

THEY DON'T PAY? WE WON'T PAY!

BY DARIO FO

ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY

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THEY DON'T PAY? WE WON'T PAY!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ANTONIA / Unemployed Housewife
GIOVANNI / Antonia's Husband; Factory Worker
MARGHERITA / Antonia's Younger Friend; Temp-Worker
LUIGI / Margherita's Husband; Factory Worker
HOUSING POLICEMAN
FEDERAL AGENT
UNDERTAKER
GIOVANNI'S FATHER / Elderly Man
ASSISTANT UNDERTAKER
VARIOUS POLICE OFFICERS, AGENTS, LABORERS

Roles of
HOUSING POLICEMAN, FEDERAL AGENT, UNDERTAKER, and GIOVANNI'S FATHER
are played by the same actor.

THEY DON'T PAY? WE WON'T PAY!

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A MODEST, WORKING-CLASS APARTMENT.

STAGE-LEFT: A SIDEBOARD WITH GLASS-DOOR HUTCH ABOVE, AND A DAYBED.

STAGE-RIGHT: A COAT RACK, AN OVERSIZED WARDROBE WITH DOOR.

CENTER-STAGE: TABLE AND THREE CHAIRS.

UPSTAGE: SECOND SIDEBOARD WITH SHELVED HUTCH ABOVE, HOLDING DINNER PLATES; REFRIGERATOR, GAS STOVE, AND TWO GAS TANKS WITH VISIBLE CONNECTIONS FOR WELDING EQUIPMENT.

FOR EXTERIOR SCENES: A REPRODUCTION OF PELLIZZA DA VOLPEDO'S PAINTING, "THE FOURTH ESTATE," COVERS AN ENTIRE STAGE CURTAIN, FORMING BACKDROP FOR VARIOUS SCENES.

OPENING SCENE TAKES PLACE IN FRONT OF PAINTED BACKDROP, ON STREET OUTSIDE APARTMENT.

LIGHTS UP.

ANTONIA ENTERS, FOLLOWED BY MARGHERITA. THEY ARE LOADED DOWN WITH PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS OVERSTUFFED WITH GROCERIES.

ANTONIA

Good thing I ran into you. I don't know how I would've humped all this stuff up here by myself. Let me catch my breath.

MARGHERITA

You gonna tell me where you got the dough to buy all this?

ANTONIA

I told you. I cashed in all my Super-Shopper points.

MARGHERITA

Get outta here.

ANTONIA

I'm serious. Then I opened my box of laundry detergent and found a welfare credit card.

MARGHERITA

Excuse me?

ANTONIA

Check it out. A foodstamp card with a week's worth of groceries on it. Now, when I go to the supermarket, they swipe it and say, "Ooops, sorry, it's empty. You got ripped off."

MARGHERITA

What else did you expect from them?

ANTONIA

You're a riot. Sit down, I'll tell you the real story.

MARGHERITA

(sits on case of mineral water)

Start talking.

ANTONIA

I go out shopping this morning—double-discount day. I get to the market and there's a mob of other shoppers there. All these women—and a few men. All in an uproar because prices went up since yesterday. It's insane. The manager's trying to calm everybody down: "I can't do anything about it. Corporate sets prices. They decided to raise them." And a woman goes: "With whose permission?" "They don't need permission. It's legal. What the market will bear. Freemarket competition." "Competing against who? Us? The ones who always get screwed? The government covers your losses—so you can bankrupt us. Then you raise your prices, thank you very much." "Your money or your life." So I go: "You guys are exploiters." Then I ducked down the aisle—I was so freakin' scared.

MARGHERITA

You did the right thing.

ANTONIA

Then somebody said: “Enough now! We set the prices this time! We’ll pay the same as last month. In fact, we’ll use the prices we paid before we switched to the euro.” Somebody else said: “That’s about half what we’re paying now.” Another woman goes: “And if you give us attitude, we’ll just take off with the groceries without paying a damn thing. You got that? It’s our way—or no way!” You should’ve seen it—that manager’s face turned white as a sheet. “You people are insane. I’m calling the cops.” But his cellphone was dead, so he’s, like: “Excuse me, I have to get into the office. Let me through.” But he couldn’t squeeze through the crowd. All the women surrounding him. He pushes. We push back. Everybody shoving. One woman pretends she got punched in the belly. She falls on the floor like she’s out cold.

MARGHERITA

Good for her!

ANTONIA

What a performance. A work of art—she was so real. Then this big, fat, old lady points her finger like a machine gun at the manager, going: “You bastard! Beating up on a poor old lady—a *pregnant* old lady. If she loses this baby now—watch out! Your ass’ll be in jail! Murderer!” Then everybody’s shouting: “Baby killer! Baby killer! Baby killer!”
(explodes with laughter)

I was on the floor laughing.

MARGHERITA

So how did it all end?

ANTONIA

It ended up with Mr Dickhead Manager freaking out and caving in—and we all paid what we wanted. Of course, a few people went a little overboard. Took out a do-it-yourself credit line.

(both laugh)

The kind where you don’t even have to show ID. “I’m not telling you where I live, Mr Manager. I know you. You’re just the type to turn me in. You’ll just have to take it on faith.

(both pick up bags, begin to leave)

Free trade. It’s all about trust. So—trust me. Seeya.”

(Margherita laughs heartily)

“It’s the cops!” somebody yells.

ANTONIA DROPS HER BAGS TO THE FLOOR.

MARGHERITA

(about to bolt)

You idiot! You gave me a heart attack.

ANTONIA

No, it was just a false alarm. But all us girls bolted or dropped our bags on the floor—or freaked out and started crying. “Cool it!” That’s from the bus drivers and city employees demonstrating outside. They haven’t had a new contract in three years. “Chill out, relax. You’re so scared of the police you’re gonna shit your panties. Christ, you have the right to pay what’s fair. This is like a strike. No—it’s better than a strike. In a strike, our lost pay comes out of our own pockets. Finally, here’s a strike where the boss pays. Even better, he’s busted—flat as us.

(Margherita laughs, applauds)

They don’t pay us what’s fair? Why should we pay their prices? They don’t pay? We won’t pay! And that goes for all the money you stole from us. The lire *and* the euros—in all the years we’ve been shopping here.” And they all took off—loaded down with groceries.

MARGHERITA

And nobody paid?

ANTONIA

Naturally. Then I started thinking, fighting with myself, a terrible struggle—and then I did my grocery shopping all over again. “They don’t pay? We won’t pay!” I was yelling it, too—along with everybody else. “Right on! They don’t pay? We won’t pay!” The lady who fainted had an instant recovery, took off down the aisles like greased lightning. “They don’t pay? We won’t pay!” It was like the sacking of Rome.

MARGHERITA

(laughing)

Beautiful! And I missed it all. Damn! Stuck in that call center all day. “Good morning, this is Margherita. How can I help you today? Good afternoon. This is Margherita. Sign up today—and you’ll receive our new-member discount.”

STREET BACKDROP OPENS TO REVEAL INTERIOR
OF ANTONIA AND GIOVANNI’S APARTMENT.

ANTONIA

By then, they were warning us that the cops were coming for real. So we all hauled ass out of there and took off down the side streets. Fortunately, I ran into you so you could help me with all these bags. I’m all riled up now. Hey, I could get into shopping like this every day. Not just because we didn’t pay for the stuff—but because all of a sudden, there we were, women and men together, doing the right thing—the brave thing.

MARGHERITA

Excuse me—but what’ll you tell your husband now? You can’t hand him that line about paying with your Super-Shopper points.

ANTONIA

Why? You think he won’t swallow it?

MARGHERITA

I wanna say, Not.

ANTONIA

Hmmm. Yeah, might be too much. Trouble is, he's such a law-abiding citizen, he'll hand me my head. Plus the fact that I blew the household budget today. I have nothing left to pay the gas, the electric, or the co-op loan. It's a variable rate—I haven't paid it in months.

MARGHERITA

Well, if you wanna talk bills—I haven't been paying, either. I'm five months behind in the rent. If Luigi catches on—

(helps Antonia put away groceries)

I haven't gotten around to my grocery shopping—like you.

ANTONIA

Oh, we'll fix that. There's enough here for an army of orphans. Take some home with you.

MARGHERITA

No, no, please. Thanks—but no thanks. Besides—like I said—I have no money to pay you for it.

ANTONIA

(sincere)

Well, since you have no money to pay me for it—

(changes tone)

You idiot! Half this stuff I got with the five-finger discount. And I'm gonna make you pay me? What do I look like? It's Take-One-Get-One-Free-Day. So take it. I don't know where to put it all, anyway.

MARGHERITA

Fine—and what do I tell my husband? “By the way, half this stuff is stolen.” He'll kill me. No way.

ANTONIA

(unpacks cans from bag)

My husband won't kill me. Oh, no. Because that's against the law. He'll just scold me to death. He'll hang out the window and yell: “My wife is a thief.”

ANTONIA CROSSES DOWNSTAGE, LEANS OUT WINDOW.

ANTONIA (CONT'D)

Drag the honor of his name and reputation through the mud? “Better to drop dead of starvation than suffer the disgrace of breaking the law. I’ve always paid for everything—down to the last cent. Poor but honest.” Then he locks himself in the closet.

MARGHERITA

(nonplussed)

In the closet?

ANTONIA

I swear. Every time we fight—for the last twenty years—he locks himself in the closet. Sweats like a pig, but he won’t come out. He’s got it all organized. His little lamp. His little stool. He plants himself in there and studies his union bylaws. He’s got them memorized. Pops his head out just to keep up the insults. Enough chit-chat. I’m getting hungry. I’ll whip up a nice soup.

MARGHERITA

Well, in that case, I guess I could—

ANTONIA

We’ll make it a lunch. I’m starving. I volunteered at daycare today. Two hours of cleaning—then I helped feed the babies. You believe I was sneaking tastes of the strained peas? I’d spoon it into them: “Eat up, it’s yummy. I’m having some, too. Mmmmm.” I practically swallowed the spoon. Shame on me. Poor little baby.

(examines can she’s holding)

What did I grab here?

(reading)

Fancy Feast Beef Dinner for kitty or puppy. Oooo, check it out.

ANTONIA HANDS CAN TO MARGHERITA.

MARGHERITA

(reading can)

Homogenized. Premium flavors for picky pets. Why’d you get this?

ANTONIA

I didn’t choose it. In all the confusion, I just grabbed whatever I could.

(taking a box)

Check this out.

ANTONIA HANDS BOX TO MARGHERITA.

MARGHERITA

(reading box)

Songbird seed?

(laughs)

Cheep-cheep-cheep.

ANTONIA

(taking another box)

Eek! Good thing I didn't pay for any of this stuff. I might be eating—

(reads box)

Frozen rabbit head.

MARGHERITA

Rabbit head? What are you saying? They freeze rabbit heads?

ANTONIA

That's what it says here: "Fortify your chicken feed. Five heads—half a euro."

MARGHERITA

At least it's cheap.

ANTONIA

(disappointed)

And I can't even bring it back. They see me, they'll arrest me. Whatever.

MARGHERITA

(laughing)

Unreal. And you want me to take home this pig slop?

ANTONIA

Oh, no. Rabbit heads are my favorite. I'll eat them. You can take the normal stuff: Olive oil, pasta. Come on, move it. Your husband's working the night shift—you'll have plenty of time to hide it.

ANTONIA PUTS PACKAGES IN THE FRIDGE.

MARGHERITA

"Hide it" is right—in case the cops decide to do a house-to-house search.

ANTONIA

Stop talking trash. The cops! The whole neighborhood was at that supermarket today. Look out there.

(leaning out window)

We're at least ten-thousand families here. What do you think? The police'll search us one by one?

(looks down, alarmed)

Holy crap! My husband! Right there! He's on his way up. I didn't hide my groceries yet. Take this stuff with you.

MARGHERITA

(terrified)

Where do I put it?

ANTONIA

Under your coat.

(Margherita quickly stuffs packages under her coat)

Help me get mine under the bed.

(frantically grabs packages off table and sideboard, stuffs them under daybed)

If Giovanni gets wind of this, he'll call in the state police. "Officer! Arrest my wife! She's an assassin—and a thief!" He'll bring back the death penalty. Go! Run! Stop him! Give him some story!

MARGHERITA

What kind of story?

ANTONIA

Anything. Tell him the TV news said there'll be a total blackout in a couple of hours. The whole city's going dark.

MARGHERITA

Really? They said that? When?

ANTONIA

They didn't say that. I just made it up to give you a story.

MARGHERITA

Ahhh.

ANTONIA

God, you're hopeless.

MARGHERITA HEADS FOR DOOR, RUNS INTO GIOVANNI ENTERING.

MARGHERITA

Hi, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI

Hey, Margherita. How's it going?

MARGHERITA

(hastily, embarrassed)

Fine, thanks. Excuse me. I gotta get home right away—on account of the blackout. Bye, Antonia. Seeya.

MARGHERITA EXITS.

GIOVANNI STARES AFTER MARGHERITA AND HER
HUGE “BELLY,” PERPLEXED.

ANTONIA

Giovanni. You’re standing there like a deer in the headlights. And you’re just getting back now? Where’ve you been all this time?

GIOVANNI

What’s the deal with Margherita?

ANTONIA

What deal?

GIOVANNI

Her belly—she’s huge in front.

ANTONIA

So. That’s the first time you ever saw a married woman with a baby bump?

GIOVANNI

You’re telling me she’s pregnant?

ANTONIA

(setting table with plates, silverware, glasses)

That’s the least that can happen when you get it on.

GIOVANNI

How far gone is she? I saw her last Sunday. She didn’t look at all—

ANTONIA

Since when are you the expert on women? Last Sunday’s a week ago. You don’t wanna know what can happen in a week.

GIOVANNI

Whoa—I may be slow on the uptake, but I’m not totally brain-dead. Plus—her husband Luigi tells me everything about him and the wife. He never said a thing about having a baby.

ANTONIA

(stumped)

Wellll—there are some things—maybe—people don’t—feel right—to blab about.

GIOVANNI

Don't feel right? Are you high? He doesn't feel right saying his wife is pregnant? What, he should be ashamed? "Oh my God, I knocked up my wife."

ANTONIA

(gropes for words)

Maybeeee—he didn't tell you—because—he doesn't know yet.

(Giovanni stares blankly; she presses on)

And if he doesn't know it—how could he tell it to you?

GIOVANNI

How could he not know it?

ANTONIA

Ummmm—must be—she didn't wanna tell him.

GIOVANNI

And why wouldn't she want to tell him?

ANTONIA

Uhhhhh—because—she happens to be—a very private person. And because Luigi's always telling Margherita they should wait, it's not a good time, what with the lousy economy. First they need to get stabilized. Plus—if she gets pregnant—she'll get fired from her job. In fact, he's had her on the pill all along.

GIOVANNI

So—if he's had her on the pill, how'd she wind up pregnant?

ANTONIA

Wellll—obviously it didn't work. Stuff happens.

GIOVANNI

Right, stuff happens. So why'd she have to hide it from her husband? It's not her fault.

ANTONIA

Ohhhhhh—maybe the pill didn't work because—she didn't take the pill. And if she didn't take the pill—uhhh—then maybeeee—the pill didn't work.

ANTONIA GRABS BROOM, SWEEPS AROUND.

GIOVANNI

What the hell are you saying?

ANTONIA

(coughs nervously)

Margherita's a strict Catholic. And since the Pope made taking the pill a mortal sin—

GIOVANNI

Have you lost your marbles? You sound like a lunatic. The pill won't work—because she won't take the pill? The Pope? She's walking around with a nine-month belly—and her husband doesn't even notice?

ANTONIA

(sinking deeper)

Maybe Luigi doesn't notice—because Margherita—binds herself.

GIOVANNI

Binds herself?

ANTONIA

Yeah—she wraps her belly super-super-tight, so nobody'll notice. And when I saw her today, I'm thinking: "Margherita, you're still bound up?" I told her off so bad, she practically busted her bindings right there in the street. "Are you out of your mind? You wanna lose the baby? You'll suffocate it. Unwrap yourself right now—and screw 'em if they fire you. The baby's more important." Should I have said that?

GIOVANNI

Of course. Absolutely.

ANTONIA

So—I did the right thing?

GIOVANNI

Yes, yes, good for you.

ANTONIA

Anyway—Margherita gets home and unwraps herself. Plop—superbump. You should've seen it, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI

I did.

ANTONIA

So I told her: "If your husband gives you any grief, tell him to come over to my house. My Giovanni'll read him the riot act and set him straight." Did I say that right?

GIOVANNI

Sure you did.

ANTONIA

So I did good, then?

GIOVANNI

(distracted)

Yeah, yeah, sure.

ANTONIA

Nice. “Yeah, yeah, sure.” What kind of an answer is that? Are you mad at me? Spit it out. What’d I do?

GIOVANNI

I’m not mad at you. I’m mad at what happened at the factory today.

ANTONIA

Why, what happened?

GIOVANNI

I’m fed up with the tension all over the place—ever since the company decided to shut down four product lines, and outsource them to Romania. Now we have a choice: Get fired or go to Romania—like commuters. We go there, and they come here. They come here, and we go there. They call it “lateral worker mobility.” And, they tell us we take too many sick days. Truth is, four workers were dead three weeks—the bosses called it absenteeism and fired them. Right—the lazy louts skip work, with the lame excuse that they’re dead. In the middle of all this downsizing, you’d think we’d just chill out—but noooo. Five workers—just five—start a big ruckus in the cafeteria over the food. “This is disgusting! Pig swill! Dumpster dregs!”

ANTONIA

What—the cafeteria food is supersized celebrity-chef?

GIOVANNI

No way! It’s total crap. But that’s no reason to gang up and start a riot.

ANTONIA

Gang up, huh? You said there were only five.

GIOVANNI

At first—but then everybody jumped in. They ate, then left without paying.

ANTONIA

Them, too?

