

**Luigi Lunari**  
**SENATOR FOX**

A comedy in three acts about some respectable people

Translation by  
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**Characters:**

Vittorio Emanuele Fox, senatorial candidate

Bianca Maria, his wife

Maria Vittoria, their daughter

Giacomo Colombo, Fox's assistant

The Honorable Mr. Orsi

Mr. Aquila, Esquire, a lawyer

Father Gatti, parish priest

*The action takes place in the garden of the Fox family over the span of twenty-four hours from the evening of the Sunday elections to Monday evening following.*

**ACT ONE**

*The garden has to one side a veranda and to the other the villa itself with steps descending into a patio set apart from the bushes and grass. In the patio are pieces of garden furniture: some white metal armchairs, a chaise lounge, and a garden swing. A table stands in the middle of the area piled with papers, apparently serving as a fair-weather desk. It is evening but the summer sky is still clear.*

*(Stretched out on the fully reclined chaise lounge is Fox, his face covered with a newspaper. His assistant, Giacomo, busies himself at the table, checking and organizing papers. He is a young man in his late twenties, seeming healthy in mind and body and impeccably dressed as befits an assistant to an important man. Mr. Aquila enters. He is a man in his late fifties or early sixties, tall, thin, bird-like and sweaty from his climb up to the villa. His suit makes a pretentious statement of wealth.)*

AQUILA: Mr. Fox...?

GIACOMO: Shhh!

AQUILA: Sleeping?

GIACOMO: Resting.

AQUILA: (*Wiping his forehead.*) Ah, good! I just came to give him my compliments.

GIACOMO: I thought perhaps you had brought him the rail.

AQUILA: Rail?

GIACOMO: To ride him out of town, to yank him from his home, his town, and the issues that most matter to him, to throw him aside like an old rag or a squeezed out lemon.

AQUILA: Oh my dear fellow, to hear you talk, one would think he'd been exiled to Siberia. The good Mr. Fox is a candidate for the Senate. Our party commands sixty-five percent of the votes in this district, so our candidate *is* the senator.

GIACOMO: Mr. Aquila, you know very well the best way to get rid of a person is to promote him. It's as good as embalming him like a dead pharaoh.

AQUILA: A seat in the Senate is not some cushy meaningless position. And it certainly is not a tomb. It is an important post calling for a wide range of action at the very highest level...

GIACOMO: In his state of health?

AQUILA: (*After a pause.*) So it's true!

GIACOMO: What is?

AQUILA: That he is not well. You can tell me. I'm a friend.

GIACOMO: He has had...a little episode.

AQUILA: "A little episode" doesn't tell me anything. What do you mean, a headache?

GIACOMO: Well, a...dysfunction.

AQUILA: Argh! What, with his ankle? His prostate? What?

GIACOMO: Circulation.

AQUILA: Come on. "Circulation"? Well, is it varicose veins? The mumps?

GIACOMO: Heart.

AQUILA: (*At last.*) A heart attack? A heart attack! Why didn't say so in the first place? After all, I am a friend.

GIACOMO: Heart attack...is a loaded phrase. It implies the worst.

AQUILA: Well, I suppose it could be simply one of those episodes that happen at a certain age. Just last week, after the fourth public speech in a single day, I had to sit down and take a deep breath. A mini-stroke, it's a little warning. Forewarned is forearmed, they say. You take note, you put on the

brakes and while others rush on toward their fatal attacks, you outlive them all. That's the truth!

GIACOMO: Unfortunately, this is a little different.

AQUILA: Oh, I see. *(Pause.)* Mr. Colombo, may I speak frankly? You are young and bright. You have to think about your own future and what might happen one day should Fox...

GIACOMO: I have a career in politics.

AQUILA: Of course. But you know how it is if you get on the wrong bus. It takes a while to realize it's not going the right way and then it's not so easy to get off and find your way back.

GIACOMO: I'm not used to having a finger in different pies.

AQUILA: Well then, don't talk about making a career in politics. *(Pause.)* But what's so bad about what I said? I merely point out that, in the unhappy chance that Fox should leave us, you are going to have to think of yourself.

GIACOMO: The day that happens, I certainly will.

AQUILA: Suppose that I, on "that day," should require the services of an assistant who is efficient, organized, intelligent, competent and knowledgeable.... You do recognize, my dear Colombo, that I am describing you?

GIACOMO: Why not?

AQUILA: Ah, so, you say yes.

GIACOMO: I didn't say yes. I said "Why not?"

AQUILA: Exactly. Why not? Is there any reason to say no? No, none! So then, it's "Yes."

GIACOMO: All said and done, Mr. Aquila, what do I really know about you?

AQUILA: Ah well. As my wife says, there was a time when you asked for references before hiring a maid. Nowadays you're the one who has to give references. Very well, I admit that I do not have the power Fox has: I am not in control of the Party, I don't have a hand in zoning decisions, I am not involved in monitoring savings banks, I have no say over the importation of meats, I have nothing to do with the exchange rate. Nevertheless, I do have my own territories.

GIACOMO: For example?

AQUILA: *(Slyly rebuking him.)* Hey, hey!

GIACOMO: Sooner or later, you'll have to give me your references.

AQUILA: *(Confidentially and with pride.)* Service stations.

