied? There's no one here.

**WOMAN:** *(Still cautious and suspicious)* I feel so guilty. *(As the MAN helps her off with her fur coat)* I wonder what you really think of me. Maybe I was wrong to give in to you so soon. I'm sure your wife resisted for much longer than me.

**MAN:** What's my wife got to do with it? She was always full of complexes, she had so many petty bourgeois prejudices... She wouldn't do it, just so she could get married in white.

**WOMAN:** *(Petulantly)* Yes, petty bourgeois, full of prejudices, but you married her just the same. I'd like to see if you would do the same for me.

**MAN:** *(Caressing her and trying to push her towards the centre-stage settee)* My dear... I assure you that if my wife didn't have so many old-fashioned ideas and if your husband were not so hostile... come closer to me.

*The WOMAN has sat down and the MAN moves closer to her.*

**WOMAN:** *(Freeing herself from his embrace)* There, you have ruined everything. *(The MAN loses his balance and knocks*

*against the back of the settee, which gives way. He ends up lying full length against the cushions*) Why did you have to remind me that I have a husband? What am I supposed to do now? You've brought back all my remorse, my guilt complex, my...

**MAN:** I'm sorry, I really didn't mean to. (*He gets up and replaces the settee back*) Maybe if we could talk about something else, just have a little chat, perhaps you'd manage to forget once again and we could go in there.

**WOMAN:** In where?

**MAN:** (*Awkwardly*) My bedroom.

**WOMAN:** Perhaps that is the best idea. Let's try.

**MAN:** (*Hopefully*) Try and go into my bedroom?

**WOMAN:** No. Try and chat a little.

**MAN:** Couldn't we go in there and chat?

**WOMAN:** Please, don't rush me. Let's just have a conversation, let's talk about when you were a child. I'm very fond of children.

**MAN:** (*Resigned*) Okay. If you don't mind, I'll begin from when I was five, because I don't remember anything before that.

**WOMAN:** Five! Pity, I prefer little children, they are more innocent, there's no harm in them... But if it's the best you can do...

**MAN:** Here we go. I remember that at five years old I was still a child, but I used to be taken for a six year old... (*Bursting out, irritated*) Oh no! For goodness' sake, enough of this. I feel a right idiot. You've been making a fool of me for a whole hour. First it was my wife, then your husband. Poor bastard, if he'd to put up with all this stopping and starting...

**WOMAN:** Not at all, it was quite different with him. He yielded right away.

**MAN:** (*Surprised*) What do you mean 'yielded right away'?



**WOMAN:** Just what I say. In his case, it was me who invited him up to my place, so it was up to me to make him succumb. (*Pompously*) If we separate the pleasure of conquest from love, what's left? Regrettably my husband has always been lamentably spineless and he gave in at once; (*Pause*) so I despise him. But with you, I have a feeling it will be different. You are so resolute once you make up your mind. Go on, be resolute.

**MAN:** Yes, I am being resolute. I resolve that we go through there right now.

*The two are about to go out, in each other's arms, when the telephone rings. They stop in embarrassment, not knowing what to do.*

**MAN:** Who could that be?

**WOMAN:** Your wife?

**MAN:** No, no... My wife... Why should she be phoning? Who would she be ringing? Certainly not me. She believes I'm at my mother's. Anyway it doesn't sound like a long distance call. It must be one of those heavy breathers or someone who's got the wrong number. (*Taking her in his arms again*) Let's go through, it'll stop in a minute.

*But the ringing continues regardless.*

**WOMAN:** Please, make it stop, it's driving me mad.

**MAN:** (*Moves towards the phone, picks up the receiver and shuts it in the drawer of the telephone table*) There you are. It won't bother us now. I've knocked it off the hook.

**WOMAN:** (*In despair*) Oh my God! What have you done? Now they're bound to know that you're at home. Who else could have removed the receiver?

**MAN:** (*Realising, with dismay, that she is right*) What a fool! You're right. And they might even have suspected that I'm not on my own. They'll think I'm trying to hide something terrible.

**WOMAN:** Thank you very much. Why don't you come right out and tell me that you only want me for one thing?

*(Bursting into tears)* Just as I was letting myself be convinced... serves me right.

**MAN:** *(Doing his utmost to appear in command of himself)* My dear, don't misunderstand me. Don't let's lose control for goodness' sake... let's stay calm... after all, why should they imagine for one moment that it was me who picked up the receiver? It could have been anyone, it could have been...

*He does not know how to go on.*

**WOMAN:** *(Ironically)* Certainly, someone just passing by.

**MAN:** *(Awkwardly, with no conviction)* Why not?

**WOMAN:** *(In the same tone)* Someone passing through by the merest chance... a burglar for example.

**MAN:** Yes, could be... *(Realising the absurdity)* What do you mean 'a burglar'? If they thought that, they'd call the police.

**WOMAN:** Right, and who knows, maybe they've done that already. *(Terrified)* Oh God! they'll find us here together, they'll arrest us. *(In a near scream)* The police! I want to go home.

*So saying, she rushes towards the door, followed by the MAN who tries to hold her back. At the same time the terrified BURGLAR comes out of his hiding place.*

**MAN:** No, don't go away. Calm down.

**BURGLAR:** The police, that's all I bloody need. Where the hell do I go now?

**MAN:** *(From outside the living room)* Wait. Act your age.

**WOMAN:** I'm frightened. Let's get out; there's no time to lose.

**MAN:** All right. Let's go, but I suppose you'll want your fur coat.

**WOMAN:** Oh yes, my fur coat. I'm completely mixed up. What a mess.

*The BURGLAR in the meantime has been undecided*

*whether to escape through the window or wait until the two have gone out, but hearing them return he darts back to his hiding place. As he climbs back into the body of the grandfather clock, he strikes his head against the pendulum with a deep, resonant 'Dong'.*

**BURGLAR:** They're coming back! Nothing else for it. Move over, pendulum, be a pal. Ouch my head!

**WOMAN:** (*Frightened*) What's that?

**MAN:** (*Smiling*) Nothing my dear. Just the grandfather clock. It struck one.

**WOMAN:** I'm sorry, I'm a bundle of nerves.

*The MAN has the fur coat in his hand and is about to help the WOMAN put it on. The WOMAN notices that the receiver is still off the hook.*

**WOMAN:** You're not so calm and collected yourself. Look, we were going to leave the phone off the hook.

*She replaces the receiver. No sooner has she said these words than the phone begins to ring again. The two stare at each other, once more overcome by terror. The MAN almost hypnotised by the sound, grabs the phone and very slowly raises it to his ear.*

**MAN:** (*With a strained voice*) Hello.

*As before the figure of the BURGLAR'S WIFE appears and at the same time her intensely irritated voice is heard.*

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** About time too, I've been trying to get through for a full hour. Are you going to tell me why you cut me off?