GIOVANNI

What do you mean, “Them, too?”

ANTONIA

I mean, not just the five. All the other guys, too.

GIOVANNI

Yeah, even the foremen. At least they should've set an example—not team up with the radicals.

ANTONIA

(feigning indignation)

Unbelievable.

GIOVANNI

There's more. On my way back from the metro, I pass the supermarket down the street, and I see this mob of women. Must've been three-hundred—screaming. They're coming out, loaded with groceries, shouting, "We paid *our own prices* for this stuff." Get the picture?

ANTONIA

(more indignant)

Incredible.

GIOVANNI

Not only that—they raided the shelves, and most of them ran off without paying.

ANTONIA

Them, too?

GIOVANNI

Them who?

ANTONIA

Well—those hotheads at the factory. They didn't pay for their lunch.

GIOVANNI

Oh yeah, them, too. They even manhandled the manager.

ANTONIA

The manager? At the supermarket or the factory?

GIOVANNI

Both of them.

ANTONIA

(incredulous)

Really? They brought them to their knees? I am truly shocked.

GIOVANNI

Me, too. Those rotten, lowlife trash. That's why people say all workers are nothing but thieves and jailbirds.

ANTONIA

What do the workers have to do with it? The wives took the stuff and paid what they wanted, right?

GIOVANNI

But back home their husbands—the working men—looked the other way. They're probably even saying, "Way to go! Pulled a fast one! Nice job!" Instead of bouncing every one of those stolen cans off their heads.

(Antonia nervously touches her head)

If my wife ever tried that, I'd make her eat the tin cans—and the can opener. If you ever even think of pulling a stunt like that, if I ever hear you were shoplifting or even swapping price tags on a can of sardines, I'll, I'll—

ANTONIA

(hand to throat, as if swallowing tin can)

Make me eat the can—and the can opener. Got it.

GIOVANNI

No, worse. I'll move out. Just pack up and take off, and that's the last you'll see of me. No, first I'll kill you, then file for divorce.

ANTONIA

(furious)

Listen, if you're gonna take that tone, you might as well get out now. Never mind the divorce. How could you even suggest that I'd, I'd—before I'd even bring a thing into this house that wasn't fully paid for, I'd, I'd—let you starve to death!

GIOVANNI

Well, I certainly hope so.

(changes tone)

Speaking of starving—what's for dinner. With all that madness in the cafeteria today, I actually missed lunch.

(sits at table)

What are we having?

ANTONIA

(places can of pet food on table)

This.

GIOVANNI

What's this?

ANTONIA

Can't you read? It's puppy and kitty chow.

GIOVANNI
Whaaaaaaaat?

ANTONIA
It's top quality.

GIOVANNI
Top quality for dogs.

ANTONIA
That's all they had left. Anyway, it's cheap, nutritious, high-protein—it's even estrogen-free, so it won't fatten you up like a suckling pig.

GIOVANNI
Now, you're screwing with me.

ANTONIA
Screwing with you? When was the last time you went shopping? They jacked up all the prices, blaming it on the high cost of a barrel of crude. Everything's double: olive oil, pasta, rice, sugar—if you can even find any. They're hoarding everything so they can rig the prices.

GIOVANNI
Oooo, price-fixing. Whatever. I'm still not a dog. You can eat this crap.

ANTONIA
Fine—I'll eat it.

ANTONIA BEGINS BARKING.

GIOVANNI
I'll just have a glass of milk and call it a day.

ANTONIA
Sorry, we're out of milk. It turned, so I threw it out. And they ran out of fresh.

GIOVANNI
How'd they run out?

ANTONIA
Don't you remember? Back when the government milk program was privatized? What did they call that dairy? Oh yeah—Full Titty Farms.

GIOVANNI
So?

ANTONIA

Yesterday the stock went belly-up—like Parmalat. And the creditors repossessed the milk—cows and all.

GIOVANNI

Get outta here. The cows, too?

ANTONIA

Yeah, Swiss Guernseys. It was all over the news.

GIOVANNI

Impossible.

ANTONIA

Very possible. I saw them being herded off the trucks myself.

GIOVANNI

What trucks?

ANTONIA

The trucks the farmers used to corral the cows in front of the bank that created the bankruptcy. They were milking them and passing out free buckets of milk to the crowds.

(enjoying the moment)

Then, one of the cows wandered into the bank and dropped a load in the vault—which somebody left wide-open. Elsie made a deposit—shit a golden brick.

(turns serious)

What was I supposed to do? Accept a bucket of confiscated milk—still warm from the cow's tit? You know that's against the law.

GIOVANNI

I know, I know.

ANTONIA

And if I set foot in this house with that nice, fresh milk—would you have allowed it?

GIOVANNI

Of course not.

ANTONIA

Would you have drunk it?

GIOVANNI

Absolutely not.

ANTONIA

Fine—don't drink it. Sit on your high horse. Meanwhile, the ones protesting the loudest over milk—you know, your union buddies on the left, the ultra left, the center left, the conservative communists, the radical socialists. What do you call yourselves these days? It keeps changing. Oh, right—

(gesture of disgust)

The Dems.

GIOVANNI

Who keeps changing? And do me a favor—watch your tone when you talk about my party.

(imitates her tone)

“The Dems.” If you're gonna talk about it, call it the Democratic Party.

(gentle, soft tone)

The Democratic Party.

ANTONIA

Still?

GIOVANNI

What do you mean, “Still?”

ANTONIA

Your party boss resigned in disgrace after that big scandal—and you think your party's still breathing? Relax, it's in a coma—a vegetable. Somebody better pull the plug.

GIOVANNI

For God's sake, don't joke about my party like that.

ANTONIA

You're right. I shouldn't speak ill of the dead.

GIOVANNI

Enough!

ANTONIA

Come on, at least we still have running water. I'll make you a nice bowl of soup.

GIOVANNI

With what?

ANTONIA

(picks up birdseed package)

Select songbird seed.

GIOVANNI

Bird seed? Stop fooling around.

ANTONIA

It's good—helps fight diabetes.

GIOVANNI

I am not diabetic.

ANTONIA

Well, that's not my fault. Besides, it's half the price of rice.

GIOVANNI

Okay, you decide how we'll eat—like dogs or like birds.

ANTONIA

Oooo, no whining now. Michela across the hall makes it every day for her husband, she says—and he swears it's delicious.

GIOVANNI

Last time I saw Michela's husband, he was sprouting feathers. He was waiting for the bus today, scratching around like this:

(imitates chicken walk)

When the bus was late, he goes: "Cock-a-doodle-dooooo."

(imitates rooster strut)

"Cock-a-doodle-dooooo.

(flaps imaginary rooster wings)

I'm flying to work today."

ANTONIA

Stop kidding around. Birdseed is good for you. The secret's in the broth. Check it out.

(waves package of rabbit heads under his nose)

I got frozen rabbit heads, too.

GIOVANNI

Rabbit heads!

ANTONIA

Naturally. Don't you know anything? You gotta have rabbit heads to make birdseed soup. I saw it on that food-channel show. What's it called? Oh yeah: "Real Rotten Recipes."

GIOVANNI

(throwing on coat, heading for door)

Oh yeah, I get it. Seeya.

ANTONIA

Where you going?

GIOVANNI

Where do you think? Out to eat.

ANTONIA

You got cash?

GIOVANNI

(turning on his heels)

Right—give me a few euros.

ANTONIA

From where?

GIOVANNI

What—don't tell me you're already broke.

ANTONIA

No, but don't forget—tomorrow the rent, gas, and electric are all due. Or would you rather they shut off everything?

GIOVANNI

Please. “The working class: Always hungry—but always enlightened.”

(Antonia puts on her coat)

Where are you going?

ANTONIA

To Margherita's. She bought a ton of groceries today. I'll borrow something. Be right back.

GIOVANNI

Don't bring back any more rabbit heads.

ANTONIA

Don't worry—I'll just bring you a rabbit's foot.

ANTONIA EXITS.

GIOVANNI

Very funny. I'm so hungry I'd even eat—

(picks up jar, reads label)

“A tasty treat for your furry friends. Delectable. Homogenized.” I actually do want to smell it. How do you get it open? Oh look, it's a pop-top. Clever—so dogs and cats can't open it.

(opens jar, sniffs it)

Hmmnn—smells pretty good. It's like marinated marmalade—in a reduction of kidney carpaccio, sautéed in cod-liver oil.

(holds jar to his ear, laughing)

I can hear the sea.

(disgusted laugh)

Dogs and cats gotta be brain-dead to eat this crap.

(changes tone)

Forget it—I gotta taste this stuff. But with a little squeeze of lemon to kill the cholera.

OFFSTAGE POLICE SIRENS, PEOPLE
SHOUTING, AND BARKED MILITARY
COMMANDS.

GIOVANNI (CONT'D)

What's all that racket?

(stands at imaginary window, shouting to someone across the way)

Aldo! Hey, Aldo! What's going on?... Yeah, I see it's the police. What do they want?... Yikes, look at all those cop vans. What is it, a sweep? Because of the supermarket?... Which one? This one, too? Right down the street? This happened today? But who?... Everybody? What, the whole neighborhood? Nooooo, no way. A thousand women! No, my wife couldn't be one of them. She hates the idea of shoplifting so much, she's feeding me frozen rabbit heads... No, just the head—the rest you toss. They're delicious. Split down the middle, a squeeze of lemon.

(mimes swallowing food)

Good as oysters—from those radioactive reefs. You'll glow in the dark.

(laughs)

Forget about my wife—she hasn't even left the house today. She had to help her friend loosen her belly. No, not “lose”—like cutting it out with an axe. Loosen—like unwrapping the bandages. Because her husband, Luigi, doesn't want her pregnant. In fact, he put her on the pill. But she believes in the Pope—so the pill didn't work. A week later, she blew up. What a sight... What part don't you understand?

MORE SHOUTS AND COMMANDS FROM STREET.

GIOVANNI (CONT'D)

(looks down into street)

Whoa—it's a regular roundup. They really planning to go house to house? I'd like to see them come up here. This is a total, absolute provocation. To bad-mouth us, no doubt. "The workers are slackers, thieves, morons."

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Anybody home?

GIOVANNI

Who's there?

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Open up! Police!

GIOVANNI

(opening door)

Police? What do you want with me?

A HOUSING POLICEMAN ENTERS.

POLICEMAN

House search. We have a warrant. We're searching every building.

GIOVANNI

Why? What are you looking for?

POLICEMAN

Come on, don't play dumb. Everybody knows there was a riot at the supermarket today. Hoards of women—men, too—made off with tons of groceries without paying full price. And plenty of them didn't pay at all. We're looking for the stolen goods, or if you prefer—the deeply discounted merchandise.

GIOVANNI

And you come here looking for it? What are you saying, I'm some idiot, punk thief?

POLICEMAN

Take it any way you want. I don't care. I have my orders to follow.

GIOVANNI

Go ahead, follow them. But I'm warning you, this is a provocation. Worse, we're taking it up the butt. First you starve us, then you screw us. Check out what I have to eat here:

(shows can)

Pasteurized pet food.

POLICEMAN

Excuse me?

GIOVANNI

Here, here—take a whiff of this crap. No decent human being could stand still for this. Even a rabbit head costs an arm and a leg.

POLICEMAN

Really? You eat this stuff?

GIOVANNI

It's not bad. Help yourself. *Mi casa es su casa*. A squirt of lemon, it goes down like creamed cat shit. Taste it. It'll cure your sciatica.

POLICEMAN

No thanks.

(puts can on table)

I never throw up between meals.

GIOVANNI

I get it. Perhaps you'd prefer something hot. I can whip you up a lovely birdseed soup.

POLICEMAN

Birdseed? Now you're messing with me.

GIOVANNI

Not on your life.

(holds up box)

Here it is. Only fifty cents a kilo. Eat it and start chirping.

(chirps like canary)

Now, walk this way.

(struts like rooster)

You can be a free-ranger. They'll call you Officer Gamecock.

POLICEMAN SITS, REMOVES HAT.

POLICEMAN

You got it pretty bad, huh? What we get paid is a joke, too. At least I get to eat at the station house, but my poor wife—I tell you, I feel for her. I shouldn't say this, but I feel for the women in this neighborhood who took their five-finger discount today. They got the right idea. Guys on their pensions get their lunch at the soup kitchen—thousands of them. Or they go dumpster-diving behind the supermarkets. Personally, my heart goes out to these women. Take it and run. It's the only defense against the corporate bandits.

GIOVANNI

(stares in disbelief)

What the—are you serious?

POLICEMAN

Sure am. People can't go on like this. You won't believe it, but police work—this house-to-house search crap—makes me sick. Who's it for? These fat-cat pigs who starve, cheat, and rob us—they're the real thieves.

GIOVANNI

(stunned)

Excuse me, officer. You are an officer of the law, right?

POLICEMAN

Right—officially speaking.

GIOVANNI

You some radical antiglobalist rogue cop? What kind of trash are you talking? You jumped left of the Marxists.

POLICEMAN

It's not a very big jump.

GIOVANNI

Get outta here. A cop? You talk like a radical.

POLICEMAN

I'm not a radical—I'm rational. But I get pissed off, too. Stop thinking every cop on the force is just another moron who jumps when they whistle. "Sic 'em! Attack! Bark! Bite!" Like a guard dog. And if you dare disagree, talk back, express an opinion? It's "Shut up! Down, boy!"

GIOVANNI

But if that's how you feel, why'd you decide to go into police work?

POLICEMAN

Who decided? Did you just decide you're gonna eat crap like dog food, rabbit heads, and birdseed?

GIOVANNI

That was my nutritionist. I gotta get rid of him.

(turns serious)

I had no choice.

POLICEMAN

Precisely. I had no choice, either. Take it or starve. *Entre nous*, I'm a college graduate, my friend.

GIOVANNI

College grad? Is that why you say *entre nous*?

POLICEMAN 2

(*offstage*)

Hey, chief! We're done here! Should we move on?!

POLICEMAN CROSSES STAGE, TO DOOR.

POLICEMAN

(*shouts into hallway*)

Of course! Don't stand there breaking my balls! Move on to the next stairwell! I'll catch up with you later!

GIOVANNI CROSSES TO POLICEMAN, CREATES
COMMOTION BY SHOUTING INCOHERENTLY.

GIOVANNI

What are you... Gimme a break!... I got my wife here!... What's with the stairs?... My stuff!... In my home!

POLICEMAN

(*to Giovanni, annoyed*)

Hey, calm down!

GIOVANNI

I was only trying to help you out.

POLICEMAN

I don't need your help. Like I said, *entre nous*, I'm a college grad. My father scrimped and sacrificed for years and years, so I could go to school—

GIOVANNI

(*to audience*)

And learned to say *entre nous*.

POLICEMAN

And what did I learn in the end? Nothing. Either leave the country, get a job sweeping streets, or become a cop. I was obligated to everybody, my friend. "Join the force and learn about the world." I learned about the world alright—a beautiful world full of bastards, con artists, and victims.

GIOVANNI

(stunned)

Not everybody thinks like you. Some guys do just fine on the force.

POLICEMAN

You mean the ones brainwashed by all the fancy talk about honor and sacrifice? So when a fellow officer gets his brains bashed in like a dog by some paranoid criminal, they're happy with a eulogy from the chief and a medal for his widow?

GIOVANNI

This is surreal. Are you actually a police officer? If you're playing with me, tell me now—or you'll have me defending the cops. Which—if they found that out at the shop—they'd never stop razzing me. You can't go shopping and pay whatever you want. You gotta obey the law.

POLICEMAN

Right—the law that rubber-stamped the theft of millions when they changed the currency from lire to euros?

GIOVANNI

But to fight injustice, you gotta work with democracy—through government, the political parties, reforming the laws.

POLICEMAN

Reforms? Beyond a few wishy-washy fixes, the reforms they hatched only propped up the party hacks—and cut the jail time for armies of criminals, big shots, and scam artists. Or raised the salaries of judges and senators—even the ones convicted of corruption and theft.

GIOVANNI

Don't forget the plum government jobs they gave to their wives, children—and first, second, and third cousins.

POLICEMAN

First they rob us, then—supposedly to punish themselves—they make new laws to get even richer.

(gives same gesture of disgust as Antonia gave earlier)

The left's as bad as the right.

GIOVANNI

Don't be bashing the Democrats now. They're the new whipping boys for everybody's pet peeve. Stressed out? Have a rash? Blame the Democrats. Soon they'll be begging the monster corporations to destroy the party.

POLICEMAN

Dream on. You're not climbing high enough. The banks are in bed with the financial giants. So long—seeya on the Titanic.

GIOVANNI

(resentful)

Right—I hate this sleazy game, too.

POLICEMAN

People need to take charge of their own lives—not leave it all to the politicians.

(puts on hat, heads for door)

Excuse me, I have to go do my job now.

GIOVANNI

(snide snicker)

Figures—first you go all radical antiglobal on me, then you put on your cop hat and go back to work.

POLICEMAN

Sorry—all I can do is spin words. I just bitch and run. Guess I don't have the guts or the moral grit to do anything but talk.

GIOVANNI

Great—you're all talk. The poor college grad forced into police work because he had no other options. His father tightening his belt till he's nothing but skin and bones. Should I break down and cry? "How could I even think of leaving the country? I'm a college graduate." You damn well should've left the country, worked as a street-sweeper—a waste-management consultant, or whatever they're called. Don't you get it? You just wanna save face. People like you always have an excuse ready—so you'll never have to take a chance, no political risks. Bet I see you in front of my factory tomorrow—while I'm walking the picket line. You'll be, like: "Listen—you just don't get it. I'm a liberal—way more liberal than you. Try to understand—*entre nous*." Then—whammo!

(mimes beating someone with billy club)

College boy!

(changes tone)

You're part of the privileged class.

POLICEMAN

(vehemently)

Privileged class?! We get paid peanuts—working overtime with no pay. If we strike, they throw us in jail—or we wind up with a bullet in our head without ever knowing what hit us—or why. Privileged class!