GIACOMO: *(With admiration.)* Ah! These days oil is sacred and almighty. *(He offers his hand.)* Also depots?

AQUILA: Depots, too! *(He shakes hands and then takes him aside.)* What I need is an official appointment, see? I must be named his successor...here, before he goes – whether to the Senate or “up there.” At all costs, we mustn’t let the Party fall into the hands of manipulators like the Honorable Grillo or Professor Vespa. They don’t care a jot for the public interest, only their own personal gain. May I count on your support?

GIACOMO: My support doesn’t mean much. It’s his that counts.

AQUILA: Well then, what do you advise?

GIACOMO: In stage plays, what do they do to ensure an inheritance from an old uncle? Flattery, deference, gifts...

AQUILA: Yes?

GIACOMO: You want to have? Then give. Get him interested in a thin slice of your domain. Make him a partner in your territory. It wouldn’t have to be for long and you’ll find it a very good investment.

*(There is a pause. They shake hands again to seal their pact. Aquila is pleased and goes to the sleeping figure on the chaise lounge. He stands there like a hunter standing over a fallen beast, announcing:)*

AQUILA: Senator Fox!

FOX: *(Waking slowly as if emerging from a great depth, he speaks with a weak voice.)* Who’s calling me?

AQUILA: *(Speaking loudly as if to someone who is semiconscious.)* It’s me, dear friend, me: Aquila!

FOX: Aquila?

AQUILA: Yes, yes! Aquila, Esquire, the lawyer, right? Don’t you recognize me?

FOX: Aquila?

AQUILA: How are you, dear friend? Are you well? Eh?

FOX: *(Weakly.)* Fine, Fine. I’m just fine, thanks. Why do you ask?

AQUILA: Because I take your health very much to heart.

*(FOX tries to get to his feet, but he staggers and Aquila runs to give him a little support.)*

AQUILA: You must take care, now.

FOX: I’m fine, just fine!

AQUILA: Right, right. But you know what they say: “One can never be too careful.” Listen, I came to talk with you about a certain matter.

GIACOMO: Understand, you must not tire him.

AQUILA: Yes, I’ll be quick. *(He pulls up a chair next to Fox’s chaise and talks in a measured and distinct manner as if speaking to someone barely able to understand.)* Now, my dear friend, you are aware, I think, that I am charged with the issuing of permits for the operation of gas stations

FOX: Gasoline?

AQUILA: I take it very seriously even though my name is not officially made known. As I always say, it is the public interest that matters.

FOX: The public interest. So I have heard.

AQUILA: Strange as it may seem, this little business of mine has made me many enemies

FOX: Enemies?

AQUILA: Oh yes: the Honorable Mr. Grillo and Professor Vespa, for example...people who are after a piece of the pie just to promote their own dirty business. Now, I often thought that if you were to work alongside me, always putting the public interest first of course...

FOX: *(Still appearing weak and distracted.)* Why, thank you! How splendid! Gas stations? Yes, that would interest me very much. But shortly I am off to Rome...

AQUILA: Oh, I just need you to authorize the use of your name.

FOX: What an unusual gesture and so generous! Yes. I don't know how I could return the favor.

AQUILA: Not to worry. We'll think about that later. I just wanted to know if this would interest you. We'll discuss details later at your convenience, and -- most of all, dear friend -- when you've regained your health. *(He rises and turns to Giacomo.)* Now, it's up to you. We'll accomplish great things together. Setting up distribution districts with more service stations -- that could take us to the top. *(He is on his way out; then, turning once more to Fox.)* Farewell, my dear good friend. See you soon. *(He is gone.)*

FOX: *(He springs to his feet, fit and strong.)* What an idiot! *(To Giacomo who has returned to his papers.)* A whiskey, please! Oh, "My dear friend, it's me, don't you recognize me?" Imbecile! They all take me for a dead man. So not wanting to waste time waiting for my funeral...the Senate. That's another cemetery; in Rome, far away, giving me all the honors and getting me out of their hair...like termites swarming around the dead queen to eat her up.

GIACOMO: Yes, but isn't it nice that each one pays his little tribute?

FOX: Issuing service station permits, eh? Very nice, especially considering his shady dealings with the refineries.

GIACOMO: We'll have him describe those next time he shows up. The Honorable Mr. Grillo telephoned. It seems his territories are sugar production and transactions with credit bureaus.

FOX: Crumbs from the table! He can do a lot more for us.

GIACOMO: We'll make him chirp for his supper!

*(Fox has taken up a spring-loaded chest expander and begins his exercises.)*

GIACOMO: I don't think it's the right time for that.

FOX: I'm feeling fine now. It's been three months.

GIACOMO: Exactly! *Only* three months.

FOX: *(Pause.)* Tell me something, my dear Colombo. For six years you have been my assistant, my right hand man, we might even say my alter ego. You've learned a thing or two. So...I have no illusions about this: Just like everyone else, you are waiting for my departure so you can pick up whatever crumbs fall from my table. But remember what I taught you, that you have to abandon ship before...

GIACOMO: ...before it gets sucked into the whirlpool.

FOX: What makes you think this isn't the moment to abandon ship?

GIACOMO: My sixth sense that tells me to wait a while.