**MAN:** I'm sorry, who's speaking please?

*His lover puts her ear close to the receiver so that she too can hear.*

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Oh that's lovely, now you don't even recognise your own wife's voice.

**WOMAN:** (*Nearly fainting*) Your wife! I knew it! Oh my God!

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Who's that with you? How could you! I distinctly heard a woman's voice. Who is it?

**MAN:** (*Turning to his lover*) Calm down my dear. There must be some mistake. I have no idea who's on the phone. I've never heard this voice before.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** But I have. There's no point in you trying to wriggle out. You brute, you swine, I've found you out at last! Now I understand why you didn't want me to come to that house. But you'll need to come here sometime and I'll be waiting...

*The BURGLAR looks out of his hiding place to follow the conversation, and hearing his WIFE's voice he cannot help being gravely concerned.*

**MAN:** (*Speaking into telephone*) Look, there's been some mistake. You've got the wrong number. This is the Frazosi house.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** I know that fine. Frazosi, 47 Via Cenini, Flat number 3. Now stop playing the fool and don't try disguising your voice any more. You don't do it very well. You swine... after telling me you didn't want to be disturbed at your work!

**MAN:** Who said he was working?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Some work right enough! Mucking about with other women! Traitor, phoney, cheat, liar! They always said that a liar is a thief... I mean a thief is a liar.

**MAN:** What do you mean? Thief, phoney, who do you think you're talking to?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** To my husband. Who else?

**MAN:** If your husband is a phoney thief, that's your business, but I am not your husband, but the husband of my wife, who's not here, thank God, otherwise...

**WOMAN:** We'd all be done for!

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** First of all, my husband is not a phoney thief. He's a real thief...

**MAN:** Congratulations, Madam.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** And if you are not my husband, what are you doing in that house?

**MAN:** My dear lady, this is my own house.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Oh excellent. You're in your own house, with a woman who is not your wife... alone, at this time of night, after spreading the word that you were out of town.

**WOMAN:** We've been found out!

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** So, just like my husband, you too are a traitor, a cheat, a liar and therefore a thief.

**MAN:** I don't give a damn for your husband. But I would be very grateful if you would tell me who said I would be out of town.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** My husband. He always tells me where he is going. He's been keeping you under observation for ten days.

**MAN:** What?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Yes, he was waiting for the right moment.

**MAN:** He was waiting for what? Why on earth did your husband want to know...

**WOMAN:** (*Covering the receiver with her hand*) But don't you see? Your wife has had you followed by that woman's husband, who must be a private detective.

**MAN:** Ah. Now I understand. So your husband offers this splendid service.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Well, he's only doing his job.

**MAN:** A marvellous job too, if you think it's respectable to do everything you can to make a wife leave her husband.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** My husband make a wife leave her own husband? Watch what you're saying!

**MAN:** Stop acting the goat. And don't let on that you know

nothing about it. (*Changing tone*) My wife... playing a dirty trick like that on me. (*Pompously*) There's no doubt that in this world mutual trust is dead and buried, fool that I was to have deceived myself. 'There are certain things my wife would never stoop to,' I said to myself. 'She is a real lady, of the kind they do not make any more, even if she is a bit on the simple side.' It was me that was simple.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** What are you getting at? Are you implying that your wife and my husband...

**MAN:** What do you mean 'implying'? I couldn't be more certain. For God's sake, quit the clowning.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** All right, all right, where is my husband now?

**MAN:** How should I know, if you don't know yourself?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** I only know that less than one hour ago he was there in your house.

**MAN:** Here, in this house?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Certainly, I phoned him myself. In fact I thought he was still there.

**WOMAN:** He must have got the keys from your wife.

**MAN:** Precisely, so that he could come and go at all hours of the day and night. I bet he's already down at the Villa Ponente.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Villa Ponente. And why should my husband be down there?

**MAN:** (*Ironically*) Oh come on. Didn't he tell you? I thought he never hid anything from you about what he was doing and where he was going. Anyway, just to keep you happy, here's the address. Villa Ponente, 34 Via Aristide Zamboni, telephone number 7845... My wife's there... though she won't be my wife much longer.

*With these words, he puts down the phone in a temper. The other WOMAN bursts into bitter tears. The figure of the BURGLAR'S WIFE vanishes.*

**WOMAN:** What a scandal! I'll be disgraced. When my husband finds out, it'll be a terrible blow for him, poor thing. When I think of all the sacrifices I've made to keep him in the dark... to hide even the tiniest details from him... so as not to upset him... even this most recent affair... and now, caught in the act...

**MAN:** And do you not think it's worse for me? I had just made up my mind to retire from the town council, but now, after this scandal, they'll put me up for mayor.

**WOMAN:** Well, what can we do? We can either run away or give ourselves up.

**MAN:** There's no need to go over the score, give ourselves up! To whom, may I ask? And what for? What are we supposed to have done after all? It's not as though they caught us red-handed. No, we were just having a chat... we were talking about children...

**WOMAN:** That's true enough. I was just telling you how much I liked children.

**MAN:** Exactly. But perhaps it would be better not to mention that. People can be very evil-minded. They would accuse us of premeditation. What an outrage, I'd shoot myself.