(changes tone)

If you really wanna go down this road, one day you just might wake up and realize that some cops defy their own chiefs—and refuse to crack heads. In fact, some even cross over to the other side.

GIOVANNI

(sarcastic)

Now I'd love to see that—like the cops at the G-8 Summit in Genoa, who beat up the antiglobal activists. They even killed one of them—then went free.

POLICEMAN

You're right about that.

GIOVANNI

Every sentence was suspended.

POLICEMAN

You know the world is changing. And if it changes—

(starts to leave)

Good luck—and *buon appetito*.

GIOVANNI

(blocks Policeman)

The way things are going, I doubt the changes'll do us any good. Now you're just gonna take off—without so much as a little search? You're hurting my feelings. At least take a look around—out of common courtesy. Come on—in the closet, under the bed.

GIOVANNI LIFTS UP DAYBED COVER SO THAT
ONLY AUDIENCE CAN SEE HIDDEN GROCERIES.

POLICEMAN

Why—to find another sack of pig slop, or a can of fish food for a trout farm? Thanks, but no thanks. So long—enjoy your dinner.

POLICEMAN EXITS.

GIOVANNI

Have a nice day. You can't meet enough weirdoes in this world. A commie-rogue cop—son of the working class, no less. I get it now—the guy's a plant. Wiseguy comes up here to get me to talk. "Ambush the supermarkets! Get the cops to revolt!" Dumb-ass me—I almost fell for it. If I went along with him, he'd be, like: "Stop! Terrorist! You're under arrest!"

(laughs, shouts toward door)

Find a sucker to take your bait?

(absentmindedly grabs box of birdseed)

Swallow it hook, line, and sinker?

(notices contents of box)

Not this sucker. I'll be pecking on birdseed.

ANTONIA ENTERS, OUT OF BREATH.

ANTONIA

Did they get here yet?

GIOVANNI

Who?

ANTONIA

Don't you know what's happening? They're searching house to house.

GIOVANNI

Sure I know.

ANTONIA

The Mambettis and Fossanis got arrested. Soon as they found out they had stolen goods from the supermarket—and that they were unemployed—they branded them illegals and deported them.

GIOVANNI

Good—that'll teach them to run their scams.

ANTONIA

But they even took back stuff people paid for.

GIOVANNI

That's what always happens when these dead-brains try to play the system. Innocent people always get trapped in the middle. Like when they came here—

ANTONIA

(terrified)

They came here?

GIOVANNI

Naturally.

ANTONIA

Did they find anything?

GIOVANNI

Why—what could they find?

ANTONIA

(catching herself)

Nothing. I'm just saying—you never know. You think you have nothing to hide, then—you know.

GIOVANNI

No, I don't know.

ANTONIA

They plant stuff—the police—to trap you. Wouldn't be the first time. Like with Rosie's boy: They searched their place, and when nobody was looking—bingo, they slipped a pistol under the pillow, and a stack of terrorist flyers under the bed.

GIOVANNI

What—they're gonna come here and sneak boxes of spaghetti and sugar under our bed?

ANTONIA

No, not under the bed. I'm just saying.

GIOVANNI

You're right—wanna bet that son-of-a-bitch planted something while he was yakking away?

(strides toward daybed)

Help me look around.

ANTONIA

(violently grabs him from behind)

No!

GIOVANNI

Are you nuts? You just gave me whiplash.

ANTONIA

Don't you dare touch that bedspread. I just washed it. I'll look under the bed. You go let Margherita in.

GIOVANNI

Margherita? Where is she?

ANTONIA

Out in the hall.

GIOVANNI

(going to door)

You're crazy—leaving a poor, pregnant woman in the hall.

ANTONIA

(pretends to search under daybed)

There's nothing here.

GIOVANNI

(sees Margherita in hall)

Holy Christ, Margherita. What are you doing out there? Get in here.

MARGHERITA ENTERS, SOBBING.

GIOVANNI (CONT'D)

What's wrong? Why you crying?

ANTONIA

Come here, Margherita.

(fetches Margherita, sits her on daybed; then, to Giovanni)

Poor thing was home all alone. When all those cops barged in, she freaked out. You believe a sergeant tried to feel up her belly?

GIOVANNI

That bastard! Why?!

ANTONIA

Because he thought she had pasta and all the trimmings stuffed up in there—instead of a baby.

GIOVANNI

Goddamn pervert.

ANTONIA

Exactly—so I told her she could stay with us. Is that okay?

GIOVANNI

Of course, it's okay.

(crosses to Margherita, tries to help her out of her coat)

You stay right here and relax, Margherita. Take off your coat.

MARGHERITA

(terrified)

No!

GIOVANNI

Make yourself comfortable.

MARGHERITA

(more terrified)

No!

ANTONIA
(jumps in front of Giovanni)

No!

GIOVANNI
(outraged)

Great, give me another dose of whiplash—I'll lock myself in the closet with Tremonti's top-selling book. That financial wizard nailed it. He predicted Italy's banks would survive the global crisis with flying colors. "Our economy's strong!" Obama should've picked Tremonti to save America's economy.

ANTONIA
If Margherita wants to wear her coat, let her wear it. She must be cold.

GIOVANNI
But it's hot in here.

ANTONIA
Hot for you—but a pregnant woman is always cold. She has to crank out enough energy for two. She might even have a fever.

GIOVANNI
A fever? Is she sick?

ANTONIA
She's in labor—duhh.

GIOVANNI
So soon?

ANTONIA
Not soon enough. What do you know? A half-hour ago you didn't even know she was pregnant. Now you're shocked she's in labor.

GIOVANNI
It just seems like she's—you know, a little premature.

ANTONIA
Please. How would you know? You can feel her pain better than her?

GIOVANNI
But if she's in labor, we should call a doctor—even an ambulance.

ANTONIA GOES TO CLOSET, REMOVES PILLOWS,
ARRANGES THEM ON DAYBED TO MAKE
MARGHERITA COMFORTABLE.

ANTONIA

Wonderful—you chase after an ambulance. Then we'll do a nice, guided tour of all the hospitals in the city—top to bottom. Think we'll find a bed? Don't make me laugh. Nice way to bring a kid into this world. You know the madness with these hospitals? With our lousy national healthcare, you gotta reserve a bed a month in advance.

GIOVANNI

Then why didn't she reserve one?

ANTONIA

(exasperated)

Oooo, why this, why that? We have to do everything? Run here, run there? Make babies? Make reservations? Why couldn't her husband do it?

GIOVANNI

How was her husband supposed to know? "Gotta make reservations. I'll go down today, reserve a bed or two—or three. Hey, you never know. For when? Hmmn, never thought about that."

ANTONIA

Excuses, excuses. "He didn't know. Never thought about it." How convenient. You hand us your paycheck and go: "You take it from here." You're all alike. You get us in the sack for your sacred needs. You knock us up and go: "That's your problem. Should'a took the pill." What do you care about some poor, devout Catholic girl who dreams of the Pope every night, saying:

(with German accent; followed by German gibberish)

"Birth control is a sin. Go forth and multiply. &%\$#&^%\$#^*#%@!"

GIOVANNI

Enough!

ANTONIA

She multiplied—now she's screwed.

GIOVANNI

Get off the Pope and his midnight Holy Communion house calls in German. How far along is Margherita?

ANTONIA

What do you care?

GIOVANNI

I'm just saying—since they haven't even been married five months.

ANTONIA

So—they could've slept together before they got married. Or are you some kind of goddamn moralist? You're worse than the Pope.

GIOVANNI

They could've—but they didn't. Luigi told me: The first time they slept together was *after* they got married.

MARGHERITA

My Luigi told you that?

GIOVANNI

(embarrassed)

We were watching TV, waiting for the World Cup to start, shooting the breeze.

ANTONIA

Insane. You hear that, Margherita? They were waiting for the World Cup to start.

GIOVANNI

Italy was up against France.

ANTONIA

Get outta here. That's sacrilege—grounds for an immediate annulment.

GIOVANNI

You're way over the top. We won on a penalty kick.

ANTONIA

Over the top? Luigi broadcasts the intimate details of his private life to the first stranger he meets.

GIOVANNI

(wounded)

I'm not a stranger. I'm his buddy, his best friend. He tells me everything. He respects me, asks my advice—because I'm older, more experienced.

ANTONIA

(shoots an ironic glance)

Oooo, more experienced. Stop it—you're such a dick.

GIOVANNI, ABOUT TO RESPOND, IS INTERRUPTED
BY KNOCK ON DOOR.

GIOVANNI

Who is it?

FEDERAL AGENT SPEAKS OFFSTAGE.

AGENT

(offstage)

Police! Open up!

GIOVANNI

Not again.

MARGHERITA

Oh, my God.

GIOVANNI OPENS DOOR TO REVEAL SAME ACTOR WHO PLAYED THE HOUSING COP, NOW DRESSED AS FEDERAL AGENT WITH A MUSTACHE.

FEDERAL AGENT ENTERS WITH SECOND OFFICER.

GIOVANNI

Hello there. You again?

AGENT

What do you mean, “Me again?”

GIOVANNI

Sorry—I thought you were the first guy.

AGENT

What first guy?

GIOVANNI

The housing cop.

AGENT

No—I’m a Federal Agent.

GIOVANNI

So I see. And you have a mustache—so you can’t be the first guy. How can I help you?

AGENT

We’re here to search the premises.

GIOVANNI

Your buddies from the housing police just got through searching the place.

AGENT

Makes no difference. We need to search the place again.

GIOVANNI

You don't trust them. Yeah, you gotta watch those housing cops. You came back to make sure they didn't pull a fast one? Then maybe the Treasury Department will come to check up on you. Then Homeland Security. The Army.

(mimes exaggerated rowing)

The Navy. The Marines.

AGENT

(very annoyed)

Cut the comedy. Just step aside and let us do our job.

ANTONIA

(enraged)

Of course! We all have our jobs to do! My job is waiting eight hours on the unemployment line—since they fired me!

MARGHERITA

(anxious to participate)

And I'm on the phone all day—telemarketing!

ANTONIA

(to Giovanni)

And you spend your eight hours chained to the assembly line—like an animal. And their job? To make sure we don't break the law—and pay the big boss the price he names for our food.

SECOND OFFICER OPENS CLOSET AND SIDEBORD
DOORS.

ANTONIA (CONT'D)

(to Agent and Second Officer)

And you guys never think to check on the big boss—to make sure he doesn't break his contract with us. Fleece us by farming out our jobs.

(Giovanni tries in vain to calm Antonia)

Or screw us out of our unemployment checks. Or violate safety laws in the workplace.

MARGHERITA

(confronting Agent)

Or drive up prices. Or kick us out of our homes. Or take the food out of our mouths.

ANTONIA PULLS MARGHERITA AWAY FROM
AGENT.

ANTONIA

Take it easy—the baby.

MARGHERITA

(to Antonia)

Am I wrong?

GIOVANNI

You shouldn't say that—because they can't stand it, either.

(to Agent)

Right, Officer? You're fed up with doing these sweeps for your bosses. Tell these women how disgusted all the cops are—jumping whenever your master whistles. “A-ttennn-tion! Sic 'em! Bark! Bite!” Like guard dogs. And don't shoot off your mouth—or it's: “Down, boy! Sit!”

GIOVANNI HOWLS AND BARKS LIKE CHAINED
DOG.

AGENT

Say that again?

GIOVANNI HOWLS AGAIN.

AGENT (CONT'D)

No—that thing about the guard dogs.

GIOVANNI

Right. I mean, you're not really part of the working class—like that Marxist Gramsci was talking about. You're their lackeys—the running dogs of the ruling class.

AGENT

(to Second Officer)

Cuff him!

GIOVANNI

Cuff me? But—why?

SECOND OFFICER HANDCUFFS GIOVANNI.

AGENT

Insulting an officer of the law.

GIOVANNI

Insulting an offi—but I didn't make up that stuff. Your buddy from the Housing Police said it. He told me you feel like slaves of the rich—your bosses' flunkies.

AGENT

Who? Us? The Feds?

GIOVANNI

No. He meant you—meaning them, the housing cops.

AGENT

Ahh—the housing cops feel like slaves. That’s a different story.

(to Second Officer)

Take off his cuffs.

(to Giovanni)

Just watch your tongue.

SECOND OFFICER REMOVES GIOVANNI’S
HANDCUFFS.

GIOVANNI

I’ll watch, I’ll watch.

(aside)

Geeez! All these arms of the law—and all on different bodies.

SECOND OFFICER CONTINUES SEARCHING
APARTMENT, GETTING CLOSER TO WATER
BOTTLES HIDDEN NEAR GAS TANK.

ANTONIA

(to Margherita, sotto voce)

Start whining. Come on—cry.

MARGHERITA

Ahaaoioooo!

ANTONIA

(still sotto voce)

Louder.

MARGHERITA

(more extreme)

Aioohieeee! Ahooooieeeeai!

AGENT

What’s going on? What’s her problem?

ANTONIA

She’s hurting bad—poor thing. She’s in labor.

GIOVANNI

She's premature—not even five months in.

ANTONIA

She was traumatized just now. Some cops tried to feel up her belly—what a disgrace.

AGENT

Feel up her belly?!

GIOVANNI

Naturally—to see if she had some pasta or rice stuffed up there—instead of a baby. Go ahead—help yourself. Feel her and find out. She's just a poor wage slave—living hand to mouth. You're safe. It's not like she's the wife of some big CEO—the wheeler-dealer of Pirelli Tires, or the top loan-shark of Unicredit Bank, or that wired-up head of Telecom. They all should be thrown in jail. But if you dare put your hands on one of their wives, they'll chop them off—and kick your ass out of the agency. No danger of that here—she's a working girl. Help yourself. No harm in copping a little feel.

MARGHERITA

No! My Luigi wouldn't like it!

AGENT

(to Giovanni)

Hey, cut it out. Now you're provoking us.

ANTONIA

Yeah, Giovanni. You're over the top—zip it.

MARGHERITA

(hitting high C)

Aiiiiieagheeeee! Auwhahaaaiaa!

ANTONIA

(aside to Margherita)

You're over the top, too.

AGENT

Did anybody call an ambulance?

ANTONIA

An ambulance? Why?

AGENT

You're just gonna stand there and risk this poor woman's life? If she's pregnant—like you said—she could lose the baby.

GIOVANNI

He's right. See what a decent guy this guy is. I told you myself—call an ambulance.

ANTONIA

And I told you myself—without a reservation, no hospital will take you. You'll tour every hospital in the city—and she'll drop dead in the back of the ambulance.

MARGHERITA

No! Not in the ambulance!

SOUND OF ARRIVING SIREN HEARD FROM
STREET.

AGENT

(looks out window)

It's the ambulance—the one we called for the woman who was sick downstairs. Give me a hand and we'll take her, too.

ANTONIA

(resisting)

No! For God's sake—don't move her!

MARGHERITA

(in tears, terrified)

I don't wanna go to the hospital!

ANTONIA

See—she won't go.

MARGHERITA

Where's my husband?

(crying, whimpering)

I want my husband.

ANTONIA

She wants her husband. He works nights—so he's not here. Sorry—without her husband's consent, there's no way we're taking responsibility.

GIOVANNI

That's right—we can't be responsible.

AGENT

You people can't be responsible? And you won't be responsible if she drops dead here?

ANTONIA

Instead of at the hospital?

AGENT

They could save her life at the hospital—and maybe the kid's, too.

GIOVANNI

But I told you—she's premature.

MARGHERITA

Right! I'm premature! Aiehie! Aieeiuu!

ANTONIA

She's definitely premature. With that ambulance bumping over the potholes, that baby'll pop right out—and how's a five-month preemie supposed to survive that?

AGENT

You're obviously in the dark about the latest medical advances. In-vitro pregnancy—ever heard of it?

ANTONIA

Sure, I heard of it—but how's that gonna help her? If it's five months out of the vitro, you can't just slip it back in. You can't even put it under an oxygen tent.

GIOVANNI

That tiny little thing—under a tent? Like it's on a camping trip? Plus—at five months, it's too young for the boy scouts.

AGENT

Really up to date on everything, aren't you?

GIOVANNI

That's right—I am up to date.

AGENT

What world are you living in? You've never seen the high-tech equipment they have these days at the Gynecological Clinic. I was in the place not five months ago. They were even doing transplants—I saw them with my own eyes.

GIOVANNI & ANTONIA

Transplanting what?

AGENT

Preemies. They had a woman four months pregnant who couldn't keep her baby. They cut it out of her belly—and stuck it in another woman's belly.

GIOVANNI

In her belly?

AGENT

Where else? Caesarian section. Popped it in there—afterbirth and all. Sewed her up, and four months later—just last month, in fact—out jumps a beautiful baby boy, healthy as an ox.

GIOVANNI

(incredulous)

An ox?

AGENT

Definitely.

GIOVANNI

Gotta be a scam. A fake baby—made from recycled baby parts.

ANTONIA

It's no scam. I told you about it before. There are some unbelievable things going on. Babies born twice—one kid, two mommies.

MARGHERITA

I don't want that—I refuse to give my consent.

ANTONIA

You hear that? She won't give her consent. We're not taking her anywhere.

AGENT

Fine—I'll give my consent. I'll take the responsibility. I'm not getting into hot water because you wouldn't help out.

ANTONIA

You're really throwing your weight around—Mr Federal Agent. You come in here, search us up and down, manhandle us—now you want to throw us into an ambulance. You won't let us live? Fine! At least let us die where and when we want.

AGENT

You can't just die where and when you want.

GIOVANNI

Of course—we have to die where and when the government wants.

AGENT

Better lay off the jokes. I already warned you once.

(Giovanni crosses to closet)

Where you going?

GIOVANNI OPENS CLOSET DOOR, GOES INSIDE.