FOX: Then, so long as I still find you here, I have nothing to worry about.

GIACOMO: Politically, yes. *(He reaches over and takes the chest expander from Fox.)* But in the matter of coronaries, it's the doctor who calls the shots. Tennis up to age fifty, golf up to sixty and after that only bridge.

FOX: Oh, for heaven's sake. That's the only sport where you can't bluff! Thanks, but no thanks.

GIACOMO: *(He is back at the table.)* I've made a few notes for your article for the *Christian Family* magazine.

FOX: Should we go over them together?

GIACOMO: The truth is that I have an engagement this evening. I mentioned it before, remember? See? It's here in the appointment book.

FOX: *(A little suspicious, despite himself.)* A meeting? Politics?

GIACOMO: Not at all.

FOX: Ah, I see. That's as it should be. Every once in a while, Colombo, I forget that you are just thirty.

GIACOMO: Twenty-nine.

FOX: Go ahead. Enjoy yourself. But remember that the art of politics requires absolute dedication. I am not saying that you must do without women, but remember they can be an albatross – a sweet albatross, but an albatross just the same. Forgive me. I may make you late.

GIACOMO: Your wife asked me to let her know when we finished here.

FOX: Go ahead and tell her.

GIACOMO: I wish you a good evening, "Senator" Fox!

*(He exits into the house. After a moment Bianca Maria enters. She is sweet, meek, and thoroughly respectable. She is carrying a knitting basket and a violin case. Fox goes to meet her.)*

FOX: My dear!

BIANCA: My dear!

*(He kisses her hands and takes her to her favorite chair.)*

BIANCA: Have you finished your work, my love?

FOX: Almost, my treasure.

BIANCA: *(A gentle protest.)* You work all the time.

FOX: Work ennobles a man.

BIANCA: My love!

FOX: My treasure! And how is our baby?

BIANCA: *(Timid and hesitant.)* She has gone out.

FOX: Gone out?! What do you mean, gone out? All by herself? In the evening?

BIANCA: She's with friends, some of the girls from school.

FOX: But where have they gone? And just who are they? Who? And why? When will she be back?

BIANCA: She'll be back early. She promised. You know what a good little girl she is. If she promises something, you can rest easy. Besides, things now aren't the way they were in our day, dearest. We have to understand that.

FOX: Oh, I understand that, but I don't like it. My little girl...!

BIANCA: *(Shaking her finger at him and speaking in a girlish sing-song voice.)* Ah, Daddy is jealous! Daddy is jealous!

FOX: *(He smiles and ducks his head to parry the charge, not willing to give credence to the absurdity of the accusation, but then also pleased with it.)*

How pleasant it is to be out here in the evening.

BIANCA: My love!

FOX: My treasure!

BIANCA: Would you like me to play something?

FOX: If you like.

BIANCA: No, no: it's if *you* like.

FOX: You know I always enjoy it.

BIANCA: My love!

FOX: My treasure!

BIANCA: *(She has taken her violin out of its case and now plays Brahms' lullaby with feeling. After a short while she stops.)* Are you sleeping?

FOX: Heavens no, I'm listening!

*(She begins to play again.)*

FOX: And yet, you know what I think sometimes? Why don't you work on another piece, now that our little girl is grown up and you have some free time? Brahms' lullaby is lovely, but I think we'd enjoy alternating it with

something else. (*She does not respond as she is so caught up in her playing. She goes on until she comes to an abrupt sour note.*)

FOX: Ah, Ah! That's where you always foul up.

BIANCA: (*Whimpering like a child.*) You're right, you're right! That was flat. Flat! How awful! (*She tries the sequence two or three more times, then she sadly puts the violin down.*) Even on a pleasant evening, it comes out sour!

FOX: You aren't going to play anymore?

BIANCA: (*Pouting.*) No!

FOX: Come, come. Don't get discouraged. Keep at it a little at a time and you'll learn it. (*He kisses her on the forehead.*)

BIANCA: (*All recovered.*) My love!

FOX: My treasure! (*He sits at the table. She takes out her knitting.*)

BIANCA: What's that you're doing?

FOX: An article for *The Christian Family* on the decay of morals in our society.

BIANCA: How pleasant it is sitting out here in the evening. Why don't you read some of it to me?

FOX: Very well. Listen to this. "Why do we seek to abolish divorce and abortion in our effort to re-establish a strict morality in the private lives of our citizens? We have a very good reason. Just as the presence of anti-cancer drugs points to the existence of the disease, so divorce and abortion indicate an infection afflicting the institution of the family. Would you consider anyone foolish for desiring a cure for cancer? Cancer means the destruction of the body and in the same way divorce and abortion represent the decay of morality, and that leads to prostitution, drug addiction, liberalism, violence, pornography and homosexuality." Well, what do you think of that? (*He awaits her approbation.*)

BIANCA: Do you believe that?

FOX: (*Astonished.*) But, dearest...

BIANCA: It's all beautifully written, but I was thinking about the homosexuals. Do you really think their divorce rate is high?

FOX: Bianca Maria! Such words passing your lips!

BIANCA: Forgive me, dearest. Let me explain. Just today I was reading in Berlusconi's newspaper that research has revealed that "those people" are generally more devoted, faithful and constant than straight people.