**WOMAN:** What a good idea! Perhaps that's the best way out, the only real solution.

**MAN:** What? The only solution! Are you mad? I can just see the headlines! 'Local Councillor, after presiding at over fifty civil weddings shoots himself for adultery.' They'd laugh their heads off at the town hall!

**WOMAN:** I am glad you find it all so funny... sometimes I wonder about you... you've no sense of responsibility.

**MAN:** Why should I blame myself? We're in a trap and there's nothing for it but to wait an hour or two until my wife arrives from Villa Ponente. (*Thinking it over*) An hour or two? Why not make full use of it? At least they'll have something to sentence us for. (*He goes towards the WOMAN who is still seated on the sofa*) Let's go in there now.

**WOMAN:** Don't be so vulgar, please.

*She pushes the MAN, who ends up in the same position as previously, full length on the settee with his head over the back which has again given way.*

**MAN:** (*Cursing, striking his open hand against the settee*) And I bought the bloody thing myself!

**WOMAN:** Is it asking too much for you to show even the tiniest bit of concern... of understanding for me? Don't you understand that I am in despair?

**MAN:** You always exaggerate! 'In despair.' Would you be kind enough to tell me what you want of me. (*With a theatrical pose*) Do you want me to shoot myself? All right then, I'll shoot myself. I keep a little pistol handy for emergencies. (*The MAN takes a pistol from a drawer and aims it at his forehead*) Maybe now you'll be happy.

**WOMAN:** Nooooo! What are you doing? Stop it. Give me that.

*She takes the gun from his hand while the MAN, who has obviously made the gesture only to frighten her, laughs quietly.*

**MAN:** (*Ironic but satisfied*) What? Now you don't want me to shoot myself?

**WOMAN:** My dear, you'll have to take off the safety catch and put a bullet in the gun. Like that. (*She snaps the loaded gun together and hands it back to him*) There you are. Now you can shoot yourself.

**MAN:** (*With a strangely squeaky voice*) Ha... Ha... Now I can...

**WOMAN:** (*Raising the gun until it is level with his face*) Come on, hurry up. You don't want to be still alive when your wife gets here now do you...

*The MAN, petrified, puts the gun against his forehead and just at that moment the grandfather clock strikes twelve-thirty. At the first sounds, the MAN starts back and stares at the gun in terror.*



**WOMAN:** What a funny clock, first it strikes one, and then it strikes midnight... seems to be going slow... I mean going backwards.

**MAN:** It certainly is strange... that never happened before... perhaps it's a sign from heaven. The hand of destiny that comes to arrest the suicide's hand... to remind him that time, that life can be ended but that no traveller returns from that undiscovered bourne. Oh my grateful thanks to you, blessed heavenly hand! My darling grandfather clock you have saved my life!

*With these words, he goes up to the clock, embraces it warmly as if it were a person in flesh and blood. The clock goes on striking and seems to spring to life.*

**BURGLAR'S VOICE:** (*Obviously unable to hold back cries of pain caused by the pendulum striking his head*) Ouch... Oh... damnation... stop.

**MAN:** (*Leaping backwards and going over to embrace the WOMAN who is now rigid with fear*) Destiny!!

**BURGLAR:** (*Comes out massaging his head*) Oooh, the pain! ...that was sore! Good evening. If you don't mind, could you let me have some soda water? I'm coming up in huge lumps all over.

**WOMAN:** (*Scandalised*) Lumps! A bit vulgar for Destiny!

**MAN:** Who in the name of God are you? What are you doing in my house? Answer, or else I'll give you a sight more than lumps.

**WOMAN:** Please, don't you start being rude as well. After all, what harm can it do to give him a drop of soda water?

**BURGLAR:** Come on, just a teensy weensy glass of soda water, after all...

**MAN:** (*Very decisively, pointing the gun at him*) Don't make me lose my patience. Who are you? Who are you?

**BURGLAR:** (*Terrified*) There's no need to be pointing that at me. I'll tell you right away sir... I am the husband... you see, that woman who phoned a while ago, she's my wife...

and I'm her husband.

**MAN:** Ah... You're the husband... good.

**BURGLAR:** Yes. We got married in church.

**MAN:** I'm pleased to hear it. So you'll have the good fortune to be buried in consecrated ground.

**BURGLAR:** Buried! No, No, No. You can't get rid of me like that. (*Turning to the WOMAN*) You've no right. Madam, you're a witness that I am unarmed. You'd better watch out. Anyone who shoots me will catch it, and no mistake. Paragraph 127 of the Criminal Justice Act. You can, at the most, fire in the air if I attempt to escape. But since I'm not escaping, you can't. I warn you that the charge would be first degree murder.

**WOMAN:** You people are always well up on the law... of course the law is always on your side. But suppose we just decided to shoot you in the back, as they do with spies. (*Turning to the MAN*) That's what to do. Shoot him in the back. (*To the BURGLAR*) Kindly turn round.

**BURGLAR:** I'm awfully sorry, but I really don't like war games. Why don't we just call the police?

**MAN:** Ah! He's smart, this one. Call the police! The police uncover the adultery, we're sent packing and he carries off the reward.

**BURGLAR:** A reward! Me? From whom?

**MAN:** From my wife.

**BURGLAR:** You're out of your mind. I've no idea who your wife is.

**WOMAN:** What a hypocrite. You don't know her! Shoot him at once, please, he's getting on my nerves.

**MAN:** Just a moment. How long were you in there?

*Pointing to the clock.*

**BURGLAR:** From precisely 13 minutes to twelve. I went in just as you arrived. Why?

**MAN:** So if he was inside the clock, he can't have phoned yet.

If we get a move on, we might still be safe.

**WOMAN:** Yes, safe, with him there ready to blow the whistle on us.

**BURGLAR:** (*Without understanding what they are talking about, willing to do anything to remove the danger*) No! Me blow a whistle! I don't know how to blow a whistle. I never learned, strike me down dead if I tell a lie. (*He blows into the barrel of the gun, which is only a few inches from his mouth, as if it were a whistle*) You see?