GIOVANNI

(pops out head from closet)

I'll be in my office. Make an appointment.

ANTONIA

(disgusted)

That's it—forget it. This isn't my day. Come on, let's bring her downstairs.

AGENT

Should I call up a stretcher?

ANTONIA

No, no, she can go on her own.

(to Margherita)

You can walk, right?

MARGHERITA

Yeah, yeah.

(rises, grabs "belly" full of groceries)

Oh, no! It's slipping!

ANTONIA

Oh, crap.

(to Men)

You mind stepping outside a second?

AGENT

Why?

ANTONIA

It's a female thing. Please.

GIOVANNI STEPS OUT OF CLOSET.

ALL MEN EXIT.

ANTONIA (CONT'D)

(to Margherita, furious)

Moron!

(imitates Margherita)

It's slipping!

(back to self)

This Fed's gonna hang us.

MARGHERITA

If it's slipping, it's slipping—right?

ANTONIA

Shut up, idiot. Plus—what's with that walk? You never saw a pregnant woman walk? Do they walk like this?

(grotesque imitation of Margherita's walk)

Come on—this is a mother walking. Think of the Madonna.

ANTONIA WALKS WITH SOLEMN, MAGISTERIAL
GAIT.

MARGHERITA

I knew it would end like this. What happens at the hospital when they find out I'm pregnant with those famous twins—Ravioli and Tortellini?

ANTONIA

Nothing happens—because we're never getting to the hospital.

MARGHERITA

Right—because they'll throw us in jail first.

ANTONIA

Quit whining! Soon as we're in that ambulance, we'll explain the situation to the drivers. They're working stiff, people like us. They'll help us out for sure.

MARGHERITA

Help us out? What if they turn us in?

ANTONIA

Stop it—no one's turning us anywhere.

(adjusting Margherita's "belly")

Pull up your tummy.

MARGHERITA

Another bag's slipping. It's falling out.

ANTONIA

Hold it in. Ugh—you're such a pain.

MARGHERITA

Don't squoosh it. Damn! It split open—that pouch of Spanish olives. Aaaaagh!!! Oh, my God!!!

GIOVANNI, AGENT, SECOND OFFICER ENTER IN
RESPONSE TO MARGHERITA'S SCREAM.

GIOVANNI
Now what's wrong?

MARGHERITA
It's coming out! It's all coming out!

GIOVANNI
Baby coming! Quick, Officer. Help me carry her out.

GIOVANNI AND AGENT LIFT MARGHERITA.

AGENT
(hand on Margherita's lower back)
Why is it all wet down here?

ANTONIA
(firmly)
Her water broke.

GIOVANNI
Her water? Wow—it's a flood.
(stepping as if in muddy swamp)
Hurry up—or she'll blow right here.

GIOVANNI HANDS OFF HIS PORTION OF
MARGHERITA TO SECOND OFFICER.

MARGHERITA
It's slipping! It's slipping down!

AGENT AND SECOND OFFICER EXIT, CARRYING
MARGHERITA WITH THEM.

GIOVANNI
(looking after them, grabs jacket)
Hang on! I'm coming with you!

ANTONIA
Where you going?

GIOVANNI
To see the preemie get born.

ANTONIA

No! You stay right here. This is a girl thing. I'll go.

(puts on coat, heads for door)

Here—take this. Clean up that wet floor.

ANTONIA TOSSES RAG TO GIOVANNI, THEN
EXITS.

GIOVANNI

Great. I'll mop up the wet floor—because it's a guy thing.

(grabs bucket)

This is messed up. When Luigi comes home from his night shift tomorrow and finds out he's an instant daddy—he'll have a stroke. And if the kid ends up transplanted in another woman's belly, he'll have a double stroke—and that'll finish him. I better talk to him first—lay the groundwork, ease him into it nice and slow. I'll start by talking about the Pope.

(mock Papal voice)

Brothers in Christ—I am but a humble laborer in the Lord's vineyard. And you are the fruit of his vines.

(wrings out rag into bucket)

Of course, your fruit will fill the straw-covered jugs—not the casks of aged Barolo.

(on knees, mopping floor; resumes normal voice)

Man—look at all this water. What a strange smell—like vinegar.

(sniffs rag)

Eeww—brine.

(stunned)

Brine?! Before we're born, we're marinating in brine for nine months? Who knew?

(mops more, finds object)

Huh—look at this. An olive? We're marinating with the olives? What's next? I'm getting stupid now—talking about olives. But where'd this olive come from?

(finds another olive)

Ooops—here's another one. Two olives? If I didn't have to worry about where they came from, I'd eat them. I'm starving.

(puts olives on table)

I'm just about ready to whip up some birdseed soup. It's probably not bad. Water's up. Throw in a couple of bouillon cubes, a chopped onion.

(opens refrigerator)

I knew it—no bouillon cubes. Not even an onion. I'll have to toss in a rabbit head. Damn! I feel like the witch in *Snow White*—making a poison stew. I'll eat the stew and—thwack!—I'll turn into a frog. Looking like a sour-pussed health minister—banning French-fries, burgers, and the people who eat them. Zap! Bam! Boom!

(absentmindedly grabs blowtorch near stove)

How many times do I have to tell that birdbrain Antonia—this is a blow torch! You don't use it to light the stove.

(lights stove burner with blowtorch, then puts it away)

It's dangerous. One day she'll blow up the place.

LUIGI ENTERS, FIRST POPPING HEAD IN DOOR.

LUIGI

Hello! Anybody home?

GIOVANNI

Hey, Luigi. What are you doing here?

(resumes stove business)

Doesn't your shift end in the morning?

LUIGI

What happened was—I'll tell you later. By the way—have you seen my wife? I went home, the place is wide open—but nobody's there. I called her office—they told me she didn't come in today.

GIOVANNI

(embarrassed)

Oh, yeah—your wife was here ten minutes ago. She left with Antonia.

LUIGI

To go where? Do what?

GIOVANNI

Welllll—you know—girl stuff.

LUIGI

Girl stuff? Like what?

GIOVANNI

Like—stuff that's none of our business. We're guys. We got our business, they got their business—which is none of your business.

LUIGI

None of my business? It damn well is my business.

GIOVANNI

Okay—it's your business. But why didn't you make it your business and reserve a bed a month ago—like you were supposed to?

LUIGI

A bed? A bed for what?

GIOVANNI

Oh, right—that's girl stuff. Same old story. We dump our paychecks on them and say: "Here, you handle everything." We sleep with them, get our rocks off, then say: "Take the pill." We knock them up, then say: "It's your problem." They have to fuss over the baby, shuttle them back and forth to nursery school—

LUIGI

What the hell are you talking about?

GIOVANNI

I'm just saying—they're right. We don't give a damn. In a way, we're the exploiters, too—with the same attitude as our bosses.

LUIGI

What's that got to do with Margherita not showing up for work, leaving the house wide open, and disappearing without even writing me a note?

GIOVANNI

Why should she write you a note? You're supposed to be working the night shift at the plant. What are you doing here?

LUIGI

The train was stopped.

GIOVANNI

By who?

LUIGI

Us—the workers. Get this: They wanna raise our fare by thirty-percent—to ride a flea-bitten, roach-infested train.

GIOVANNI

You stopped the train for that?

LUIGI

Why not?! We pulled the emergency brake, then laid down on the tracks. We shut down the whole line. The Eurostar and the Paris Express, too. You should've seen the managers, the supervisors—all the chiefs. Man, were they pissed.

GIOVANNI

(laughing)

Party time! Must've been quite a show.

(serious)

Christ, that's fucked up. Playing right into the hands of the bosses—and the reactionaries. So much tension in the air, and you pulled that crazy shit? Lying down on the tracks?

LUIGI

I know, I know—I'm with you. That was some insane shit. I even told the other guys: "What's the point starting this riot to get them to lower the train fares?"

GIOVANNI

Good man!

LUIGI

We shouldn't have to pay any fare at all.

GIOVANNI

Did your brains just fall out? Not pay the fare?

LUIGI

Better believe it. The company should cover our fare—including the commuting time. We're not just sitting on the trains for hours—playing tourists. We're sacrificing that time to the company. We wake up two hours earlier, and get home two hours later—all for the guys on top.

GIOVANNI

Are you for real? Who turned your head around? Anarchy International? They're all spies, anyway—or troublemakers, hired provocateurs.

LUIGI

Provocateurs? Are you shitting me? Now my buddy Tonino is a spy?

GIOVANNI

Tonino? Who works the press?

LUIGI

Yeah.

GIOVANNI

You gotta have a better example than him.

LUIGI

What about Marco?

GIOVANNI

No, not Marco.

LUIGI

What about my three Calabrese paisans?

GIOVANNI

The Taliban Three? You let them mess with your head? Nice.

LUIGI

No—I got there all by myself. It ain't that hard to figure out. Things can't keep on this way. Somebody's gotta make a move. Forget waiting on government handouts—or for unions to muscle in, or the politicians to step up. And those CEO sons-of-bitches—when it suits them, they go: “Get off the plantation! Come up to the industrial north—set yourselves free!” Then it's: “Financial meltdown! Oil prices through the roof!” Even after the price of crude drops, it still costs an arm and a leg to fill our tanks.

(change in tone)

Enough, Giovanni. We gotta make our own moves—stop waiting for somebody else to take a piss for us. We gotta shift gears—take control. Don't you see? Everything's changing—big time.

LUIGI POPS OLIVE INTO HIS MOUTH.

GIOVANNI

What—you, too? Tell me—you been talking to that Housing Cop without the mustache—the twin of that Federal Agent *with* the mustache?

LUIGI

Huh?

LUIGI EATS ANOTHER OLIVE.

GIOVANNI

That antiglobalist-Commie-instigator cop—who says we gotta take the five-finger discount at the supermarket. That guy gave me the same brain-dead, fanatic rant you just unloaded.

LUIGI

Never heard of him.

(picks up open jar, tastes from it)

Mmmmn—tasty. What kind of spread is this?

GIOVANNI

Did you just eat from that jar?

LUIGI

Yeah—it's not bad. Sorry—I was hungry.

GIOVANNI

Without lemon?

LUIGI

You're supposed to eat it with lemon?

GIOVANNI

Hell, I don't know. Does it really taste good?

LUIGI

Delicious.

GIOVANNI

Leave me some—let me taste.

(tastes from jar)

Yummy—almost as good as that grub-worm concentrate for chub-fishing.

LUIGI

What is it?

GIOVANNI

Kind of a pâté—for pampered pups and kittens.

LUIGI

Dog and cat chow? Are you nuts?

GIOVANNI

No—just eccentric. I'm a gourmet.

(tosses empty jar into trashcan)

When I cook for myself, I whip up one of my specialties. Here—taste some of this.

(offers bowl of soup)

Go ahead—taste it.

LUIGI

(tasting)

Mmmnnn—subtle. What's in it?

GIOVANNI

One of my secret recipes—birdseed and frozen rabbit-head minestrone.

LUIGI

Birdseed and rabbit head?

GIOVANNI

It's Gourmet Chinese—Lo Fun Chow.

LUIGI

Birdseed's a little undercooked.

GIOVANNI

Birdseed pilaf—it should be *al dente*. You make the birdseed chewy—and the rabbit head tender.

(looks around for olives)

The whole Chinese economic boom is based on this soup.

(shocked)

Hey—did you eat the olives that were sitting there?

LUIGI

Yeah—why? No good?

GIOVANNI

(panicky)

Damn right, no good! Those were your wife's olives. Idiot! You'd eat your new baby's baby-food without blinking an eye.

LUIGI

What the—my wife's olives? New baby's baby-food?

GIOVANNI

Did you crawl out of a cave? Don't you know a newborn baby comes out soaked in brine?

(mimes description)

It slips out. The mother takes it in her arms—and lets the primordial soup spill out on the floor. Then the husband has to mop it up.

LUIGI

What's gonna come out of your mouth next?

GIOVANNI

What's coming out of *your* mouth? The boss should buy us our commuter tickets to get to work—plus pay our travel time, since we're not on vacation after all. With that logic, he should pay us for the hours we sleep—since we're just resting up for the next day's work. And he should buy us season tickets to the football games—since that's how we relieve our stress from working on the assembly line. And toss in a little for our wives when we make love to them—since that's how we breed more workers, which jacks up his profits.

LUIGI

(crosses to stove for more soup)

Now that's what I'm talking about. And on top of that—don't our women provide a free service to the bosses? All the bottled-up rage and gloom we bring home from the job—we take it out on them. Coming home to our wives is like crawling back into our caves—to lick our wounds, pick off our fleas, and scratch our mangy hides. Man and wife—wallowing in our sad, empty, miserable, shitty little lives.

GIOVANNI

Let's not jump off the bridge here. Our lives ain't that shitty. We're better off than before. We have homes—even if they're crappy as hell. Once in awhile they screw us—banks give us subprime loans, then foreclose on our houses and evict us. To throw us a bone, they give us cash-for-clunkers. At least you got a clunker—I don't. We all got refrigerators and TVs. Of course, there's the temporary crew—like you.

LUIGI

A fridge, a car, a TV? Who gives a shit—when my goddamn, lousy life sucks? A job fit for a trained monkey.

(mimes robotic assembly-line worker)

Solder. Hammer. Drill a hole. Solder. Hammer. Drill a hole. Roll it down. Pull up the next.

(Giovanni joins in robotic moves)

Stack 'em and rack 'em. Make your quota. Speed it up.

LUIGI & GIOVANNI

Solder. Hammer. Drill a hole. One piece down. Next piece up. Solder. Hammer. Drill a hole.

GIOVANNI

(stops suddenly)

No shop talk in the house! I'll blow a fuse! God, what are you doing to me? Turning me into a zombie.

LUIGI

Not me! Your boss is the zombie-maker! Excuse me—I mean, the company. No—the multinational conglomerate. You know—the ones with the jobs, always messing with your head. In the newspapers, on radio and TV—all over the Internet. Check out the news media—one big horror show. Every newscast starts out with a rape, then moves on to kidnapped babies buried in a dumpster, a mother beat to death with a hammer—and to wrap it all up, your daily Mideast suicide bombing. Hundreds massacred, thousands injured. Illegal immigrants—raping and murdering. Followed by the lynching of Gypsies and Tunisians. Halfway through the newscast—we're hit with the shock and awe of the politicians. "Deport suspected terrorists—and poor people, too! Beef up the police force!"

GIOVANNI

And the military!

LUIGI

Give street-cops nuclear weapons. People are scared to leave the house—especially in the suburbs.

GIOVANNI

And the statistics say—if you can believe them—in the last ten years, violent and quality-of-life crimes are down ten-percent. Suddenly, Italy’s the safest country in Europe.

LUIGI

Don’t say that. You gotta keep everybody pissing their pants—living in fear. All together now: “We’re not safe!” Crank up the insecurity—so they’ll forget all their problems: Unemployment, pay cuts, housing, pollution, climate change, hospitals closing, the ambulance showing up after the patient’s stone dead. Crank up that fear even more—make us forget about all the workers who die on the job.

GIOVANNI

Right! In factories and warehouses, dead workers never get any attention—unless they drop six or seven at a pop. Know how many people died on the job in Italy? According to the latest report from the European Union? Workers falling off unsafe scaffolding and catwalks? Crushed by cranes and bulldozers? Hang on—I got it right here in my office.

(crosses to closet, takes out sheet of paper, reads)

“Over twelve-hundred killed in a single year. Seven-thousand in the last five years—more deaths than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.

LUIGI

Work is war—but we can’t discuss it, especially during lunch.

GIOVANNI

Good thing the Pope did another one of his televised sermons—trashing birth-control pills. He’s not happy just showing up in women’s dreams to terrorize them.

LUIGI

The Pope terrorizing women in their dreams? Where’d you read that?

GIOVANNI

I didn’t read it. I heard it from Antonia. She was talking about your wife.

LUIGI

What did she say?

GIOVANNI

Margherita dreams about the Pope almost every night. He flies in through the window—whoosh! “Stay off the pill!” Then—whoosh!—off he goes.

LUIGI

What?! Popes fly through windows? Whoosh—don’t take the pill? Why should Margherita care? She’s not even on the pill.

GIOVANNI

Ahh—so you know. Who told you?

LUIGI

Nobody told me. She don't need the pill—because she can't have kids. She's abnormal. She's got—what's it called?—help me out here. Some kind of hereditary defect, something like—Vaginemesis? Vagenesis? Vaginal Exodus? I can never get it right.

GIOVANNI

You're the one with the hereditary defect—in your head. Your wife's just fine. She can have a truckload of babies.

(enthused)

In fact—she has one!

LUIGI

(stunned)

She has a baby? Since when?

GIOVANNI

Since right now. It's probably born already—five months premature.

LUIGI

Stop talking trash. Five months? She doesn't even have a bump.

GIOVANNI

(stifles laugh)

She's been binding herself. But Antonia unwrapped her and—badaboom! A big, old baby bump—like nine months' worth, maybe even twelve.

LUIGI

Get outta here—you're screwing my head around.

GIOVANNI

You don't believe me? For your information—my wife just left with her in the ambulance. She almost popped it out right here.

LUIGI

She was giving birth—here?!

GIOVANNI

Her water broke—I saved it.

LUIGI

You saved my wife's broken water?

GIOVANNI

Sort of water. More like brine—with olives. The same ones you ate.

LUIGI

Listen, stop fooling around. Where's my wife?

GIOVANNI

I told you—at the hospital.

LUIGI

Which hospital?

GIOVANNI

Who knows? If you'd reserved a bed last month—like you were supposed to—then you'd know. Now they could be roaming all over town. And the poor little kid gets born in an ambulance—swimming in olives.

LUIGI

Quit with the jokes! You're a wise-ass—obsessed with making cracks, even about serious stuff. Tell me the hospital she's in—or I'll punch out your lights!

GIOVANNI

Calm down! I said I don't know. Wait, wait! Maybe they went to that place—what's it called?—the Gynecological Clinic.