FOX: Bianca Maria!

BIANCA: And then, I got to thinking. Suppose two homosexuals divorced in order to marry people of the opposite sex. Mightn't that be a good thing? It would put things back the way they should be, wouldn't it?

FOX: Bianca Maria, I am surprised at you! How can you allow such words to pass your lips?

BIANCA: You brought up the subject, my love.

FOX: Well, yes, my treasure. But you were just supposed to listen. I thought there were certain words you did not even know. And I am shocked at Berlusconi!

BIANCA: (*Quiet. She brings the matter to a close.*) I'm sorry, darling. (*Pause. Fox goes back to work, but now a little ill at ease. She knits and hums the tune of Brahms' lullaby.*)

BIANCA: Do you think diamond shapes in variations of green and blue would look good on this sweater for Maria Vittoria?

FOX: What? Oh, yes, I suppose.

BIANCA: I'd like to make it with a narrow waist. She could put it on after skiing with a long sleeve shirt in yellow and brown. A bit unusual, don't you think?

FOX: What? Oh, sure.

BIANCA: (*Pause.*) So you worry how I might know certain words! But to show you how the world changes, my love, tell me if I would ever have thought of putting blue and green together when we were first married.

FOX: What?

BIANCA: I was saying, if you want to see how our values are up for grabs and never really certain, just ask yourself, would I have put green and blue together back when we married?

FOX: I would hope not.

BIANCA: Exactly! "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*"

FOX: "*Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace.*"

BIANCA: "*Che sarà, sarà, whatever will be, will be*"

FOX: (*While still writing.*) "*Four score and ten years ago...*"

BIANCA: "*Thus doth time make fools of us all.*"

FOX: "*Und so weider,*" as the Germans say, (*He suddenly stops writing and puts down his pen. He changes position as if ready to launch into another subject.*) Anyway, my darling, I can tell you one thing. If I did not have you and the child and this house... I am not sure I could resist the sordidness of the world out there. It's like quicksand. But here I have everything that I hold dear. I would wish these walls could block out the rest of the world leaving this house an oasis, like a glass dome protecting you and the child from everything that is base, ugly and squalid in life. Whenever I leave this house, go out into the streets, pass a newsstand or open a newspaper, see those vulgar and nasty images, read those news stories about disorder, violence, and crazy, absurd riots, I get so upset all I

want is to run here and close the doors and windows to protect you and the child. I would your lives could be pure poetry, serene and calm. I'd rather you knew nothing about murderers, thieves, adulterers, workers, or poor people ...!

BIANCA: *(She is moved.)* Dearest, That is the most beautiful declaration of love that a man could possibly make to his wife. *(Pause.)* Would you like me to try the Brahms lullaby again?

FOX: No thanks. I don't want you to tire yourself.

BIANCA: You know very well that I can't stand doing nothing.

FOX: Unfortunately I have to get back to work. *(But he can't. He stops, holding his pen in mid-air. He is anxious.)* I can't stop thinking about the child, out in the evening, alone. I don't like it.

BIANCA: Aha! Daddy's gotten jealous. Daddy's jealous!

FOX: I wouldn't want her to start...you know...with some sweetheart...

BIANCA: It has to happen sooner or later.

FOX: Yes, but not before you've had a talk with her.

BIANCA: What about?

FOX: Come, come, you know what about. As her mother you must have something to say to your daughter when she starts going out on dates?

BIANCA: You think the time has come?

FOX: I don't know. Once upon a time a mother would take her daughter aside on the eve of the wedding. But now it seems even elementary schoolgirls need to know these things.

BIANCA: *(She giggles in embarrassment.)* Oh my! I wouldn't know how to begin...

*(We hear a bell signaling the front door opening, and then someone whistling a three note signal.)*

FOX: Who's that?

BIANCA: It's the child. She's home already, see? She said she would get home early, and she did.

FOX: Good.

*(Fox takes up his pen again. We hear Maria's voice call out)*

MARIA: Father? ...Mother? *(She whistles again.)*

BIANCA: *(She makes coy call.)* Yoohoo!! Out here!

*(Enter Maria. She is a beautiful, well-dressed woman in her mid twenties. She carries herself well and gives an impression very different than we might have gathered from the parents' discussion.)*

MARIA: Why are you still out here in the garden?

BIANCA: Oh, it's so nice here in the evening.

FOX: *(Pretending to be annoyed.)* You don't say hello?

MARIA: *(She goes to him and kisses him.)* Hello, Father. *(She does the same to Bianca.)* Hello, Mama. *(She takes her place with some formality as if about to make an announcement.)* Father, Mother, I have to talk with you. *(The parents look at her in some surprise.)*

MARIA: I want to get married.

*(Both pen and knitting needles fall to the ground.)*

FOX: Excuse me?

MARIA: I said, I want to get married.

FOX: *(After a pause.)* But...Maria Vittoria, getting married requires... *(He is at a loss for words.)* ...requires two people.

MARIA: Of course, Father. There are two of us.

FOX: *(Another pause.)* Just now your mother and I were speaking about this very subject. It seems the moment has arrived for...

*(Bianca rises and moves off.)*

Where are you going?

BIANCA: Well, I mean...if you two have to talk...

FOX: On the contrary, it is I who should leave you two to talk.