**MAN:** Besides, if we killed him, it would be a bit too obvious.

**WOMAN:** Suppose we just gave him a really serious wound.

**MAN:** What good would that do?

**BURGLAR:** I couldn't agree more. What good would it do?

**WOMAN:** I know what good it would do. If you could get him on one particular nerve. (*She touches him at the back of the neck*) For example in the neck, this one which passes right behind here, between the atlas and the epistropheus. He would lose his memory completely.

**MAN:** Are you sure?

**WOMAN:** Positive. In any case, he'd be completely paralysed, he wouldn't be able to speak and from our point of view that would be just as good.

**BURGLAR:** (*Who already feels paralysed*) But not for me it wouldn't. Is there not some other way, a little less risky? Come on lady, think up another idea. You've got brains.

**WOMAN:** (*Flattered*) Yes, there might be another solution: get him drunk. No one would believe the evidence of a drunk.

**MAN:** That's true. I've always thought you were marvellous.

**BURGLAR:** (*With a sigh of relief*) Absolutely marvellous. I knew it as soon as I saw you (*Rubbing his hands*) Well, what have you got to drink? If it's all the same with you, I'd rather have red wine. White wine gives me indigestion. Ever since I was a boy...

**MAN:** No, not wine, it takes too long. It's far better with gin or whisky. Three good glasses should do the trick.

**BURGLAR:** Well... whisky doesn't really agree with me. It smells of oil.

**WOMAN:** (*Who in the meantime has filled a glass to the brim*) There's no oily smell with this one. It's genuine Scotch whisky.

**MAN:** What's it like?

**BURGLAR:** (*Savouring it like a real connoisseur*) Very good indeed! Quite excellent.

**MAN:** (*Drinking in turn*) It damn well ought to be. It cost me a packet.

**BURGLAR:** (*Pretentiously*) Could I have another soupçon?

**MAN:** (*To the BURGLAR who holds out his glass to have it filled up again*) Take it easy. If you swallow the lot, what are we supposed to have?

**WOMAN:** Where are your manners? Anyway, it's him who is supposed to be getting drunk isn't it?

**BURGLAR:** Yes, it's me. (*Becoming bolder*) But if you want, why don't you get sozzled as well? Ha, Ha, Ha, wait till my wife hears about this. She'll never believe it. (*The thought of his wife wipes the smile from his face*) Talking of my wife, what did you tell her to drive her into such a temper? You've landed me right in it. You two go and phone her right away and explain your little ploy to her.

**MAN:** Ploy? What ploy?

**BURGLAR:** You know. That you're getting me drunk to stop me talking... about whatever it is that's bothering you.

**WOMAN:** Do you hear that? He wants a witness, the villain. You were right all along. Better to shoot him at once, and get it over with.

**MAN:** Yes, much better. (*He goes to get the gun which he has left in the drinks cupboard, but the BURGLAR gets there first, seizes the gun and aims it at the MAN*) Now none of

this nonsense! That's my gun! Give it back to me this minute.

**BURGLAR:** It's all change now. First you keep me locked up in that tomb getting knocked about by the pendulum, then you set my wife against me, then you want to paralyse me with my epistropheus. Time to stop fooling about. I came here to burgle, not to play the clown.

**MAN:** To burgle!

**BURGLAR:** Indeed. I'm a burglar. The real thing.

**WOMAN:** (*Amused*) A burglar. Now it all comes out. I've never heard such nonsense. Where's your black mask, your striped jersey, your felt shoes?

**MAN:** Exactly. Where are they?

**BURGLAR:** Black mask! Felt shoes! This isn't a cartoon in one of your colour supps. Anyway what do you know about burglars and robbers?

**WOMAN:** (*Pompously*) For your instruction, I know everything there is to know about robbers, thieves, swindlers, burglars etc. I was on a TV quiz show. My subject was 'Celebrated Crimes and Thefts'.

**MAN:** Oh now I see where all your knowledge about the use and care of guns comes from. (*To the BURGLAR*) I'm sorry... bad luck... choose another profession. This just won't do at all.

**BURGLAR:** Listen you, have you ever heard of the Martello gang?

**WOMAN:** (*In the tone of someone repeating by heart*) The Martello Gang, leading members Mangia, Serafini, and Angelo Tornati nicknamed Stanca.

**BURGLAR:** Angelo Tornati nicknamed Stanga, with a g. It's a dialect word meaning long.

**WOMAN:** Long... don't be absurd... he's just a little fellow.

**MAN:** (*Just to say something*) You mean 'smallish'.

**BURGLAR:** Why, do I seem smallish to you?

**MAN:** What have you got to do with it?

**BURGLAR:** What have I got to do with it? Allow me to introduce myself. I am Angelo Tornati, nicknamed Stanga. And if you don't believe it, here are my release papers from St Stephen's Prison. (*He pulls out some documents*) I did three years.

**WOMAN:** (*A smile spreading over her face after glancing at the papers*) Wonderful! It really is him. Stanca, sorry Stanga. Marvellous. May I? (*She embraces him, kisses him on the cheek*) A robber, a real robber... I've never met a real robber before... let me have a look at you.

**MAN:** (*Jealous*) What are you up to now? This scoundrel comes to burgle my house... and you kiss him... it's disgusting.

**WOMAN:** Watch your language! 'It's disgusting.' What do you know about it? Have you ever kissed a robber?

**MAN:** No.

**WOMAN:** Well then. You try, and then tell me if it's quite as disgusting as you say.

*At that moment the doorbell rings.*

**WOMAN:** Who can that be?

**BURGLAR:** I bet it's my wife again. (*Lifting the phone*) Perhaps now you'll be good enough to explain to her. Hello Maria. You've landed me in a right fix with your telephone calls. I've told you time and again that when I'm at work you must leave me in peace. You must not disturb me, even if the house goes on fire. I want you to stay at home and not bother about anything.