LUIGI

The Gynecological Clinic?

GIOVANNI

Where they do the baby transplants—from one belly to another.

LUIGI

(losing it)

Baby transplants?! One belly to another?!

GIOVANNI

What planet are you from? You missed the latest on premature babies. Know what happens at the Gyno Clinic? When your wife gets there, they got this contraption—a sterilizer cart full of steaming instruments in an oxygen tent. They take the woman with the four-five-month preemie, then take another woman—there's always some spare woman around—she's like the second mother. They do a Caesarian on Mom Number One, then another on Mom Number Two—take the baby out of Number One, stick it in Number Two. Stitch her back up—afterbirth and all. And four months later? A squirmy catfish that looks like you!

LUIGI

Cut it out with the Caesarians, the instruments, the transplants. Just tell me where this friggin' Gynecological Clinic is. Get out your phonebook and look it up.

GIOVANNI

I don't have a phone anymore—landline or cell. That's the first thing we had to give up when we downsized our lifestyle.

LUIGI

But the phonebook?

GIOVANNI

What do I need a phonebook for? To see who's in town?

(mimes leafing through book)

Oh, look. The Giulianis. The Iacoccas. The Olivettis. The Versaces. Yeah, right.

GIOVANNI THROWS IMAGINARY BOOK ON FLOOR
AND TRAMPLES IT.

LUIGI

Do they still have a payphone downstairs in the bar?

GIOVANNI

Wait—I just remembered. The Gyno Clinic is in that brand-new, fancy hospital.

LUIGI

The one way out in the 'burbs?

GIOVANNI

Exactly—must be an hour away.

LUIGI

Why'd they go so far?

GIOVANNI

I just told you. Jesus, you're thick. It's the only place they do the transplants. They get a second woman, whoever's around—

(shocked realization)

A second woman? My wife! Antonia's right there with her. She'll be the first choice—and she's just flaky enough to do it. She'll get the transplant and come home pregnant. Move it—let's hit the road!

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI EXIT, RUNNING.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

EARLY MORNING.

ANTONIA AND GIOVANNI'S APARTMENT, AS IN
ACT ONE.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA ENTER.

MARGHERITA'S "BELLY" IS STILL HUGE, AND SHE
IS WHIMPERING.

ANTONIA

Let's go Margherita—get a move on.

(calls toward bedroom)

Giovanni! Giovanni!

(to Margherita)

Not here.

(peeks into bedroom)

Wanna bet he already left for work? What time is it?

(looks at clock)

Five-thirty! With all the damn hoops we jumped through—we're gone over four hours.
Nope, he's gone. Poor guy—didn't get a minute of shut-eye.

MARGHERITA

It's all our fault. Why did I listen to you? Now look what a mess we stirred up.
Yesterday, I couldn't even call my supervisor in time to cover my shift. They're gonna
fire me.

ANTONIA

Oh, stop sniveling! Christ, you're worse than a hemorrhoid. After all is said and done,
everything went smooth as a baby's butt. You saw how sweet those ambulance drivers
were. I just told them: "Look—this girl's not really pregnant. She's just crammed with
stolen stuff. And they fell all over themselves to help us out. They turned it into a party.
"You go, girls! You done good! You gotta stick it to those gouging thieves at the
supermarket!" Now that's solidarity.

MARGHERITA

Sure—honor among thieves.

ANTONIA

Know what I got going for me? Faith in people. You gotta believe in people. Here—I'll
make you some soup. Give me a bag of rice. I'll give one back to you later.

MARGHERITA PULLS BAG OF RICE FROM HER
“BELLY.”

ANTONIA CROSSES TO STOVE, SEES PAN
GIOVANNI USED FOR COOKING IN ACT ONE.

ANTONIA (CONT'D)

What's this—the birdseed? Giovanni, that jerk. He actually made a soup with the
birdseed. And a rabbit head.

(shows pan to Margherita)

Eew—look at it floating in there.

MARGHERITA

Please! You want me to barf right here?

ANTONIA

(to pan)

Looking at me with those big eyes.

(to Margherita)

I'm telling you—he'll swallow any lie I make up—hook, line, and sinker.

MARGHERITA

Listen—if you're making that soup just for me—forget it. I'm not hungry. My stomach is
tied up in knots.

ANTONIA

So—untie it. I can't believe anybody can get so freaked out.

(Margherita pulls items from her “belly”)

What are you doing?

MARGHERITA

I'm taking this stuff out. You want me to stay pregnant for the rest of my natural life?

ANTONIA

I don't want any stolen stuff in my house. You get me? And do me a favor: Take this
stuff from under the bed, too. Your schemes are not gonna land me in jail.

MARGHERITA

My schemes?! You're the one who cooked all this up—and now they're my schemes?

ANTONIA

Fine—in that case, I'll make myself a nice, big belly, too.

ANTONIA MOVES TO WARDROBE, TAKES OUT TWO PILLOWCASES, SAFETY PINS, TAPE; THEN FASHIONS ONE PILLOWCASE INTO POUCH TO HANG FROM HER NECK.

MARGHERITA

Where we gonna put all this stuff?

ANTONIA

(stuffing pillowcase with contraband)

We'll take it back by the railroad tracks. My father-in-law's got a storage shed—on a little lot back there, where he grows his lettuce and zucchini. That's the perfect hiding place.

MARGHERITA

(exasperated)

Uh-uh—no-no-no. I can't do this anymore. I've had it up to here with your crazy ideas. Here—take it all. I don't want even one little box of macaroni.

(moves to door)

I'm going home.

ANTONIA

Terrific—whatever you want. Know what? You're an idiot.

MARGHERITA

(stops short)

I'm an idiot?! And you, Miss Einstein—you're so smart? I wanna know what you plan to tell your husband—when he sees me with no belly and no baby.

ANTONIA

Oh, I already thought of that. We'll tell him you had a hysterical pregnancy.

MARGHERITA

Hysterical?

ANTONIA

Of course—happens all the time. A woman thinks she's pregnant, her belly swells up—then, when she's ready to deliver—what comes out? Air—nothing but air. Talk about a come-down.

MARGHERITA

Just what my day was missing—a hysterical pregnancy.

ANTONIA

Whatever—keep an eye on the soup. I'll be back in ten minutes.

ANTONIA FINISHES FILLING PILLOWCASE, HANGS
IT FROM HER NECK, HIDES IT UNDER HER COAT.

MARGHERITA

Why don't you fill up a couple of shopping bags? You can take it all in one trip.
(takes bag from under daybed)
Instead of doing the pregnant-mom routine—back and forth a hundred times.

ANTONIA

Because—unlike you—I'm not a moron who'd get herself busted in two seconds.
(leads Margherita to window)
Come here—look down there. What's that parked on the street?

MARGHERITA

A van.

ANTONIA

A *police* van. What do you think they're here for—at the crack of dawn? A few hands of gin-rummy? They're setting up an ambush for fools like you—running around with loaded shopping bags, trying to hide the stuff we stole yesterday. Bam! They'll pick us off like ducks in a shooting gallery.

(moves to stove)

Just watch the gas. If it goes off, I got the lighter.

(looks for lighter)

Where'd it go? I can never find it.

(finds blowtorch)

Oh, here it is.

MARGHERITA

That's the lighter? For who—King Kong?

ANTONIA

No—it's Giovanni's automatic welder. I'll show you how to use it.

(demonstrates)

See—you turn it on like this.

MARGHERITA

But it's not glowing.

ANTONIA

Because the tip's not made of iron. It's special, something called—antimony. Gets really hot—two-thousand degrees. And you never see a thing. It's perfect for lighting the gas.

MARGHERITA

(looks out window)

Look. There goes Maria from the third floor—crossing the street. She got pregnant, too.

ANTONIA

(looks out window)

Great—everybody’s stealing the idea. Pretty soon, you’ll see pregnant dogs strolling by—with puffed-up doggy coats. And men—with fake hunchbacks. Pregnant dogs? Hunchbacks? What will the tourists think of us?

ANTONIA MOVES TO DOOR.

MARGHERITA

Wait—I changed my mind. I’m coming with you.

MARGHERITA STUFFS PILLOWCASE, HANGS IT
FROM HER NECK, HIDES IT UNDER HER COAT.

ANTONIA

What happened? Got an attack of courage? Good girl—I knew you’d come around. Even panty-wetters like you wake up eventually.

(affectionately)

Come on, Miss Piss—let’s move.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA CONTINUE TOWARD
DOOR.

ANTONIA STOPS SHORT.

ANTONIA

No, wait—help me move the bed.

MARGHERITA

Why?

ANTONIA

We have to do the scene change.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA BEGIN MOVING
STAGE PIECES.

MARGHERITA

This is exploitation of pregnant mothers.

STAGE CURTAIN CLOSES.

SCENE TWO

SCENE OPENS IN FRONT OF CLOSED STAGE
CURTAIN.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI ENTER AS IF WALKING
ALONG STREET.

LUIGI PULLS OUT BERET, PUTS IT ON. GIOVANNI
DOES SAME.

LUIGI

Great—now it's starting to rain. We'll both get drenched.

GIOVANNI

Son-of-a-bitch! I'd like to kick the whole world's ass—but my feet are about to explode out of my shoes. You and your brilliant idea to drag us to every hospital in town. You called around, and they all said she wasn't admitted. So why do we have to wear out the sidewalks?

LUIGI

You're gonna trust some screwed-up hospital bureaucracies?

GIOVANNI

Whatever—I've had enough. You know what? I'm catching the next train to work. By now, I'll be docked an hour's pay.

GIOVANNI STARTS TO LEAVE.

SOUND OF HUGE AUTO CRASH OFFSTAGE.

GIOVANNI RUNS DOWNSTAGE TO PEER OUT AT
AUDIENCE.

GIOVANNI (CONT'D)

Look what happened! Holy crap! What a disaster!

LUIGI

(crosses down to Giovanni)

A pair of eighteen-wheelers! They flipped over!

GIOVANNI

Sure—these rain-slicked roads. You brake too hard and—screeeech, badda-boom!

POLICEMAN SEEN EARLIER ENTERS.

POLICEMAN

Keep back, please. You need to step back. It might be hazardous—flammable cargo. It could go up like that.

GIOVANNI

Hey, Officer. Fancy meeting you here.

POLICEMAN

Yeah, fancy. Oh, it's you. Ain't life full of little surprises. What's up?

(to audience)

Hey, you! Down there—on the side of the road! What are those morons doing? You, too! On the other side! Get back! No rubbernecking! Keep moving! Get back to work! You don't see enough accidents on the job?! You gotta go looking for more?!

POLICEMAN STEPS OUT INTO AUDIENCE.

GIOVANNI

(to Policeman, EXITING up aisle)

We're a bunch of masochists!

LUIGI

What's going on? You actually know him?

GIOVANNI

Sure, he's an old friend. A radical, antiglobal extremist. He's gotta be a spy.

LUIGI

A spy? In the Police Department?

POLICEMAN ENTERS FROM AUDIENCE,
DRAGGING SACKS.

POLICEMAN

Let's go—move it! Help me get these sacks out of here!

(to Giovanni and Luigi)

You guys, too. Gimme a hand. And since you got here before me—did you see what happened to those drivers?

LUIGI

Oh, right—damn! I hope they weren't trapped inside the cabs and crushed.

POLICEMAN

They didn't get crushed. They got outta there.

GIOVANNI

That's good news.

POLICEMAN

They crawled out and took off like a shot.

GIOVANNI

I'll bet—so they wouldn't get burned alive.

POLICEMAN

There was no danger of that.

(hoists sack)

These sacks are full of sugar, flour, rice—white and brown. The whole load came over from China—by way of ex-Yugoslavia and points east.

GIOVANNI

Smuggled in, no doubt.

LUIGI

So they could sell it on the black market—if it didn't flip over on the highway, that is.

GIOVANNI

Hey, there's always an angel looking down—ready to cheat the cheaters. A Chinese angel.

LUIGI

Just think—not so many years ago, when you said “Chinese,” you'd think “brothers in arms.” Mao Tse Tung will lead us to the light.

POLICEMAN

Nice—cop an attitude. Indignation is the last refuge of a ball-buster.

GIOVANNI

Takes one to know one. And which laws do you enforce when you're not being a wiseguy?

POLICEMAN

Search and seizure. Impound and confiscate. Speaking of which—gimme a hand rounding up those sacks.

GIOVANNI

Right—you already recruited us.

POLICEMAN

(speaks into audience)

Whoa—where are those guys going? Dammit—they're boosting the booty.

(laughs)

They must know they're full of flour and sugar.

GIOVANNI

What are you, the lookout? Double-agent, huh? If you don't haul-ass down there, they'll boost the truck, too.

POLICEMAN

You're right.

(into audience)

Hey, you! Drop those sacks!

(EXITING through audience; to Giovanni and Luigi)

And you guys keep rounding them up.

POLICEMAN EXITS.

LUIGI

What, now we're mules—humping Chinese contraband? Forget it—I'm about ready to grab a couple of sacks and take them home myself. I'll feed some to the retired guy across the hall.

(grabs two sacks)

If he doesn't keel over in twenty-four hours, we're good to go.

GIOVANNI

(stops Luigi)

Are you nuts? You're gonna stoop to the level of the slacker, malcontent riff-raff? They're no working guys. They're picket-line junkies.

LUIGI

What, you're Mr Captain of Industry, now? One walkout and you're a picket-line junkie? You never went out on strike?

GIOVANNI

Okay, I have walked out—but I don't steal what isn't mine.

LUIGI

Not yours? Who made this stuff? Who planted the seeds? Who ran the harvesters? Who ground it and put it in sacks?

GIOVANNI

The Chinese?

LUIGI

Of course—and the Chinese workers are exploited, too. What's international workers' solidarity? Something Lenin invented to piss off the industrialists? The very ones picking our pockets?

GIOVANNI

Got it. The world is full of thieves—and the smartest guy is the one who steals the most. Anybody who doesn't steal is an asshole. Guess what—I'm proud to be an asshole in a world of scam artists and outlaws.

LUIGI

Bravo! You're a proud member of the International Alliance of Assholes.

LUIGI GRABS SACK WHILE ANOTHER SACK IS
TOSSED TO GIOVANNI FROM AUDIENCE.

FEDERAL AGENT ENTERS, MISINTERPRETS
ACTIONS OF GIOVANNI AND LUIGI.

AGENT

Well, well, well—what have we here?

LUIGI

(still hauling sacks)

We're making like mules—and saving the country.

AGENT

Saving the country? Looks more like you're looting it.

GIOVANNI

Hey, look who's back—the agent with the mustache.

(to Luigi)

Don't you think he looks just like the cop playing lookout?

AGENT

(pulls out pistol, points it at audience)

Freeze! Drop those sacks! Put 'em down or I'll shoot you both! Damn—those rotten bastards gave me the slip.

(whips around, points gun at Giovanni and Luigi)

And who said you two could touch those sacks?

LUIGI

(hiding behind Giovanni)

Terrific—we're about to get our asses shot off.

GIOVANNI

(ducks behind Luigi)

Officer, please—we were only following orders. And watch out with that pistol. If it backfires, you'll blow your mustache right off.

AGENT

(laughs, adjusts mustache, tries to keep composure)

Don't get cute with me. I warned you once.

GIOVANNI

Fine—but we're only trying to do you a favor. Otherwise, they'd rob you blind.

AGENT

We don't need your favors. Drop 'em.

GIOVANNI

Not a problem—the other officer gave us the order, anyway. The one taking care of business down by the truck.

AGENT

All right, then—go ahead.

(Giovanni and Luigi pick up more sacks)

No, hold it—stay right there.

(Giovanni and Luigi drop sacks, startled)

Wait till I check it out.

(to offstage Officer)

You, officer!

AGENT EXITS THROUGH AUDIENCE.

LUIGI

Orders. Counterorders. See—just like the army.

GIOVANNI

Yeah, I know he seems like a hardass—but down deep he's a good guy. He carried your wife down to the ambulance.

LUIGI

I was about to tell you something before.

GIOVANNI

Yeah? What?

LUIGI

Something about union policy—downsizing and outsourcing. Starting tomorrow, we're laid off.

GIOVANNI

Who told you that?

LUIGI

I heard it on the train. They're putting all six-thousand of us on half-pay. And a couple of months from now, they're shutting down.

GIOVANNI

Closing the factory? Why? It's not like we need a bail-out. We got two years' worth of contracts—at least.

LUIGI

They don't give a shit about contracts. One of the plant engineers tipped me off. They're dismantling all the machinery—moving it lock, stock, and barrel. Out of the country—to, like, Mumbai—or Tur-*geek*-istan, someplace like that. And the best part? This year, the company got a government research grant to develop a new engine that uses green fuel. The project was supposed to create two-thousand new jobs—machinists, technicians, specialists. But it never happened. Know where all that government grant money ended up? In a Swiss bank account—invested in some off-shore corporation that manufactures high-tech weapons for the military.

GIOVANNI

(furiously grabbing sacks)

Give me a hand here. Grab this stuff. Load up as much as you can carry. Move it!

LUIGI

Now that's one proud, upstanding, law-abiding asshole.

GIOVANNI

There comes a time when even an asshole has to wake up. Let's roll!

THEY EXIT, LADEN WITH SACKS.

AGENT

(shouting from audience)

Hey, you two! Where you going? Stop right there! Stop—or I'll shoot!

GIOVANNI ENTERS BRIEFLY.

GIOVANNI

Go ahead, shoot! Shoot your balls off!

GIOVANNI EXITS.

AGENT ENTERS, OUT OF BREATH.

AGENT

Bastards. They were faking it. "We're saving the merchandise—doing you a favor." And they say the Sicilians are bad.

AGENT EXITS, GIVING CHASE.

SCENE THREE

LIGHTING INDICATES A DIFFERENT STREET.

STAGE CURTAIN REMAINS CLOSED.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI ENTER, CARRYING
SACKS.