MARIA: Mama, why are you blushing? *(To Fox.)* What are we supposed to talk about?

FOX: *(Ill at ease, he decides to start with a long run at the subject.)* Well now, Maria Vittoria, matrimony, that is the union of two persons intent on living together for the rest of their lives, involves more than holding hands, gazing into one another's eyes, as you might read in the romance novels.

Nor is it just a matter of giving each other a little kiss on the cheek.

MARIA: Father, what are you going on about?

BIANCA: Listen to your father, Maria Vittoria.

MARIA: But Papa, I know all that. I know marriage is a serious matter. There are responsibilities involved. Problems may arise and we have to be ready to deal with them in a mature manner.

FOX: There's more to it than that, my child. Some aspects of married life are...personal, intimate.... Aspects you cannot possibly know about...certain factors in the relationship between a man and a woman that are called... *(He is overcome with the effort this calls for. He mops his brow or loosens his collar.)* that are called...sexual relations.

*(Bianca gasps)*

MARIA: *(Almost laughing.)* Papa, don't be ridiculous!

BIANCA: *(Melodramatic.)* No!...such a thing to say to your father!

FOX: *(Severe.)* Please, Bianca Maria.

MARIA: Papa, I sometimes think you forget I am twenty-four years old with a degree in botany.

BIANCA: (*Shaking.*) Botany, little girl, is altogether a different matter. There it's just pollen, pistils, corollas, and, really, the wind does all the work.

MARIA: Look, both of you, would you quit this nonsense and listen to me. I want talk with you about this. I love this boy, this man! He loves me and we want to get married.

FOX: (*Forcefully.*) Who is this person? What's his name? What does he do? Where does he work? Good God!

MARIA: (*Patiently.*) Papa, dear Papa, I'll tell you everything, of course. You'll talk to him yourself, and you can find out whatever you want to know. Then you can think it over. After all, we don't expect to get married tonight.

FOX: (*Sarcastic and bitter.*) Well, that's something, at any rate! Young people today, they know it all. They rush in and do things without a thought in their heads. I suppose we should be grateful you tell your parents anything at all.

MARIA: Why take that tone, Papa? Why should I bring this up if it weren't serious? Well, it is serious and I am here to ask you to accept it.

BIANCA: (*Weeping.*) Oh, my little girl, my little girl!

FOX: Please, Bianca Maria.

MARIA: I'd like an answer.

FOX: Now, Maria Vittoria...I knew we'd come to this some day, although I hadn't expected it this evening. You know you are everything to us. Our one desire is for your happiness. We want you to realize your full potential, all your hopes and dreams. So then, if this ...gentleman... is of good standing, if he is honest, healthy, and well educated, if he is morally sound...well, then, I see no reason why your mother and I would not accept your marrying. I say this even though we might have preferred, well, maybe not choosing your husband, as was once the custom... not altogether inappropriate, I might add... but at any rate, having the chance to follow this development more closely. (*He stops there, exhausted.*)

MARIA: Papa, he is all those things: healthy, well educated, honest, of good standing. There is one thing that might not please you, I suppose. His parents...

FOX: Divorced?

(*Bianca gasps.*)

MARIA: No. In fact his father is not in the picture.

FOX: He's an orphan?

MARIA: He might be. His mother is dead, but we don't know if his father is still alive..

FOX: What do you mean?

MARIA: He's the son of a John Doe.

BIANCA: The son of whom?

MARIA: Of a John Doe, Mamma; an unknown father.

*(A moment of shock.)*

FOX: Never!

MARIA: Papa...

FOX: Never!

MARIA: Papa, I beg you, think about it.

BIANCA: *(Whining.)* Little child, you studied with the nuns at school...

FOX: Bianca Maria, be quiet!

MARIA: Naturally, I want to obey you and make you both happy. But now that I am sure that I have found a man who suits me perfectly, I want you to really think about this. Don't dismiss it.

BIANCA: *(Trembling.)* My baby, just consider what Auntie Angela would say!

MARIA: I don't give a damn what Auntie Angela would say.

BIANCA: Such language, Maria Vittoria!

FOX: Bianca Maria, please be quiet! There's more at stake here than Auntie Angela's reaction, and that, dear daughter, is the fact that never in the history of our family...

MARIA: Papa, in all your speeches do you not proclaim yourself democratic, Christian and antifascist? Isn't that so?

FOX: Absolutely.

MARIA: Well then, explain to me, Papa, which of these three justifies denying me the right to marry a man whose intrinsic and plainly evident qualities make him fully worthy of me? Or maybe you would contend that he must be made to pay today for the faults of his parents years ago.

BIANCA: *(Astounded and indignant.)* Oh, listen to the young lady! What a glib comeback! And to think of the money we have spent on your education!

FOX: Bianca Maria, will you please shut up!?! Listen, my daughter: the principles involved are theoretical ones. And so they apply generally, not specifically. That means they are valid for the public at large more than for us specifically.

MARIA: In that case they apply to no one at all.

FOX: They carry a statistical application.

MARIA: Papa, I'm sorry, but if this is your last word, if nothing can change your mind...then I must disobey.

*(Bianca faints with no more than a sigh.)*

FOX: Bianca Maria!