**MAN:** It's not the phone... it's the doorbell.

**BURGLAR:** (*Looking at the phone with annoyance*) So that's why she let me talk.

*He hangs up.*

**MAN:** (*Opens the window and looks out*) Who is it?

**WOMAN'S VOICE:** Who do you think? It's me, Anna.

**WOMAN:** (*Turning pale*) Oh God... this time it really is his wife.

**MAN:** (*Trying to sound perfectly natural*) Ah it's you, dear. I wasn't expecting you. What's happened?

**ANNA:** That's what I wanted to ask you. I had some mad female on the phone shouting insults.

**BURGLAR:** A mad female! That's my wife. I might have known.

**ANNA:** Why don't you open the door? What's keeping you?

**MAN:** Just coming... (*Moving away from the window*) Now we're for it. What do we tell her?

**BURGLAR:** Bye, Bye, don't call me. I'll leave by the window.

**MAN:** (*Grabbing him by the collar*) Oh no you don't. Very convenient. It's thanks to you and your wife that we're all in this mess, so it's up to you to get us out.

**BURGLAR:** Me! What do you want me to do?

**MAN:** (*Turning to the WOMAN*) Just a minute, if you two could pass yourselves off as man and wife... we'd be OK.

**WOMAN:** What! Me married to him! We haven't even been introduced.

**MAN:** Don't worry, love follows after. Anyway, it's always better to be taken for the wife of a phoney husband than the lover of a real husband. (*Preparing to go and meet his WIFE*) Right then, everybody ready. (*Picking up the gun*) I'll take this now, thank you. Remember, no fooling about, otherwise... (*Clicks the gun shut*) I don't want to have to use this.

**WOMAN:** Oh my God, how dreadful. (*Looking the BURGLAR over from head to toe*) If you're going to be my husband, stand up, let me see you. Couldn't you have put on something neater? It's always the same, when we're visiting other people, you always make me so embarrassed... You know that when a man looks untidy, it's always the wife's fault.

**BURGLAR:** I know, I know but... I didn't exactly expect

things to turn out like this. I've got a nice checked suit at home. I'll pop over and put it on, if you like.

**WOMAN:** No you won't. (*Looking at his bulging pockets*) Your pockets are stuffed with things.

**BURGLAR:** (*Straightening up like a tailor's dummy*) It's the latest style didn't you know?

**ANNA:** (*Voice heard coming from outside*) So what's all this? Who's here with you?

**MAN:** That's what I was trying to tell you. There's been a misunderstanding but now it's all cleared up.

**ANNA:** Misunderstanding? You can say that again. You were supposed to be at your mother's, but instead I find you here.

**MAN:** (*Entering, followed by WIFE*) I'm trying to explain. Here we are, this is my friend Doctor Angelo Tornato.

**BURGLAR:** (*Drily*) Tornati.

**MAN:** (*With a weak smile*) Sorry. And this is his wife.

**BURGLAR:** It was your husband who made us get married. Love follows after, so he told us.

**MAN:** (*Covering up*) In my official capacity, at the registry.

**WOMAN:** Please forgive this intrusion, I realise it's a bit late, not very convenient for you, but we had to turn to your husband, because... it so happened... well you see...

**ANNA:** (*Drily*) Never mind that. Was it you who telephoned me?

**MAN:** (*Intervening quickly*) Yes. It was her. But you must understand, the poor thing was so distraught.

**WOMAN:** Do forgive me, but I was nearly driven crazy by jealousy, I don't know why, but I had the idea that my husband was having an affair with you. But now that I see you, I don't know how I could have thought such a thing.

**ANNA:** Why, do I look as though I'm past it? Or do you want to come right out and say that I'm some kind of monster.



**WOMAN:** No, no I didn't mean that at all. You look very elegant. I meant, knowing the vulgar tastes of my husband as I do...

**BURGLAR:** Me! Vulgar tastes!

**ANNA:** I am sorry that you feel vulgar, my dear, since your husband married you, but that doesn't mean that you have to consider me low enough to end up with a man like your aforementioned spouse.

**BURGLAR:** That's quite enough, first vulgar, now low and aforementioned.

**MAN:** (*Evidently attempting to defuse the situation*) No need to overdo it, dear. He is not much to look at but he might be all right for some tastes!

**ANNA:** What a husband I have! Instead of being outraged when they cast aspersions on his own wife, he says that I might get to like my supposed lover. The man's mad!

**WOMAN:** No, your husband didn't mean that. He just meant that when a woman is in love, she always thinks that other women might like her husband no matter how vulgar his tastes are.

**ANNA:** That's lovely that is. You mean that because I'm fond of my husband, you must be fond of him as well, is that it? Seeing you are here, why don't you take him as your lover?

**WOMAN:** No thank you.

**ANNA:** (*Turning to BURGLAR*) And what do you say to all this?

**BURGLAR:** To be quite honest, I'd sooner have her as a lover than as a wife... always assuming your husband had nothing against it... it's all up to him. It was him who married us.

**ANNA:** (*Bursting out laughing, in obvious good humour*) Very good, very witty. Now I see why your wife is afraid of other women. Witty men are the most dangerous. Especially if they have vulgar tastes.

**BURGLAR:** (*To the WOMAN*) She called me vulgar again!

**WOMAN:** (*Affectionately, putting her arm around him*) Ah yes, he really is dangerous. You've no idea.

**MAN:** (*Annoyed*) You're overdoing it a bit. (*Correcting himself*) All men are dangerous, to some extent.

**ANNA:** Certainly not you, my love! (*Looking at the BURGLAR and the WOMAN who are holding hands tenderly*) Aren't they lovely. They look like two newly-weds on honeymoon. You were made for each other... weren't they dear?