GIOVANNI

Hang in there—a hundred yards and we’re home free. No, wait. There’s a police van in front of my building.

LUIGI

Those two women crossing the street—looks like our wives.

GIOVANNI

Can’t be. Right now, Antonia should be at the bank—protesting the interest rates going up again.

LUIGI

No way. Look, they’re going into that ugly cellblock—where you live. And one of them is pregnant.

GIOVANNI

Look again—they’re both pregnant.

LUIGI

Right—can’t be them.

GIOVANNI

(gesturing behind them)

Goddammit—we’re trapped. Look!

LUIGI

Look where?

GIOVANNI

You blind? It’s that Federal Agent. Son-of-a-bitch followed us. Everybody’s boosting stuff left and right—but he’s got a bug up his ass for us. Guess we didn’t steal enough.

LUIGI

And he knows where you live. Look—he's headed straight for your building.

GIOVANNI

Let's pull a fast one on him—and go to your place.

LUIGI

I love it. Quick—through here and we'll give him the slip.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI EXIT.

AGENT ENTERS, OUT OF BREATH.

AGENT

Sure, sneak off. I know where you live. I can find my way around. After all—I can read.

SCENE FOUR

STAGE CURTAIN OPENS, REVEALING GIOVANNI
AND ANTONIA'S APARTMENT.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA ENTER BOTH WITH
HUGE "BELLIES," COMPLETELY EXHAUSTED.

ANTONIA

(flops down on daybed)

Please, please, let me die.

MARGHERITA

Load. Unload. Load. Unload. I feel like a dump truck.

ANTONIA

No more babies for me. God, my stomach. Pregnancy's a killer.

MARGHERITA

(unpacking lettuce heads from her "belly")

What about me? Get pregnant? Get unpregnant. Another baby bump? Get an abortion.
Then the transplants: Vacuum-packed one minute—fresh from the fields the next. Look
at all this lettuce. We'll be eating salads for a year.

ANTONIA

Talk all you want, but we gotta stuff ourselves up again. Those cops are downstairs. We came in with bellies—we better go out with bellies. Big bellies in—big bellies out. They may be dense, but even they'd catch that. I just feel sorry for my father-in-law. He's coming home to a garden picked clean of every leaf of lettuce.

(suddenly shouting)

The soup!

(rushing to stove)

I forgot the soup on the stove. It must be burnt to the pot. God, and I'm so hungry.

(lifts lid from pot)

Oh, good—it didn't even heat up.

(shocked)

Why isn't it hot? It's on the stove *four* hours. The gas! Those bastards turned off my gas because I didn't pay my bill. Those animals. Those ugly, thieving, low-lives. They'll shut off my lights next.

MARGHERITA

Maybe it's just a break in the line.

ANTONIA

No, the maintenance guys came over yesterday to warn me.

(a KNOCK at the door)

Who's there?

AGENT

(offstage)

Friends.

ANTONIA

What friends?

AGENT

(offstage)

I work with your husband. He sent me to tell you something.

ANTONIA

Oh, my God. What happened to him?

ANTONIA MOVES TOWARD DOOR.

MARGHERITA

(stuffs lettuce heads under her coat)

Wait, wait. I gotta put my lettuce back in.

ANTONIA

(addressing door)

Give me a minute. I'm not decent.

(opens door; Agent ENTERS)

You again? What is this, a gag?

AGENT

Stop right there. I got you this time. Ahhh—look at this. You're both pregnant now? Those are some fast-growing bellies. I knew right off it was a scam.

ANTONIA

You're out of your mind. What kind of scam?

MARGHERITA

(collapses on daybed, overwhelmed)

Oh, here we go. I knew it, I knew it.

AGENT

I'm so happy to see you didn't lose the little one after all.

(to Antonia)

You, on the other hand, should be congratulated. In five hours, you made love, got pregnant, and did your nine months. That was quick.

ANTONIA

Watch it, Officer. You're on a slippery slope.

AGENT

No, I was on a slippery slope before—when I fell for your little song and dance about the labor pains and the premature baby. But I'm not falling for it twice. Come on—give up the goods.

ANTONIA

You're nuts. What goods are you talking about?

AGENT

That innocent act is getting old. Game over. Your men raid the trucks, then pass the loot to the wives—who pass themselves off as a Madonna with child. I see pregnant women walking around every day now. Is it possible every woman in this neighborhood's got a bun in the oven? At the same time? I know the old saw about working-class women being so fertile.

(crosses to window)

But this is off the charts. Grown women, teens, tweens. Today I even saw an eighty-year-old biddy strolling by with a belly big enough to hold a soccer team.

ANTONIA

I know—but you got it all wrong, Officer. It’s all about the festival—for our patron saint, Saint Eulalia.

AGENT

Now you got a new story—about a patron saint?

ANTONIA

You never heard of her? What a saint—a woman of courage, who, who—wanted to have children. She was obsessed—poor, blessed thing—determined to get pregnant at any cost. “Gimme a baby! Gimme a baby!” And she worked at it every single day. “Eulelio!”—that was her husband—“Get over here, let’s try it again!” But nothing worked—until one day, the Heavenly Father took pity on her from above. And—wham bam—she got pregnant! At sixty—a miracle.

AGENT

At sixty?

ANTONIA

Oh, yes. And don’t forget Eulelio. He was over eighty.

AGENT

Yeah—faith can move mountains.

ANTONIA

But they say the husband passed away soon after.

AGENT

I’ll bet he did.

ANTONIA

Anyway—to commemorate the miracle, all the women in the neighborhood go around for three days with make-believe baby bumps.

AGENT

Oh, what a charming ritual. So that’s why you ladies emptied out the supermarkets—to collect what you need to make your bellies. See what religion can do for the common people? Alright, can the melodrama. Show me what you got under there.

ANTONIA

(disdainfully)

And if I don’t?

AGENT

Don’t test my patience.

ANTONIA

And if you lose your patience—then what? You’ll strip-search us? I’m warning you—if you lay even one finger on us to take a peek, you’ll bring down the curse on you.

AGENT

Don’t make me laugh.

(suddenly agitated)

What curse?

ANTONIA

The same one that struck Eulelio. The old guy was a nonbeliever—an atheist. “Yo, Saint Eulalia! Get over here! We gotta talk! Open your dress and let me see what you got under that belly. And I’m warning you—if you’re really pregnant, I’ll strangle you. Because you know that baby’s not mine.” So—Saint Eulalia tore open her dress.

(getting into it)

Then—the second miracle! Her belly opened up and roses started pouring out—a stream of roses.

AGENT

Listen to this—what a pretty miracle.

ANTONIA

But the story’s not over. Poor Eulelio’s watching this—and suddenly, right before his eyes, everything goes dark. “I can’t see! I can’t see!” he’s screaming. “I’m blind! God’s punishing me!” Then Saint Eulalia says to him: “Oh, nonbeliever. Now do you believe-lieve-lieve?” Saints always talk with an echo. “Yes, I believe!” Then—the third miracle: From all those roses—out pops a baby!

(indicating baby’s height)

Ten months old. And talking. “Daddy, Daddy,” it says. “God has forgiven you. Now you can die in peace.” The baby lifts his tiny hand, taps Eulelio on the head, and—bam! Eulelio drops dead on the spot.

AGENT

(taken in but covering it)

Enough with the fairytales. Show me the roses—I mean, cut to the chase, you two. I’ve wasted too much time here, and it’s making me nervous.

ANTONIA

So—you don’t believe in the miracles?

AGENT

No, I don’t.

ANTONIA

You’re not afraid of the curse?

AGENT

I told you—no.

ANTONIA

Okay—whatever. Don't say I didn't warn you.

(to Margherita)

Come on, get up. Let's show him together.

ANTONIA RECITES A CHANT DRAMATICALLY.

MARGHERITA ACCOMPANIES ANTONIA WITH A MUMBLING SING-SONG.

ANTONIA

Blooming-bellied Saint Eulalia!
He who dares deny your wonders,
Curse the man who will not hail ya!
Strike his head with violent thunder!

An evil bastard mocks and cries!
Strike the sight from this man's eyes!
Saint Eulalia, sacred one!
Strike him down and make it done!

ANTONIA & MARGHERITA

Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Praise the Lord!

THE TWO WOMEN THROW OPEN THEIR COATS.

AGENT

What's that stuff?

ANTONIA

What stuff?

(feigning surprise)

Wow, look at that. It looks like—lettuce.

MARGHERITA

It's a whole salad: Chicory—

ANTONIA

Endive, radicchio—and a head of cabbage.

MARGHERITA

I have a cabbage head, too.

AGENT

What's going on here? Why you hiding salad greens under your coat?

ANTONIA

We're not hiding anything. Don't you see? It's a miracle.

AGENT

Naturally—the miracle of the cabbages.

ANTONIA

Who says you can't perform miracles with your leftover vegetables? Even if you don't believe—it's not against the law. If an Italian citizen—especially a woman—hangs chicory, endive, and cabbage from her belly—is that a crime?

AGENT

No.

ANTONIA

So there is no law?

AGENT

No.

ANTONIA

Well, nice knowing you.

ANTONIA OFFERS HER HAND FOR A GOOD-BYE
SHAKE.

AGENT

Nice knowing you? I wanna know why you stuffed all this food under your coat?

ANTONIA

I already told you—to make a baby bump—just like in the miracle of Saint Eulalia. You have to carry it around for three days. And if you doubt it—the curse will be on your head.

LIGHTS BEGIN SLOW FADE.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA REACT TO FADING
LIGHTS WITH RISING CONCERN AS THEY REPEAT
THE “PRAYER” TO SAINT EULALIA.

ANTONIA & MARGHERITA

Blooming-bellied Saint Eulalia!
He who dares deny your wonders,
Curse the man who will not hail ya!
Strike his head with violent thunder!

An evil bastard mocks and cries!
Strike the sight from this man's eyes!
Saint Eulalia, sacred one!
Strike him down and make it done!

AGENT

Now what's happening? Your lights are going out?

ANTONIA

(very calm)

What do you mean, Officer?

AGENT

Don't you see? They're going down.

(worried)

It's getting dark.

ANTONIA

Getting dark? You're wrong about that. I can see clear as day.

(to Margherita)

Can't you?

MARGHERITA

(sotto voce)

They shut off your lights.

ANTONIA

(to Agent)

We can see just fine. Maybe your eyesight's going.

MARGHERITA

(closer to Antonia, sotto voce)

They turned off your electricity.

ANTONIA

(sotto voce)

Shut. Up.

AGENT

Quit fooling around. Where's your circuit breaker?

ANTONIA

(moves assuredly, though dark)

Right here—can't you see it? Wait, let me do it.

(SOUND of on-off clicking)

See—now it's off, now it's on. Sweet Jesus, it's bright in here. Can't you see?

AGENT

No, I can't see.

ANTONIA

Oh my God—he's been struck blind.

MARGHERITA

Blind—and so young.

ANTONIA

It's the curse. God is punishing you—ohh, poor thing.

AGENT

Cut it out. Open your window—I wanna look outside.

ANTONIA

The window is open.

MARGHERITA

Yes, the window's open. You can't see it?

ANTONIA

Come and look.

(grabs Agent by arm)

Here—this way.

(places chair in front of Agent)

Watch out for the chair.

AGENT STUMBLES INTO CHAIR.

AGENT

Owww! I bumped my leg.

ANTONIA

Watch where you're walking.

AGENT

How can I—if I can't see?

ANTONIA

Oh, he's already blind—poor man.

AGENT

(furious and frightened)

Who's blind?

ANTONIA

Come—here's the window.

(leads Agent to wardrobe, opens upper doors)

Careful now—the window's open. Here—touch the sill.

(Agent touches wardrobe frame gingerly)

Look out there—what a view. I always forget how beautiful it is. And it's all lit up—the festival lights for Saint Eulalia. See them?

AGENT

(desperate)

No, I don't see them! I can't see anything! Goddammit—what happened to me?! A match—light a match!

ANTONIA

(worried)

A match? I have something even better.

(moves to stove, grabs blowtorch)

Stay right there—don't move a muscle. You don't know your way around the place. You might hurt yourself. I'll bring it—one of those stove lighters.

(lights blowtorch)

Oooo, what a nice flame it makes.

AGENT

I don't see a flame.

MARGHERITA

It's exactly like the badge on your cap.

AGENT

Let me feel it.

ANTONIA

No way—you'll burn yourself.

AGENT

I said I wanna feel it! That's an order!

ANTONIA

Uh oh—an order. Okay.

ANTONIA ALLOWS AGENT TO TOUCH
BLOWTORCH.

AGENT
Aieeeeeee! My hand! My hand is burning! Oh, my God!
(blows on his hand)
Yow—that stings!

MARGHERITA
(grabs Agent's hand)
Wow, what a stink. Smells like a barbecue.

ANTONIA
(to Agent)
There, you see? And all because you didn't believe me.

AGENT
(desperate, crying)
So—I'm really blind? I'm blind!

ANTONIA
We've only been saying that for the last hour. Don't cry. Come on—man up. Stop crying—you'll disgrace the force. At the end of the day—what happened? Nothing. You went a little blind.

AGENT
I wanna get out of here!
(increased desperation)
I wanna go home—to my superior officers!

ANTONIA
Hold it, hold it. I'll take you to the door. I can't take you downstairs. My soup is on the stove. Here we are—here's the door.
(opens large door of wardrobe)
See ya.

AGENT BOLTS MADLY INTO WARDROBE,
BOUNCES OFF BACK WALL, STAGGERS OUT,
FALLS TO FLOOR.

AGENT
Oww!

MARGHERITA
He slammed his head.

AGENT

(barely raises head)

Ow, sucker-punched. Who did it?

ANTONIA

(desperately improvising)

The baby. Saint Eulalia's baby tapped your forehead with his itty-bitty hand.

AGENT

Itty-bitty hand make big boo-boo.

AGENT COLLAPSES UNCONSCIOUS.

ANTONIA

Officer! Officer! Dammit—he passed out.

ANTONIA KNEELS BESIDE AGENT.

MARGHERITA

He could be dead.

ANTONIA

Ever the optimist. Who's dead? Get me the flashlight—there, on the counter.

(gropes in dark, retrieves flashlight)

No, he's not dead. He's just a little under the weather. He'll be fine. He's breathing.

MARGHERITA

He's dead! He's dead! He's not breathing!

ANTONIA

(ear to Agent's chest)

Trust me—he's breathing, he's breathing.

(alarmed)

He's not breathing—not even a heartbeat.

MARGHERITA

Oh, God—we killed a cop.

ANTONIA

Okay—maybe I overdid it a little. What do we do now?

MARGHERITA

What do you mean—we? This is not my problem. It's all your doing. Sorry, but I'm going home. My keys—where'd I put my keys?

ANTONIA

Some friend—you leave me flapping in the wind. Oh, the power of solidarity.

MARGHERITA

(finds ring of keys on table)

Oh, here they are. But here's another set in my pocket. Two sets of keys. But these are my husband's. He must've been here looking for me and left them here. Antonia, don't you get it?

ANTONIA

(shouting)

Why the hell should I care? I got a dead cop here—and you're talking about keys.

MARGHERITA

Think about it. My husband was here with your husband—who must've spilled the beans about me being pregnant. What am I supposed to tell him now? I can't make up stuff on the fly like you.

ANTONIA

(dawning on her)

I'm freaking out! It's the first time I ever killed anybody. I'm so stressed.

(crying, talking to unconscious Agent)

Officer, don't be like that. Let's bury the hatchet. You just got sucker-punched by a door. Officer? He's coming to.

(raises Agent's arm, lets it drop like a stone)

This is a dead man.

MARGHERITA

See what happens when you make fun of miracles.

ANTONIA

(attempts grotesque CPR on Agent)

He was the one making fun. I even warned him—don't mess with the curse. Saint Eulalia's got some serious powers.

MARGHERITA

Now what are you doing?

ANTONIA

CPR.

MARGHERITA

Where'd you get that from? That's not how they do it now. You gotta do mouth-to-mouth—like for drowned people.

ANTONIA

You trying to tell me I gotta make out with a cop? That's against my politics. And if Giovanni ever found out—no, I'm not kissing him.

(pause)

Anyway, Margherita—since you're still here—you kiss him.

MARGHERITA

Not me! Yuck!

ANTONIA

Don't get an attitude. If you kiss a cop, it's like—don't ask, don't tell.

MARGHERITA

He'd be better off with an oxygen tank.

ANTONIA

(thinking a moment)

I have one! It's for the welder. It runs on oxygen. There's hydrogen in one tank—and oxygen in the other. Come and help me. I'll close the hydrogen valve like this—then open the oxygen valve.

(manipulates valves)

Let's stay calm—like we're performing an operation. You'll see—once he gets some oxygen in him, he'll come around. In fact, he'll feel great—like he spent a month in the mountains.

MARGHERITA

Are you sure this'll work?

ANTONIA

Absolutely. I saw them do it on *House*.

ANTONIA KNEELS BESIDE AGENT, STICKS TUBE
IN HIS MOUTH.

MARGHERITA

Oooo—Dr House? The Gimp? He's hot.

ANTONIA

Watch—his lungs'll fill up with oxygen, and his chest'll swell up, then go down. Here we go. It's going up—he's starting to breath. Look how nice—it's swelling up. There we go. Now it'll go down.

MARGHERITA

Looks to me like it's just swelling up. Look—his tummy, too. Stop! He's gonna blow!

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA RUSH TO TURN OFF
DEMONIC CONTRAPTION.

MARGHERITA PULLS TUBE FROM AGENT'S
MOUTH.

ANTONIA

Dammit—I mixed up the tanks. I gave him hydrogen instead of oxygen. God—look at
that belly. I knocked up a Federal Agent.

BLACK OUT.

SCENE FIVE

STAGE CURTAIN IS CLOSED.