MARIA: Good heavens, Mama, not now!

FOX: Help! Help!

GIACOMO: *(He enters and runs to Bianca.)* Let me handle this. *(He places Bianca on the chaise lounge and lightly slaps her cheeks.)*

FOX: Bianca Maria, say something! Anything!

BIANCA: *(Coming to.)* Oh, my daughter! My poor, lost daughter!

GIACOMO: There. I think things are all right now. *(He backs away.)*

FOX: How are you? Tell us, are you all right?

BIANCA: *(Very weak.)* Yes...yes... it's passed. I'll be fine.

FOX: Many thanks, Colombo. Please do excuse us, however: You see, we were discussing a family matter and... *(Giacomo does not move.)* Would you mind...?

*(Again Giacomo does not move. Maria goes to him and takes his arm.)*

MARIA: Papa...

*(A pause as the revelation sinks in.)*

FOX: Him?!

GIACOMO: Yes, me.

*(With a little groan, Bianca faints again.)*

GIACOMO: We love each other, Maria Vittoria and I...I want to marry her and make her happy.

BIANCA: *(She sees that no one took any notice of her, and she turns ferocious.)* You devil, you monster. You are a traitor, wicked and evil! You creep into our house like a snake slipping between the hearthstones to seduce our helpless child using God only knows what black arts and malevolent devices...

FOX: For the love of God, Bianca Maria, take it easy. Let's not lose our heads. Now then, where were we?

GIACOMO: *(From the top.)* We love each other, Maria Vittoria and I...I want to marry her and make her happy.

FOX: Ah, yes. And then?

GIACOMO: And then...well, that's it! Nothing else to say.

*(The two men are suddenly too embarrassed to speak.)*

MARIA: *(Intervening.)* Papa, Mamma, you have to say yes, say that you are happy for us. Shake Giacomo's hand, hug me and kiss me...

FOX: In short, give you our blessing.

BIANCA: So, your father was a John Doe! No one knows who he was.

GIACOMO: Yes.

BIANCA: And yet, knowing full well that your father is unknown, you dared come here and entice our little Maria Vittoria...

MARIA: Oooh! “Entice,” “black arts” and “malevolent devices”!  
Mamma, where do you pick up these words?

BIANCA: (*Becoming shrill.*) Never, never, never! Oh, you don’t know my sister, Angela. But you, Maria Vittoria, you do know her. You know Auntie Angela!

FOX: Bianca Maria, will you please just shut up? Maria Vittoria, take your mother into the house. I’ll talk with Colombo.

MARIA: (*She escorts her reluctant mother toward the house.*) Come on, Mamma. How are we going to settle anything if you carry on like a Greek tragedy?

(*The two women exit. There is a pause as the two men study each other.*)

FOX: So...here we are.

GIACOMO: Sir, I have told you my intention. And you do know me after all.

FOX: And you know me as well, and you must know how highly I value family. I cannot allow a shadow to fall across my family, not even the hint of a shadow. As for you, your situation – which admittedly is not your fault -- will not permit maintaining that respectability granted my daughter only by...

GIACOMO: Go on: “granted my daughter only by...”

FOX: ..only by an unblemished family name. Yes, exactly!

GIACOMO: An “unblemished name”. I thought so. Here we are at the turn of the third millennium, five centuries since the Council of Trent, two hundred years since the French Revolution, fifty years since the end of Fascism, ten years since the fall of Communism...

FOX: All right, Colombo! I know I am out of fashion. I am a conservative, even a reactionary, if you like. But I am convinced that family is our last bastion to defend civilization. All we hear about is divorce, abortion, free love, open marriages. If we do not stand up against these developments threatening the sanctity of the family, we will face catastrophic collapse.

GIACOMO: You amaze me. After working with you for years, I would have expected you to be more flexible.

FOX: In public affairs, in the outside world, but not within these walls.

GIACOMO: Suppose certain facts force you to compromise.

FOX: What do you mean by that?

GIACOMO: I mean that Maria Vittoria and I are resolved to marry. Have you taken that into account?

FOX: And you? Have you taken into account that Maria Vittoria will not get a penny from me if you do marry? Not only that, but our relationship will come to an end.

GIACOMO: And have you taken into account how many things I know about you?

FOX: And have you taken.... Oh, so it's blackmail, is it?

GIACOMO: Things such as your dealings with the State Television Network, your interference in movie rights, the problem of Dutch butter, the trade of armaments for iron ore, the prefabricated houses sent to some far flung province to silence a protest, the Swiss bank account, that vote against the Prime Minister's court appointment...

FOX: Hush!

GIACOMO: ...documented in the letter that you know very well. And what about the check you gave to the sugar refinery, or the insulated tubing for the local hospital, or the telegram sent to Iversen in Denmark...

FOX: Words.

GIACOMO: Words? Photocopies. (*He pats his briefcase.*)

FOX: You son of a bitch.

GIACOMO: You think so?

FOX: Sorry. (*He paces nervously.*) This conversation has taken a turn for the worse. May we put it back on friendly terms?

GIACOMO: I couldn't ask for anything better.