**MAN:** (*Getting riled*) Yes, but now... it's time to be saying goodnight... it's getting late.

**ANNA:** Where are your manners? Take no notice, just stay as long as you please. Why don't we all have a little drink?

**BURGLAR:** Why not? The same whisky as before for me.

*He grabs the bottle but the WOMAN signals 'no' to him.*

**WOMAN:** (*Whispering*) Put that down! (*In a strained voice, to ANNA*) You're very kind, but we've already taken advantage of your courtesy... (*The BURGLAR puts the bottle in his pocket*) It really is late, and I wouldn't want my husband to come and (*Realising what she has said*) ...I mean, him to get home too late... we live quite a way off, right at the other end of the town, and he must get up early tomorrow morning, isn't that right dear?

**BURGLAR:** Eh?

**ANNA:** Well, why not stay the night? We've got a spare room. Go on, dear, you make them.

**MAN:** (*His mind elsewhere*) Yes, why not sleep here tonight. (*Realising what he has said*) What am I saying? Perhaps they prefer...

**BURGLAR:** Oh, we'd be quite happy.

**ANNA:** Good, you see. They'd rather stay here. I can't tell you how pleased I am.

**WOMAN:** (*Making a last effort*) But really... we've got nothing with us, and my husband can't sleep without his pyjamas.

**ANNA:** If that's all. (*To her HUSBAND*) You can give him your pyjamas, the ones you haven't worn yet, can't you?

**MAN:** (*In despair*) Yes!

**ANNA:** (*To the WOMAN*) Would you like to come with me and I'll show you the room. You'll be perfectly comfortable, I'm sure. (*To the BURGLAR*) I'll have to steal her from you for a moment.

*The two WOMEN go out. The two MEN, left alone, stare at each other, the one with embarrassment, the other with hatred. The first to speak is the owner of the house.*

**MAN:** Did you really have to go on like that? You're nothing but a half-witted Casanova... but if you think you're going to sleep with my... my... my pyjamas... you can get that idea out of your head right away.

**BURGLAR:** Whose idea was it in the first place? Who had the great idea of making me pretend to be the husband of your lady-friend? And then you go all of a twitter... A man who's never had a day's luck in his life comes here to earn his living... not only do you stop him going off with as much as a broken alarm clock, but you make him take part in your cavortings! No, no, I'm very sorry, but now you phone up my wife... No, a better idea, let's get your wife in here and we'll tell her everything... then I'll call the police. I'd sooner be interrogated by a police sergeant than by my wife.

**MAN:** Listen to that! An officer and a gentleman! I do believe he's offended. We disturbed him at his back-breaking work. You came here to burgle. All right, get on with it. Burgle away. (*He opens the silverware drawer*) There are some gold teaspoons there, help yourself.

**BURGLAR:** (*Takes out his bag, opens it but then thinks better of it*) No thank you, but stealing things in this way is not my style. Another time perhaps.

**MAN:** (*Who is beginning to get jumpy. He makes as though to take the gun from his pocket*) I have ways of making you. With this!

**BURGLAR:** If you really insist. (*He handles a spoon very delicately*) Yes, quite a pleasing little piece, this spoon.  
*He sticks it into his jacket pocket.*

**MAN:** (*Taking out his gun menacingly*) I told you to steal... so do it thoroughly. I don't want you to go around telling people there's nothing much to steal in my house... or complaining that we exploit burglars.

**BURGLAR:** I never said that.

**MAN:** You're just the type to say it. Come on, take these as well.

*He opens a drawer and hands him a bundle of silver spoons.*

**BURGLAR:** I really don't want to abuse your kindness, your hospitality.

**MAN:** No need for scruples. Just get on with the job. I've got a gun, remember.

*At that very moment, the BURGLAR'S WIFE comes in, and seeing the MAN pointing a gun at her husband, lets out a piercing scream and throws herself between the two, clinging to her husband.*

**BURGLAR:** Maria! How did you get here?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** The door was open.

**BURGLAR:** And I had to clamber three flights up a roan pipe to get here.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Forgive me, it was all my fault, I know... I only understood too late... but now you'd better give everything back... even if they give you a few months, it's quite near the festive season and it's not too bad doing a stretch at this time of the year... they even give you Christmas cake and tangerines... please give yourself up.

**MAN:** Not his wife, not her as well! What am I going to tell my wife when she finds out that he has two wives?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Who has two wives?

**BURGLAR:** (*His voice high-pitched from terror*) I've nothing

to do with this, remember. It was him that told me to take her as my wife in case his wife found out that she wasn't my wife... just a wife...

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Give me that gun. I'll teach him a lesson. (*Snatches the gun from the MAN's hands and points it at her husband*) Ah ha! you wicked traitor, liar, villain... fool that I was to believe that you were getting along fine with your wife when you've had another wife all the time... and she's not even his wife... I'll kill you. (*Tries to remove the safety catch*) How does this thing work?

**MAN:** I'll show you. Oh God what am I doing? Never mind (*Snatches the gun*) For God's sake don't make such a din. If the other two wives hear us, I'm done for and no mistake, but so's your husband. Listen to me one minute. I am not going to explain all the whys and wherefores, it would take too long, but if you want to save your husband, stay calm. (*Footsteps are heard, coming nearer*) Damn... here they are... what in God's name can we say now!

**ANNA:** (*Entering*) What a lovely woman you married, Signor Tornati... she's waiting for you... I've brought you down these pyjamas myself because if I were waiting for my husband... (*She stops, surprised at seeing the new guest whom the BURGLAR and her husband are trying to hide from her view*) ...I have... Sorry dear... Who is this lady?

**MAN:** (*As if unaware of her existence*) Who?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** I'm a wife... Maria Tornati.

**ANNA:** What? Another wife?

**MAN:** (*Trying to redeem the situation*) Yes, I was just going to tell you... this lady claims to be...

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Claims to be! I am the wife.

**MAN:** Exactly, I am the wife... she is the wife. (*Staring hard at her, as if trying to hypnotise her*) The first wife of my friend Tornato.