STAIRCASE AND DOORWAY REPRESENTING
HALLWAY OUTSIDE LUIGI'S APARTMENT ARE
BROUGHT ON STAGE.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI ENTER, STILL LADEN
WITH STOLEN SACKS.

GIOVANNI

We can't just hang out in the hallway for hours—like a couple of jerks. We already did
the scene change. Look, I'll try a few body slams to break down this door.

LUIGI

Didn't you see me bust my ass trying? You couldn't get through that with a bulldozer.
There's two deadbolts and a padlock.

GIOVANNI

What's with the fortress?

LUIGI

My wife had them put in. She's terrified of thieves.

GIOVANNI

So, now that a couple of real thieves need to get into the place, we're screwed. Stuck out
here like Dumb and Dumber. And you—dickhead! What kind of thief forgets his house
keys?

LUIGI

Cut the thief crap.

SOUND OF APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS HEARD
OFFSTAGE.

GIOVANNI

Jesus—somebody's coming.

LUIGI

Calm down—who could it be? Probably just a neighbor.

GIOVANNI

Neighbor? It's that Fed!

GIOVANNI FRANTICALLY HIDES SACKS.

UNDERTAKER

(offstage)

Pardon me—can I ask you a question?

GIOVANNI

Holy crap, it's him! We're toast!

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI BEGIN TO RUN OFF.

LUIGI

That's not him. Looks like him, but it's not him.

GIOVANNI

You're right—that's not the guy.

UNDERTAKER ENTERS, THE SAME ACTOR WHO
PLAYED THE FEDERAL AGENT AND THE HOUSING
POLICEMAN.

UNDERTAKER

I beg your pardon. I look like whom?

GIOVANNI

Yikes—he's a dead ringer for him. Plus, he's a spitting image of the Housing cop—
without his mustache.

(laughs)

Excuse me—I'm not laughing at you. I just feel like I'm in a play I saw when I was a kid.
One of those raggedy theatre troupes that didn't have enough actors—so, one actor
played all the different cop parts.

UNDERTAKER

Well, I'm certainly not a policeman.

GIOVANNI

Well—what are you?

UNDERTAKER

I'm the neighborhood Funeral Director.

GIOVANNI

Uh oh—touch wood.

(Giovanni and Luigi grab their own crotches)

Sorry—conditioned reflex.

UNDERTAKER

Please, think nothing of it. That's what everybody does—soon as they see me. I do it, too—every time I look in a mirror.

UNDERTAKER MIMES HOLDING UP A MIRROR
WHILE GRABBING HIS OWN CROTCH.

GIOVANNI

(laughing)

He's seeing himself in the mirror.

(to Undertaker)

You're okay.

UNDERTAKER

Thank you.

(starts up stairs, then hesitates)

By the way—would you happen to know if a gentleman named Sergio Prampolini lives here? I'm not sure if he's on the first floor, the second, the fourth—or, Heaven forbid, the top floor.

LUIGI

Relax—he lives on the third floor. But I'm sure he's not home. He's in the hospital. Poor guy's always sick—he's got a tough life.

UNDERTAKER

Well—he died.

GIOVANNI

Guess that solves all his problems.

UNDERTAKER

Unfortunately, his remains are no longer at the hospital. One of the family members took him away. I was hoping to find his body here—but if no one's home, I'll have to bring the casket back with me.

GIOVANNI

Listen, you can leave it at my place—if that’s okay. I live across the street.

LUIGI

Sure—we can leave a note on the Trampolinis’ door: “We have your father’s coffin. You can pick it up at your convenience.”

UNDERTAKER

Why, thank you. That’s very kind.

GIOVANNI

Would you mind if we loaded these sacks inside the coffin—since it’s raining? It’s perishable stuff—and it can’t get wet. The coffin has a lid, I hope.

UNDERTAKER

Oh, yes indeed—it’s up to code. It may be the welfare model, but it does come with a lid.

GIOVANNI

Gotta hand it to the city: They give you a coffin—and even throw in the lid.

UNDERTAKER

That mayor of ours thinks of everything.

GIOVANNI

Okay then—ready to go?

UNDERTAKER

Certainly—I’ll run ahead to unload the casket from the van.

UNDERTAKER EXITS.

GIOVANNI

I’d love to see if those cops have the guts to poke their noses inside a coffin.

GIOVANNI CARRIES THE DOORWAY OFFSTAGE,
THEN ENTERS.

LUIGI

(stunned)

Holy crap—the coffin bit. How’d you come up with that?

GIOVANNI

Reminded me of something that happened in Naples.

LUIGI

Naples?

GIOVANNI

Somewhere down south. Remember the stiff they found in a dumpster? Still fresh, all dressed up, holding a rosary—but no coffin in sight. Then they nailed a crime ring that goes around raiding the cold storage at the city morgue. They pull the dead poor people out of the city's pine boxes, trash the bodies in a dumpster, then sell the cheap coffins back to a different city down there. They make millions on hot coffins.

LUIGI

That's the same racket some banks are running.

GIOVANNI

Banks?

LUIGI

They buy up stocks, squeeze out all the value, then sell off the worthless shares. They don't steal stiff—they just stiff you.

GIOVANNI

Banks, graveyards—same thing.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI LOAD STOLEN SACKS ONTO STAIRCASE, THEN EXIT, TAKING STAIRCASE WITH THEM.

SCENE SIX

STAGE CURTAIN OPENS, REVEALING GIOVANNI AND ANTONIA'S APARTMENT.

AGENT STILL LIES UNCONSCIOUS ON FLOOR.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA ARE ONSTAGE.
ANTONIA FILLS HER "BELLY" WITH CANS AND
FOOD PACKAGES TAKEN FROM UNDER DAYBED.

MARGHERITA IS ENRAGED.

ANTONIA

Open the shutters, Margherita. I can't see a thing.

MARGHERITA

(opening shutters)

Wow, it's pouring. You know what—you are some kind of reckless, hare-brained lunatic. Damn! Here we are with a dead man in the house—and all you can think of is smuggling rice and macaroni.

ANTONIA

Just a few more trips. Anyway—what are we supposed to do? If he's dead, he's dead. And if he's alive, you'll see. Soon as he comes to, he'll make a high-speed pilgrimage to Saint Eulalia's shrine, get down on his knees, and give thanks for all his blessings. Sigh in his eyes, life in his body, and a baby in his belly.

MARGHERITA

Keep joking. See what that gets us.

ANTONIA

Couldn't possibly get us any worse than what we got in the last twenty-four hours. Come on—help me stand him up so we can get him out of here.

MARGHERITA

Out of here where?

ANTONIA

Into the wardrobe.

MARGHERITA

The wardrobe?

ANTONIA

Where else? Don't you watch those cop shows? They always put the dead body in the wardrobe. Give me a hand.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA TRY TO LIFT
AGENT. MUCH CLOWNISH BUMBLING ENSUES.
THEY FINALLY GET HIM INTO WARDROBE AND
CLOSE DOORS.

ANTONIA (CONT'D)

Be right back. I gotta pee before I bust. Do your belly bag—we still got two more trips, then we're done. Ugh—I'm ready to drop.

ANTONIA EXITS TO BATHROOM.

APARTMENT DOOR OPENS. LUIGI ENTERS,
PEEKING IN FIRST, WEARING UNDERTAKER'S CAP.

LUIGI

(whispering)

Hello? Anybody home? Officer?

MARGHERITA, FRIGHTENED AND EMBARRASSED,
HIDES STOLEN GOODS UNDER DAYBED.

MARGHERITA

Who's there? Luigi, is that you?

LUIGI

(embraces Margherita)

Margherita, sweetheart—finally. How are you? Let me look at you. No belly? The baby, how's the baby? *Where's* the baby? Did you lose it?

MARGHERITA

No, don't worry. Everything's fine.

LUIGI

Really? Everything? You're okay? Talk to me.

MARGHERITA

Later, later. It's better if Antonia tells you. She'll explain it all.

MARGHERITA HURRIEDLY EXITS TO OTHER
ROOM.

LUIGI

Why Antonia?

ASSISTANT UNDERTAKER

(offstage, to Luigi)

Ooof—this casket weighs a ton. Are we coming in, or not?

LUIGI

(crosses to door)

Sure, come on in. There's no cops, no nothing. Get out of that coffin, Giovanni. We gotta turn it sideways to get it through the door.

GIOVANNI

(offstage, stretching, yawning)

Too bad—it was so nice in there. I even took a nap.

GIOVANNI ENTERS, FOLLOWED BY
ASSISTANT UNDERTAKER.

LUIGI HELPS ASSISTANT UNDERTAKER CARRY IN
HUGE CASKET.

MARGHERITA

(offstage)

Antonia, Antonia! Come on out—and step on it.

ANTONIA

(offstage)

What's the problem? Dammit—can't a girl pee in peace?

GIOVANNI

They're back? Both of them?

LUIGI

Yeah, yeah—everything went fine. They're doing great.

GIOVANNI

That's a relief.

(to Assistant Undertaker)

Thanks for everything.

LUIGI

(to Assistant Undertaker)

See you around. Oh—your hat.

(hands him hat)

Thanks for that, too.

ASSISTANT UNDERTAKER

Hey, no sweat.

ASSISTANT UNDERTAKER EXITS.

GIOVANNI

So—how are we gonna disguise this coffin? I don't even have a doily to put on it.

LUIGI

Wait—I got an idea. Let's lock the door and keep them in there for awhile. Then we'll hide everything, shove the stuff under the bed—and stick the coffin in the wardrobe, standing up.

GIOVANNI

Great—lock 'em up.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI PULL SACKS FROM COFFIN,
STUFF THEM UNDER DAYBED.

MARGHERITA

(offstage)

Hey, Antonia—you finished? I gotta tell you something.

ANTONIA

(offstage)

Be right out. I gotta button up. I'm all undone here.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI HAVE PUT ALL THE SACKS
UNDER DAYBED.

GIOVANNI

Done—the bags are all there. Just shove them under more.

LUIGI

“Under” my ass. Look at this—we shoved them so hard on one side, they popped out the other side.

(stretches across daybed, head hanging over side)

Look at all this stuff. It didn't look like so much in the coffin. It, like, doubled in size.

GIOVANNI

It's an optical illusion—your head's upside-down, and your eyes are looking backwards.

LUIGI

Really? Who knew?

GIOVANNI

Look at your next paycheck that way. It'll double in size, too. Meanwhile, give me a hand with the coffin.

GIOVANNI AND LUIGI SHOVE EMPTY COFFIN INTO
WARDROBE, JUST HAPPENING TO FIT IT
PERFECTLY AROUND UNCONSCIOUS AGENT.

LUIGI

But—did I just see that Federal Agent? Inside the wardrobe?

GIOVANNI

The Fed?

(throws open wardrobe doors)

Enough with the optical illusions.

(tries unsuccessfully to close wardrobe doors)

Damn—now they won't close.

MARGHERITA

(offstage)

I've had it, Antonia. I'm going out there to wait—and you'll be sorry.

GIOVANNI

Go unlock the door. I can't move from here.

LUIGI RUSHES TO UNLOCK DOOR.

MARGHERITA ENTERS.

MARGHERITA

Luigi—you're all sweaty.

(sees Giovanni)

Oh, hi Giovanni.

GIOVANNI

Hey, what's up? Your husband told me everything's cool. So—did you have your baby, or not?

ANTONIA ENTERS, CHARGING IN.

ANTONIA

Now what do you have to tell me that's such an emergency?

ANTONIA SEES GIOVANNI AND LUIGI. SHE FREEZES, BENDS OVER, TRIES TO HIDE "BELLY," BACKS SLOWLY TOWARD HALL DOOR.

GIOVANNI'S SHOUT STOPS HER.

GIOVANNI

Antonia! Your baby bump!

(slides down wardrobe door till sitting on floor)

You got the transplant?

LUIGI

The transplant?

ANTONIA

Sort of.

GIOVANNI BEGINS TO MOVE AWAY FROM WARDROBE BUT QUICKLY MOVES BACK TO BLOCK DOORS.

GIOVANNI
Did they do a Caesarian?

ANTONIA
A little one.

GIOVANNI
How little?

ANTONIA
Uhh—you know. Just little enough.

LUIGI
(to Margherita)
Did you get a Caesarian, too?

MARGHERITA
Uhh—yeah—I mean—I don't know. Antonia, did I get a Caesarian?

LUIGI
Why you asking her? Don't you know?

ANTONIA
No—poor thing. They put her under. How could she know anything when she's knocked out?

GIOVANNI
What—you were wide awake during *your* operation?

GIOVANNI RISES, MOVES SLIGHTLY TOWARD ANTONIA.

WARDROBE DOOR BEGINS TO OPEN, CAUSING GIOVANNI TO CLUMSILY BUT SURREPTITIOUSLY TRY TO KEEP IT CLOSED.

ANTONIA
Stop it, stop it. Why you giving me the third degree?
(hurries to close wardrobe door)
And leave my wardrobe alone!
(attempts to kick wardrobe door closed)
You're not even man enough to ask if I'm okay—if we're dead or alive. After what we went through to keep you from worrying.
(Giovanni attempts to kick wardrobe closed)
Dragging ourselves from the hospital beds—like a couple of idiots, against doctors' orders.

HUGE HOWL FROM GIOVANNI, CAUSING ALL
OPEN DOORS TO SLAM SHUT.

AS ANTONIA SPEAKS, ALL DOORS, DRAWERS,
SHUTTERS, EVEN GARBAGE CAN LID BEGIN TO
OPEN, AS IF IN SYMPATHY.

MARGHERITA AND LUIGI LAUNCH INTO SURREAL
WALTZ, TRYING TO PUT EVERYTHING BACK IN
ORDER.

ANTONIA (CONT'D)

And what was I supposed to do—in your opinion? She was gonna lose the baby. I could
save it. What happened to solidarity? Don't you always say we have to stand together?
That a true Marxist—or at least a self-respecting liberal—should share the wealth?

GIOVANNI

Okay, you're right—I'm sorry. You did the right thing—I guess. No—definitely.

LUIGI

Thanks for what you did, Antonia. You're a wonderful woman.

GIOVANNI

Yes, you are—a wonderful woman.

LUIGI

(to Margherita)

You tell her, too—come on.

MARGHERITA

Yes, Antonia.

(meaningfully)

You are one amazing woman.

ANTONIA

Alright, enough. You're gonna make me cry.

GIOVANNI

Come here—get off your feet.

(sits Antonia on daybed)

The Caesarian and everything—maybe you should have stayed in the hospital.

ANTONIA

Oh, please—I never felt better. It's like it never happened.

GIOVANNI

Yeah, I can see it in your face. You look totally fine. And check out that nice, big belly.
(moved, caresses her "belly"; freezes)
Is it my imagination—or did it just go *vrrrrrr*? It's moving already.

LUIGI

It's moving? Please, Antonia—can I touch it, too?

MARGHERITA

No! You're not touching anything, Luigi.

LUIGI

Hey, it's my kid, too.

GIOVANNI

Right—we're like blood now.

MARGHERITA

(whining)

What—I don't count? I'm just some crumbled gorgonzola? Antonia gets all the attention—and what about me?

ANTONIA

She's right. Be nice to her, too. Stop fussing over me.
(Giovanni and Luigi back off)
I have to go out, anyway.

ANTONIA RISES, RUSHES TOWARD DOOR.

GIOVANNI

(blocks Antonia)

Out? Are you nuts? You're not going anywhere—except into a nice, warm bed. In fact, let's move the bed closer to the stove.

GIOVANNI BEGINS TO MOVE DAYBED.

ANTONIA & MARGHERITA & LUIGI

(rushing Giovanni)

Nooooooooo!

GIOVANNI

You're right. It's too dangerous to move it—that propane tank.

ANTONIA

(notices casket lid leaning against wall; freezes)

Giovanni—what's that?

GIOVANNI PLAYS FOR TIME, BABBLES TO THINK
OF PLAUSIBLE ANSWER.

GIOVANNI

The propane... why didn't you let me know... instead of making me worry... you
could've called.

ANTONIA

But Giovanni—what is that?

GIOVANNI

Just pick up a phone. Or ask a nurse to call. Get a message to a neighbor or—

ANTONIA

Excuse me—Giovanni. What is that thing?

GIOVANNI

(out of ideas)

“Hello. Listen, could you tell my husband everything's okay?”

ANTONIA

Hello—Giovanni. What is that brown, wooden thing?

GIOVANNI

“The baby's fine—and so are the two mothers.”

ANTONIA

Gio-van-ni!!!

GIOVANNI

(hurt)

Don't change the subject. You can't pick up a phone about your baby—but you can
babble on about that rotten piece of wood. I'll burn it. I don't even know why I bought
that—that—that—

ANTONIA

(exasperated)

That, that—what? Tell me what it is, Giovanni. It gives me the creeps. What does it
remind me of?

GIOVANNI

Don't you get it? Don't you watch TV? A three-year-old would know what it is. Those
TV ads—the one with the ocean, the waves, the crashing surf.

ANTONIA

What is it, Giovanni?

GIOVANNI

It's a surfboard—in the Baroque style. They sell them in the parking lot at the factory. Since we're furloughed till January, I figured we'd go to the beach in December—go surfing, watch the yacht races. Cheer for Italy in the Americas Cup. *Forza Italia!* Good times, huh?

(Antonia looks skeptical)

Okay, okay, I made that up. It's not a surfboard.

ANTONIA

(threatening)

Giovanni! Tell me what it is!

GIOVANNI

Can't a guy crack a joke? Where's your sense of humor? It's a cradle. When I told Luigi: "Hey, your wife's having a baby." First words out of his mouth were: "A cradle! A cradle!" He runs into the first cradle store he could find. "I want the top of the line." The sales clerk goes: "Check out this Japanese model. It's called Sweet Balance."

(Luigi and Giovanni rock casket lid)

See these four holes on the sides? You hang it from the ceiling on steel cables, put the baby on it, give it a tiny push—and it rocks for hours. Then, when the baby cries? Give it another push and—*vrrooom!* It kicks into a daredevil spin.