FOX: (*He clears his throat as if about to begin a speech.*) My dear Giacomo...I want you to know that...I hold you in high esteem. High esteem... and I might add much affection. I could be your father and in fact I have looked after your career as I would for my own son. I have done so with the same keen interest and anticipation as I would for a son, hoping for the happy outcome that I am sure is your destiny. (*He pauses here expecting an appropriate declaration from Giacomo.*)

GIACOMO: I thank you, sir, for these kind words that attest to your care for me. It is most flattering. I offer in exchange a similar sentiment, for my feelings toward you, if you will permit me to say so, are those of a son for his father. Having had the good fortune to work at your side...

FOX: All right, all right. That'll suffice. Now can we get down to brass tacks, as they say? We can explain ourselves openly and cordially.

So...your parents are unknown.

GIACOMO: Only my father. My mother raised me. She died when I was sixteen.

FOX: I am sorry to hear it. How difficult would it be to track down your father? I mean, could your birth have been the result of a momentary weakness on your mother's part, or was it one of those cases ...how should I say?...that make it difficult to single out the one responsible?

GIACOMO: (*Indignant.*) I'll have you know, Mr. Fox, that my mother belonged to a prominent family in our city, closely associated with the archbishop...

FOX: Yes, yes, please. I understand.

GIACOMO: Out of our family have come men of letters and illustrious philanthropists. But we fell on bad times due to some bad investments we made confident in the ultimate triumph of Fascist Italy. Still, even in the darkest hour, the family has maintained the honor of an unblemished name.

FOX: Well, perhaps not entirely unblemished.

GIACOMO: My mother has paid, Mr. Fox, she has paid dearly for that youthful indiscretion. She dedicated her life to me and to prayer. How well I remember her knitting me a sweater because we could not go to one of those boutiques where my legitimate cousins got theirs. She brought me up like a delicate hothouse flower, protecting me from the wind and rain, what she called the "evil of the world," a world that had betrayed her, for that man took advantage of her with a crude stratagem. Yes, that man – not I -- insinuated himself like a snake through the hearthstones of our home. She made sure that the "evil of the world" would never touch me. As a result, I grew up thinking I was living in an oasis of goodness. She never uttered a word against that dastardly coward who seduced her and then abandoned her, that scoundrel who disappeared into the crowds of the city.

FOX: You don't even know your father's name?

GIACOMO: No. My mother carried that secret to the grave.

FOX: So then, you...

GIACOMO: Yes, I could be seated at a table next to his in some restaurant without knowing it.

FOX: Well, my boy, why not go out and get yourself a father? Any father. It doesn't matter so long as he suits the purpose. There are foreign prostitutes, you know, whom the police threaten to send back to Africa or Asia or wherever, and they get around it by paying desperate old men on pensions to marry them.

GIACOMO: (*With disdain.*) Mr. Fox, it may be that I am officially registered under the name of Colombo, a name so often given to fatherless "discovered" children, but I want you to know that in my veins runs the blood of the Aironi of Savoy-Piedmont.

FOX: The Aironi?

GIACOMO: Don't tell me you never heard of them. If you went to the university in Turin...

FOX: Of course, of course. The Archbishop Aironi, back when he was a parish priest, was my spiritual father.

GIACOMO: My mother's uncle!

FOX: I often played tennis with Filippo Aironi at the Turinese Tennis Club

GIACOMO: My mother's second cousin.

FOX: And I was often in the Palazzo Aironi.

GIACOMO: Where my mother lived.

FOX: Nearly thirty years ago.

GIACOMO: My mother was little more than a child.

FOX: So, your mother...?

GIACOMO: The Countess Camilla Guendolina Cecilia of Savoy-Piedmont.

FOX: *(Clutching at his heart.)* Oh, my God!

GIACOMO: Are you all right? Another attack? Where are the pills?

*(Fox falls into a chair and Giacomo runs to the table, gets the pills and a glass of water, and brings them to Fox.)*

FOX: *(Quietly, almost to himself.)* Impossible!

GIACOMO: What was that? What is impossible? *(He takes the glass back to the table.)*

FOX: Proof. Some kind of evidence. Giacomo, didn't your mother leave some indication, some clue, something?!

GIACOMO: *(Rejoining Fox.)* Of what? Oh, you mean that scoundrel.

Well, yes, she did. Some little bauble, an insult really, he gave her as a memento of a trip to Monte Carlo. It's a cameo that I always carry with me just as a reminder. This is it.

*(But Fox has closed his eyes and does not look at the cameo that Giacomo is showing him. Giacomo stands there with his hand outstretched. Then he becomes suspicious. Suddenly he is struck with realization.)*

GIACOMO: NO!

*(Fox opens his eyes and slowly, gravely nods his head. Giacomo does not know what to do. He hesitates, and then makes to leave. He stops and passes his hand over his face. He searches his memory of plays and novels with similar situations that might suggest what to do or say.)*

GIACOMO: P-p-p-Papa!

FOX: Sssh! Sssh! Easy now. Let's not have any grand speeches. No big scenes. Just nothing. I understand now. That's how it is. It changes nothing. My esteem for you remains in tact. You deserve it for what you are, and for no other reason. This does not displease me; in fact I rather like it...another good reason for my respect. Of course, I don't believe in the call of blood, but his cannot change anything. So there we are.

*(Pause. Then Maria enters from the house.)*

MARIA: All right, Papa! Are you finished now?