**BURGLAR:** (*Correcting*) Ti.

**MAN:** (*Uncertain*) To - ti.

**BURGLAR:** Ti... ti... ti... Tornati.

**MAN:** The first wife from whom he is now divorced.

*The BURGLAR'S WIFE tries to interrupt, but her husband nudges her with his elbow.*

**ANNA:** Are you foreigners?

**BURGLAR:** Eh... no, we are...

**ANNA:** Then how were you able to get divorced?

**BURGLAR:** (*Asking the MAN for help*) Eh? Able?

**MAN:** (*Turning to BURGLAR'S WIFE*) Able?

**ANNA:** Ah... I understand... your friend works in the cinema.

**MAN:** Yes, yes, yes, he works in the cinema. He's a film producer.

**ANNA:** A producer! And what kind of films does he make?  
(*Noticing the bag he has in his hand*) What's that in your hand? (*Opens the bag*) My best silver! What are you doing?

**BURGLAR:** A spot of burgling.

**MAN:** Noooo... he was telling me about the subject of a new film of his... where there is a scene involving a theft... and he was showing me...

**ANNA:** Oh how interesting. So you're a specialist.

**BURGLAR:** Yes, father and son...

**ANNA:** Your wife too?

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** No... not me. My husband won't let me, he always leaves me at home.

**ANNA:** No, I meant... this business of the divorce... if they are divorced, how come his wife is still his wife... he seems to have two.

**MAN:** Precisely... He got divorced... then remarried... but then the State, over-riding Church Law, didn't recognise the divorce, even though it had earlier recognised, in civil law, the second marriage... so that the poor thing now finds himself at one and the same time a bigamist, an adulterer, a public sinner and a devout Catholic.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** What! (*To her husband*) You never said a word to me.

**BURGLAR:** I didn't know. (*To the houseowner*) What do you mean, a devout bigamist?

*The MAN pushes him away from the women.*

**ANNA:** (*To the BURGLAR'S WIFE*) Just as well for you. There are some things it's better not to know. Even when you do know them, you still don't understand. Poor thing! Who knows where it'll all end. Maybe they'll put him on trial and send him to jail like a petty thief.

**MAN:** Maybe. Just like someone who makes off with the cutlery (*Pointedly*) and all because he has a wife.

**ANNA:** What?

**MAN:** I mean two wives.

**ANNA:** (*To the BURGLAR*) Which reminds me, your other wife, shouldn't we let her know that she's here. (*Pointing to the BURGLAR'S WIFE*) What bad luck for her. I don't see what else we can do. Even if you all agreed, it's really just a one-and-a-half sized bed. You wouldn't be very comfortable.

**MAN:** Never mind... we'll fix something up.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** You'd better... you're not getting off that lightly.

**BURGLAR:** (*Would like to take the bag, but is obliged to leave it so as to push his WIFE towards the door on the left*) Yes, yes... but let's get out now. Damn! I'll have to leave the takings.

**MAN:** (*To BURGLAR'S WIFE*) Don't go yet. Come in here and meet your husband's wife... I mean... this way.

**BURGLAR:** I'm coming too.

**ANNA:** (*Watches the three go out and shakes her head with compassion*) Poor woman! (*Then, seeing the bottles scattered on the table*) What a mess. They've certainly been drinking.

*She pours herself a drink. In the meantime a man appears at the door and calls quietly to her.*

**ANTONIO:** Anna... are you alone?

**ANNA:** Oh my God! Antonio, are you out of your mind? Go away... at once... my husband's at home.

**ANTONIO:** What on earth's up? You were just not making any sense on the phone. What's all this about my wife phoning you?

**ANNA:** Nothing, nothing at all. It's all been a mistake, thank God! I had a phone call from a woman who insulted me because of her husband.

**ANTONIO:** And you thought it was my wife?

**ANNA:** Exactly, I don't know your wife, much less her voice but I got such a fright. Anyway, you can't stay here. Away you go. I'll see you tomorrow.

**ANTONIO:** Ah, you want me out of the way now. No, no, I'm not having that. What do you take me for? A telephone call, some funny misunderstanding, your husband coming home when he's supposed to be at his mother's... no, no, there's more to all this. You know what I think? I think it was all set up to cancel our date so that you could meet someone else here. Who it was I don't know, but certainly not your husband.

**ANNA:** You're mad. How can you think such a thing?

**ANTONIO:** Stop lying. What about these glasses. It's quite clear... you were preparing yourself, spiritually. Where is... what's his name? Speak, it'd be better for you. (*Seizing her by the shoulders*) Who is he?

*At that moment the BURGLAR appears with the pyjamas still under his arm. He's come back for the bag. But at the sight of this scene and of the new guest, he drops the bag in fright, at which ANTONIO turns round.*

**BURGLAR:** Don't let me disturb you. I'm just picking up my bag.

**ANTONIO:** Ah, here he is... with his pyjamas neatly rolled



up... the young gentleman's ready and willing.

**BURGLAR:** (*To ANTONIO who has grabbed his arm*) Just lay off, the lady gave me these herself. You can have them if you like. There's no need to get all worked up over a pair of pyjamas.

**ANTONIO:** I know she gave them to you, don't I just! And now I'll make you both pay. (*With these words, he locks the door and puts the key in his pocket*) No one's leaving until you explain.

**ANNA:** Antonio... I beg you... you're making a terrible mistake... this man's a friend of my husband's and he's here as our guest with his wives...

*From the other rooms, the shouts of the two WOMEN, evidently quarrelling, can be heard.*

**VOICES OF THE TWO WOMEN:** No, no I'm not the village idiot, you know... don't give me all that stuff, you little whore. (*Other voice*) Who are you calling a whore? Just mind your language.

**ANTONIO:** (*Releasing his grip*) So they really are your wives? How many have you got?

*The BURGLAR makes a gesture of his hands as though to say 'quite enough'.*

**ANNA:** Please, please, please, Mr Tornati... don't breathe a word of this to my husband.

**BURGLAR:** No, no, not a word.

**ANTONIO:** That's very good of you. I'm sorry about this misunderstanding.

**BURGLAR:** What's one more misunderstanding among friends? What a night this has been!

**ANNA:** You must fly now. Where have you put the key?

**ANTONIO:** In my coat. (*He searches in his pocket*) Oh damn! It's slipped down into the lining. There's a hole in the pocket. Ooooh, what next? Don't just stand there. Give me a hand.