(mimes terrified baby)

That baby'll never cry again.

ANTONIA, UNCONVINCED, COLLAPSES ONTO
DAYBED.

GIOVANNI'S ELDERLY FATHER APPEARS AT
DOORWAY, THE SAME ALL-PURPOSE ACTOR SEEN
IN OTHER ROLES. HE WEARS WHITE-HAIRED WIG,
WRINKLES COVER HIS FACE.

FATHER

Pardon me, am I interrupting?

GIOVANNI

Hey, Pop. Nice to see you. Come on in.

ANTONIA

Hi, Pop.

GIOVANNI

Have you met my friends?

(to Margherita and Luigi)

This is my father.

FATHER

A pleasure.

LUIGI

Giovanni—ever notice how much your dad looks like the Fed and the Housing Cop?

GIOVANNI

Don't even go there. He's feeble-minded as it is.

FATHER

Don't start with me. I am not feeble-minded.

(hugs, kisses Margherita)

Antonia, my dear—how are you?

GIOVANNI

No, Pop. She's not Antonia.

(gestures to Antonia on daybed)

That's Antonia.

FATHER

It is?

ANTONIA

Yes, Pop—I'm Antonia.

FATHER

What are you doing in bed? Are you sick?

GIOVANNI

No, she has a child on the way.

FATHER

Really? On the way from where? And don't you worry. He'll show up.

(mistakes Luigi for child)

Oh, here he is now—and all grown up.

(to Luigi)

But you shouldn't keep your mother waiting.

GIOVANNI

Pop—he's my friend.

FATHER

Bravo! You should always be your son's friend.

(confused)

Your friend's son. Your father's friend. Your—

(recovers)

Whatever. I came to bring you a few things.

ANTONIA

(alarmed)

Oh, Pop. You didn't have to—

FATHER

No, wait—it's right outside in the hall.

(EXITS to hall, immediately ENTERS with huge sack)

Sometimes I feel like I'm having a senior moment. Here—

(drops sack on table)

I found this in my storage shed. It must be yours.

LUIGI

(looks in sack)

What's this? Butter? Flour? Canned tomatoes?

ANTONIA

I had nothing to do with it.

GIOVANNI

No, Pop. It can't be our stuff.

FATHER

It must be your stuff. I saw Antonia come out of the shed this morning.

GIOVANNI

(incredulous)

Antonia?

(furious)

Antonia!

ANTONIA

Stop saying my name. Antonia. Antonia. Antonia. Okay, fine—it's stuff I bought on sale.

GIOVANNI

At the supermarket?

ANTONIA

Yes—but it was half-off.

GIOVANNI

And the rest?

ANTONIA

Boosted.

GIOVANNI

Boosted? So now you're a thief?

ANTONIA

Yes!

LUIGI

(to Margherita)

You, too?

MARGHERITA

Yes—me, too.

ANTONIA

No, that's not true. She's lying. She wasn't involved. She was just backing me up.

GIOVANNI

(enraged)

This can't be happening. I'm losing my mind here.

LUIGI

Calm down, Giovanni. We're not the ones to talk about stolen goods.

GIOVANNI

We're not? Don't you get it? Our case is different. We're talking about somebody who robbed a store.

(to Antonia)

Shame on you!

ANTONIA

(exhausted with lying; deadly serious)

It's true. You're right. Shame on me. I'm dishonest, disgraceful. And worse—I've been poking your most sensitive spot—your daddy button. And I gotta say it: The baby's a lie, too. I made up the whole thing. Here, look—

(pulls packages from her "belly")

Here's what I've been hiding in my baby bump: pasta, rice, sugar.

LUIGI

What? You mean the baby? The transplant? The Caesarian?
(to Margherita)

Margherita?!

MARGHERITA

I was only being her backup—by filling my front up.

GIOVANNI

No—this is too much. You actually had me believing you got pregnant through a transplant.

FATHER

Oh, what a dummy. I almost forgot about the message.

ANTONIA

Let it go, Pop. Your messages are like a bad rash.

FATHER

This one's just a short note.

(pulls letter from pocket)

It says you're being evicted from your apartment.

GIOVANNI

Says who?

FATHER

The bank that gave you the loan. They accidentally sent the eviction notice to my house. It says you're three months behind in payments.

GIOVANNI

Get outta here. Must be a mistake. Let me see.

(takes letter)

Antonia. You've been paying every month—right?

ANTONIA

(on the spot)

Yeah—sure.

FATHER

Whatever—they're evicting the whole co-op. Since hardly anybody here's been paying a nickel for months now. Even the renters are paying only half the rent.

GIOVANNI

Who told you this?

FATHER

The co-op manager—going door-to-door, evicting people. What a charmer. He also told me they're tearing down these buildings—they've been condemned. What a lovely word—condemned. And they're putting up twin high-rises—six-hundred feet tall. Green buildings, covered in vines—hanging and cascading everywhere. Very dramatic, very high-end.

FAINT CLAMOR MIXED WITH SHOUTED
ORDERS HEARD OFFSTAGE.

LUIGI

(looking out window)

Check this out. There's some kind of police barricade down in the street.

GIOVANNI

(at window)

You're right—look at that. It's like a war zone—all those police vans.

FATHER

Sure—to cart away everybody's furniture and things—free of charge.

CLAMOR INCREASES OFFSTAGE: CRIES OF
WOMEN AND CHILDREN, AND MORE SHOUTED
ORDERS.

POLICEMAN

(offstage, from street)

Let's go—move it along. Pack up your belongings and move 'em out. Everything's gotta go.

GIOVANNI

Yikes—this eviction notice really is for us. God, Antonia—what is this? Talk to me!

ANTONIA

Don't shout. You'll scare the baby. Ooops—right. No more baby.

GIOVANNI

(reads from letter)

Says here we haven't paid in three months. You wanna explain this, Antonia? Let's hear it.

ANTONIA

Okay, it's true. I haven't paid the loan in three months. Or the electric. Or the gas—which, by the way, they turned off.

GIOVANNI

The gas *and* the electric? Why didn't you pay them?

ANTONIA

Because, since I got fired last year, I'm not bringing home a cent—and I'm scraping just to put lousy food on the table and make ends meet on your paycheck.

MARGHERITA

Luigi—I have something to tell you. We owe five months back rent.

LUIGI

Beautiful!

ANTONIA

Yeah, yeah—it's us women. We're all sorry-assed losers. Us and all the others in this building—and every other building. The whole lot of us.

GIOVANNI

This can't be happening! For God's sake—why didn't you tell me you didn't have enough money?

ANTONIA

Why? What would you have done? Hit up the Bank of Italy for a twenty-year loan to cover our last three payments?

GIOVANNI

No! I would've robbed them instead.

ANTONIA

(throws up hands; ironically)

Oh, no!

(mimes shooting double pistols)

It's Jesse James!

GIOVANNI

I'm gonna kill myself! You don't get it. We slave away like animals our whole lives—to own our own house, get through life, and leave something to our kids. Then—bam! We're fucked! Left with nothing—homeless!

ANTONIA

And whose fault might that be? Mine, of course—since I messed up the loan payments, and couldn't predict the soaring interest rates, and the banks becoming loan-shark thugs.

GIOVANNI

You knew I never wanted to get buried in loans and debt. Remember me screaming at you? Banks have a license to steal! Letting bankers handle your loan is like letting vampires run the blood bank.

FATHER

Okay, kiddies. Seeing as everything is hunky-dory, I'll just run along now. And remember—always look on the sunny side. I wish you all a lovely life—especially considering you're condemned.

FATHER EXITS.

GIOVANNI

(calls after Father)

Thanks for the good word!

POLICEMAN

(offstage, from street)

May I have your attention, please? Buildings, fifteen, three, and seventy-two—get ready. We'll be arriving shortly to begin the evacuation.

GIOVANNI

(to Antonia)

Know what burns me most about this whole scam? After we're kicked out on the street, we get to watch them auction off our apartment to the bank—who'll buy it at half the price we forked over.

LUIGI

Don't worry—there's no way it can end like this. There are laws—government regulations against all these fraudulent foreclosures. They have *ipso facto* authority.

GIOVANNI

What *ipso facto* authority would that be?

SEVERAL MOVING MEN ENTER, BEGIN TO
CART AWAY EVERYTHING IN SIGHT.

GIOVANNI, ANTONIA, LUIGI, MARGHERITA
WATCH INCREDULOUSLY.

LUIGI

The one you're always talking about—the democratic principles of our government. Christ—we're not some miserable mob of hopeless victims.

GIOVANNI

Of course, we're miserable victims—with no dignity. That's the deal. And I'll tell you something else, Antonia. Me and Luigi—we stole, too. It's all under the bed.

(goes to daybed, pulls out sacks)

Sacks full of sugar and flour.

ANTONIA

(amazed)

You stole?!

LUIGI

(helps Giovanni with sacks)

But here's what sent him over the edge—we're being laid off.

GIOVANNI

That was just the last straw—the one that broke the camel's back.

(to Antonia)

Look at all this stuff—and there's plenty more.

MOVERS CARRY COFFIN LID.

GIOVANNI GRABS LID FROM MOVERS.

GIOVANNI (CONT'D)

No! You're not taking this!

MOVER

We have orders to haul everything out of here.

GIOVANNI

(to Antonia)

You have to know the truth—this is not a cradle.

ANTONIA

(feigns surprise)

It's not?

GIOVANNI

No—it's the lid to a coffin.

(refers to wardrobe)

The coffin's in there. We used it to carry over the stuff—that was my idea.

GIOVANNI CROSSES TO WARDROBE.

ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA TRY TO STOP
GIOVANNI.

ANTONIA

No, stop! What are you doing?!

GIOVANNI PUSHES PAST ANTONIA AND MARGHERITA, RESTS COFFIN LID AGAINST SIDE OF WARDROBE.

GIOVANNI

What a man's gotta do. You have to know everything. Luigi—give me a hand.

LUIGI HELPS GIOVANNI PULL COFFIN FROM WARDROBE.

FEDERAL AGENT IS REVEALED, JUST AWAKENING.

GIOVANNI & LUIGI

The Fed!

AGENT

I can see!

(steps out of wardrobe)

I can see! Saint Eulalia's forgiven me! I'm exonerated!

(notices his swollen stomach)

My belly?! I'm pregnant! Oh, bless you, Saint Eulalia! And thank you! I'm gonna be a mommy!

(rushing off)

Eulalia be praised! Hallelujah!

AGENT EXITS.

GIOVANNI

What is this? Night of the living dead? A pregnant cop? Looks like our first line of defense was breached.

SHOTS AND SCREAMS HEARD FROM OFFSTAGE STREET.

ALL RUN TO WINDOW.

GIOVANNI (CONT'D)

Look—the women are going for the vans. They're taking back their stuff. The cops are charging the crowd.

LUIGI

And look at those kids up on the roof. They're throwing down roof tiles and bricks.

GIOVANNI

The cops are firing into the crowd.

MARGHERITA

It's a free-for-all—shooting all over the place. They're dropping paratroopers, too. It's urban warfare. Like that city near Naples—where they wanted to put a garbage dump in the middle of town.

ALL TAKE TURNS HURLING INSULTS OUT
WINDOW.

COMPANY

(alternating)

Murderers!

Bastards!

Goddamn sons of bitches!

Get the hell out of here!

GIOVANNI

(to Company)

The coffin! Let's throw it down there—drop it on their heads.

ANTONIA

(blocks Giovanni)

No! The cops are backing off—they're running away!

LUIGI

We saved the coffin!

GIOVANNI

(grabs newspapers, scans headlines)

Yes! We did it!

ANTONIA

Giovanni—what's got into you?

GIOVANNI

(refers to newspapers)

It's all right here—in *L'Unità!* *La Repubblica!* In every single paper! Front-page news! "Black Day for the Economy. Capitalism in Meltdown!" Finally—the left can shout: "We were right! We saw it coming!"

(elated)

We gotta celebrate! Dance in the streets! We won! Bull's-eye for Karl Marx!

UPSTAGE CURTAIN, DEPICTING PELLIZZA DA
VOLPEDO'S PAINTING, "THE FOURTH ESTATE,"
CLOSES BEHIND COMPANY.

GIOVANNI (CONT'D)

(serious tone)

Wait a minute—not so fast.

ANTONIA, MARGHERITA, LUIGI

What do you mean? Why not?

GIOVANNI

Capitalism's fallen alright.

(throws newspapers to floor)

And it's landed right on our heads. Now we're screwed.

LUIGI

Terrific—what good is being right if we wind up buried in shit?

GIOVANNI

By the way—did you happen to notice the painting right behind us? "The Fourth Estate."
A masterpiece by—

ANTONIA

The famous Pellizza da Volpedo—Nineteenth Century.

GIOVANNI

Right—but it's all about what it means! All those working people—laborers, farmers,
peasants, women—walking toward us. They *are* the Fourth Estate: The downtrodden, the
disenfranchised, the wage slaves.

LUIGI

The ones who always wind up paying. Their taxes are sucked right out of their wages—
no loopholes for them.

ANTONIA

It's the same in every economic crisis—every meltdown. Only now they call it a
tsunami—a tidal wave crashing in like ten tornadoes, destroying everything in its path.
First the banks, then the corporations, governments, political parties. But the ones always
hit first and hardest are the workers—and the people who scrimped and saved their whole
lives.

(crosses to Agent)

Mr Bank President—you are the president of the bank, right?

(Agent nods)

I've heard all my savings and investments are about to tank. Maybe I'm better off cashing out?

AGENT

Oh, please—don't panic. Those rumors are spread by alarmists, doomsayers, stock manipulators. Relax—your money is safe. The economy is solid. In fact, if I were you—

(turns to audience)

Or you—I'd go out and buy myself another fistful of stocks. You'll see. They'll rise like your grandmother's *panettone*. Blurrrup!

GIOVANNI

Then—Ffflllffft! Your money's gone. Pure confetti. Wheeee! But, hey! No problem. Like the Pope says—

(mock Papal tone)

Money is not what matters most. Money means nothing. Wealth is fleeting. All that matters is the Word—the Word of gold, uhh, I mean—God. The Word of God.

ANTONIA

The Word of God. Great—I'll take two kilos. I'm starving.

MARGHERITA

(looking at painting)

But wait—if we're being screwed over and over, why do all those Fourth Estate people keep marching toward us? Their minds all made up—so sure of themselves? So confident—so powerful?

ANTONIA

Maybe it's time to warn them. It's all over, guys. We're in meltdown.

MARGHERITA

Hold it—these people know plenty about disasters and economic meltdowns. They've been hanging tough for more than a century. It's in the songs they sing, their one dream—raising up the men, women, and children of the future.

ALL SING "*THE INTERNATIONALE*."

ALL

(singing)

Rise up, you wretched of creation!
Rise up, be free of hunger's chains!
For right explodes in thunderation!
And now's the time to end your pain!

GIOVANNI

(interrupting song)

Stop! Let's not go overboard with the patriotic grandstanding.

LUIGI

Grandstanding?! Take a good look. That crowd up there's our history. Paintings like that must be hanging in school halls for decades—slowly fading, getting dull.

GIOVANNI

And you can't just blame Father Time. Feels like the Fourth Estate lost its way—starting with our Constitution. It gives people the right to choose who represents them in Parliament. Whoever wins the election, leads the country.

ANTONIA

But the Constitution does not let the winner just fix the laws to suit himself.

MARGHERITA

Even the Prime Minister can't push laws through Parliament—trashing every conviction in every one of his trials—thanks to phony settlements and a string of bogus judgments—trumped up by him and the lawyers he planted in his administration.

GIOVANNI

We're drowning—how much more can we stand? We're the laughing stock of Europe. They look at us, nudge each other, and whisper: "Oh, those Italians—*Les Italiens!* A nation of depraved, pathetic sheep!

(laughs)

"They'll swallow anything—no matter how rotten.

(burps)

"Or how much it turns their stomachs."

OTHER PEOPLE JOIN COMPANY ONSTAGE.

ANTONIA

"And their Prime Minister gives the finger to judges he can't control—and threatens to kick them off the bench."

MARGHERITA

But to save Alitalia—and keep it in Italy's hands—Berlusconi had a brilliant idea: He sliced it up. He gave the government one measly sliver—buried in debt and nearly bankrupt. The big, fat, juicy piece—with a whole fleet of jets and sky-high profits—he dished out to his mob of tycoon cronies—all Italians. *Viva Italia!*

AGENT

Then he goes on TV, yelling: "Have no fear, Italians! Your miserable pennies are safe in the banks! And if the banks fail, the government will bail you out—with your own money!"

ANTONIA

And here we are—laid off, homeless, with no future.

GIOVANNI

That's why that painting up there—our great-great-grandparents—it's fading away. And little by little, we're in danger of fading, too. Whenever I'm near it, I feel it pulling at me, sucking me in.

ALL STEP BACKWARDS, SEEMING TO BLEND IN
WITH PAINTED BACKDROP.

LUIGI

We're all being sucked in—up to our necks.

MARGHERITA

Hell, we gotta get tough! Or we'll melt into that picture—like old, broken statues in a museum.

ANTONIA

(feeling crowded)

Move over a little.

MARGHERITA

Give me some room here.

LUIGI

I feel like I'm being crushed. God, what's happening—what's going on?

AGENT

I'm going blind again.

GIOVANNI

Is it my imagination—or am I getting stiff?

AGENT

Stop shoving!

ANTONIA

Give me some air!

LUIGI

Christ—what a crowd!

MARGHERITA

Is it getting dark in here? I feel all—flat.

LUIGI

I touch myself—but I don't feel anything.

It's so quiet.

MAN

I'm getting sleepy.

WOMAN

Shut up! Old relics can't speak!

GIOVANNI

MUSIC UP.

LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE TO BLACK.

END