*He takes off his coat to make the search easier. All three take part in the operation to locate the key, which seems to have a life of its own and keeps eluding them.*

**ANNA:** Got it! No, you knocked it out of my hand.

**BURGLAR:** Stop. Here it is. Oh no, where's it got to now?

**ANTONIO:** Take it easy. You're ripping the lining apart. Hell, it's gone into the sleeves now.

*The voices from the adjoining room draw closer.*

**ANNA:** Here, they're coming. Now what do we do?

**BURGLAR:** Come over here. I was in here for a couple of hours. (*Opens the grandfather clock*) You can make yourself quite comfortable. (*Pushing him in*) Just watch out when it starts striking... You can get a right nasty one... and no smoking!

*The two women come in, followed by the MAN... They are somewhat distraught.*

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** (*To her HUSBAND*) Since these two are not going to tell me anything, let's go home and you can explain everything.

**BURGLAR:** Go home? What's the rush? We're all having such a wonderful time. What lovely people! Look, they've even given me a pair of pyjamas. Anyway, I don't know how on earth we're going to get out. There's no key.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** (*Shaking the door*) It shouldn't be very hard for you to pick the lock. That's your job isn't it.

*The BURGLAR takes an enormous bunch of keys out of his pocket.*

**BURGLAR:** Would one of these do?

**ANNA:** (*To her husband*) What a lot of keys! What's he got all them for?

**MAN:** I told you, he's a film producer, and you show me a film producer that doesn't have at least five or six offices, two or three villas, and a couple of pied-à-terres.

*At that very moment, the grandfather clock begins to strike. First a blow, then a shout of pain and the unfortunate inhabitant of the clock comes out cursing.*

**ANTONIO:** Ouch, that was sore... my poor head... ooooh.

**BURGLAR:** I told you so! I told you you'd get it in the skull, and there's not even any soda water in this house.

**WOMAN:** (*Panic-stricken*) It's my husband. (*Trying to appear nonchalant*) Hello dear.

**ANTONIO:** Julia! What are you doing here?

**ANNA:** What. You know Mr Tornati's wife?

**ANTONIO:** Whose wife? You must be joking, Julia's my wife.

**MAN:** (*Turning to his wife*) No, no, dear, don't worry. There's been a misunderstanding.

**BURGLAR:** Another one! What a lot of misunderstandings this evening.

**WOMAN:** You'll have to explain to me what you were doing in that clock. (*To BURGLAR*) Was he in there when you were there?

**BURGLAR:** (*After a moment's perplexity*) Well it's hard to say. It's very dark inside.

**MAN:** It's all clear now, totally clear, just give me a minute and I'll clear up the misunderstanding. Well then...

**BURGLAR:** Well... O help! There's no misunderstanding. It's like this. Now...

*Before he has time to go on, the others, afraid that he will uncover their individual affairs, interrupt hurriedly.*

**ANNA:** Of course there's been a misunderstanding... obviously there has.

**ANTONIO:** Yes I understood that at once. In fact I'm astonished that our friend here hasn't gathered that yet. It's all one big misunderstanding.

**WOMAN:** It's so clear that even a child could understand it.

**MAN:** So there's really no need of explanations. You can't

explain misunderstandings, otherwise it would hardly be a misunderstanding, would it?

**BURGLAR:** (*To his WIFE*) Come on, let's get out.

**BURGLAR'S WIFE:** Just a minute. Don't pull me like that.

**BURGLAR:** Let's go before they notice.

*As they pass the switch, the BURGLAR puts out the light.*

**ANNA:** Who's put out the light?

**WOMAN:** What's going on?

**ANTONIO:** Stop them! Where are those two off to?

**WOMAN:** He's so crazy he might even go off and give himself up... this minute.

**MAN:** Quick, stop them, don't let them get away.

**WOMAN:** They've gone out through the garden... run.

**MAN:** It's impossible. You two go out that way. You come with me.

*They all go out. Silence. From the window appears the light of a torch. The light comes right into the room and stops on the bag filled with the BURGLAR's takings. At that point the others return.*

**SECOND BURGLAR:** Nice place here, the cutlery already parcelled up. Very thoughtful of them. (*Pause*) Somebody's coming.

**MAN:** He's come back in through the window, the scoundrel. He actually came back to get the silverware.

**ANNA:** Grab him.

**WOMAN:** Quick... hold him... don't let him get away.

**MAN:** Switch on the light.

*When the light comes on, a SECOND BURGLAR, surrounded by his four pursuers, is seen.*

**ANNA:** That's not the great Tornati. It's another one!

**SECOND BURGLAR:** Ah no, no. This is a bit much. You're

starting to lay traps, leaving the window open, the loot all tied up and ready... and then just as I'm about to move, Bang! It's a fair cop Guv! No, that's just not playing the game. I'm going to see my union about this, so I'll bid you all good night.

**EVERYONE:** Noooooo!

**MAN:** No, for goodness' sake, listen, there's been a misunderstanding.

**SECOND BURGLAR:** A what?

**EVERYONE:** Misunderstanding.

**MAN:** Now, with your permission, we'll explain everything.

**EVERYONE:** It's like this...

*The following lines are to be spoken simultaneously, so that there will be a great din without a single word being understood.*

**WOMAN:** Earlier this evening I was with my husband. I got a phone call and came here at once...

**ANNA:** I was at Villa Ponente. The phone rang and at the other end I heard a woman's voice insulting me...

**MAN:** I was at my mother's. We were just sitting down to eat when all of a sudden I remembered I'd left the office keys at home...

**ANTONIO:** I was at the cinema earlier on. The usual stuff, sex and violence, when...

*The SECOND BURGLAR, assaulted by the clamour of voices and meaningless words, moves back until he bumps into the sofa. He sits, then falls full length at the mercy of the four unfaithful liars who talk and talk and talk.*

*Blackout*