FOX: *(He looks at her, then at Giacomo. Then he replies with a seriousness that gives new meaning to the statement.)* It's impossible, my daughter! Truly impossible!

*(Maria stands there bewildered. She looks at Giacomo and senses that he actually accepts the verdict. He withstands her stare briefly, then turns on his heel and flees into the house.)*

## ACT TWO

*The setting is the same, but now it is the following morning.*

*(Giacomo is alone, seated at the table writing with forced concentration.)*

GIACOMO: "My dear Mr. Fox..." No! "To the Distinguished Senator..." "Dear Papa..."

*(Maria appears on the veranda eating an apple. She watches Giacomo for a while, then, when only the apple core is left, she throws it with stinging force at him. He jumps to his feet and wads the paper into a ball – even though he has written nothing on it.)*

GIACOMO: You!

MARIA: Yes, it's me. Don't you have something to say to me?

GIACOMO: Should I have something to say?

MARIA: Oh, fine! Last night you cut me off without a word. This morning you don't show up. Papa won't talk. Mamma faints. So, he won you over you, did he? You buckled. Talk to me!

GIACOMO: *(Takes a long pause, and then very seriously:)* I am so sorry, Maria Vittoria.

MARIA: Don't pull that long face as if you were a suffering, holy martyr. Talk to me! Say something! Cat got your tongue? What happened? Did he blackmail you? *(He remains silent.)* What about your scheme? "All I have to do is show him the corner of a photocopy," you said. "Don't worry." And I, idiot that I am, I go off to the Institute of Botany to make photocopies to save you one hundred *lire* per copy.

GIACOMO: I paid you.

MARIA: No, darling. You still owe me four thousand *lire*

*(During the ensuing action, the two of them, almost automatically without thinking about it, engage in the process of making up the money owed: Giacomo gives her a five thousand lire note and gets one thousand in change.)*

MARIA: But it doesn't matter. Now I get it. You have more to gain working with Fox than marrying his daughter. Did you consider how you could make a move up just by marrying Mr. Aquila's daughter? ...that bitch!

GIACOMO: Maria Vittoria!

MARIA: Oh, stuff it, Giacomo Colombo! Now you listen to me. Don't think I haven't learned a few things from Father and even from you. Do you want to know what I did while I was making your photocopies?

GIACOMO: ?

MARIA: I made *my* photocopies. There is a manila folder at the Institute labeled "Carnivorous and Parasitical Plants." Inside there's enough to put you away for the rest of your life and your descendants as well!

GIACOMO: Oh, beautiful!

MARIA: Hah. Is that all? Don't try one of your moral speeches!

GIACOMO: Blackmail!

MARIA: Blackmail, you say. You fool! Why should I? Blackmail you into marrying me, after Father blackmailed you to keep you from marrying me? You think I'd want a worm like you? I tore your mask off and now I know all about you. Thank God I found out in time. No one could pay me enough to have you anywhere near me, not even for a single day. This is the end. *Finis!* Feel free to go on kissing Mr. Fox's boots – or should I say Senator Fox's boots. But beware! Don't you provoke me. Don't tempt me. Because sending you to jail will be such a joy, I can't wait! Do you hear?! I can't wait! *(She comes to a stop, unable to continue, and bursts into tears.)*

GIACOMO: *(He is embarrassed and moved to pity. He approaches her.)*  
Maria Vittoria!

MARIA: Leave me alone!

GIACOMO: Please calm down and listen to me. Maria Vittoria, listen. I cannot tell you the reason...

MARIA: What an idiot I am, bursting into tears! Damn it all to hell! Oh, Giacomo...Giacomo!

*(She throws herself into his arms. He holds her awkwardly. Fox enters on the veranda, supported in his weakness by the efforts of Father Gatti and the Honorable Mr. Orsi. Father Gatti is a little priest, almost in the literary mold, a modern version of the abbot of times gone by. The Honorable Mr. Orsi is a large blunderbuss of a man. When Fox comes to the top step and sees the two young people, he suddenly starts back. The others interpret this as a new moment of weakness or illness and so take extra pains to see him well supported)*

GATTI: *(Very solicitous.)* Careful now!

ORSI: Don't you worry! We're here to help you.

GATTI: Now watch the steps.

ORSI: One, two, three, four five ...and six.

GATTI: There we are!

FOX: Maria Vittoria, Mother has your orange juice ready for you.

*(She leaves without saying a word. Giacomo recovers himself. He goes back to the table and finds something to do.)*

GATTI: The great day has come!

ORSI: I already voted, you know: first to Holy Mass, then the voting booth and then here.

FOX: I'll vote a little later.

ORSI: We'll have the results this evening. But what do the results matter to us? For us it's in the bag.

GATTI: Right! In the bag!

ORSI: My dear Senator, I have been hearing alarming reports about your health, but I must say, you seem perfectly fine.

GATTI: Right! Perfectly fine! .

FOX: Thank you, Father.

GATTI: My son!

FOX: And yet I feel something inside has come... Well, I'm no longer a young man.

ORSI: Who is in this day and time? But what really counts is your spirit and your get-up-and-go. Your mind is so brilliant, your observations so keen, we have resolved to put a proposal to you.

GATTI: Let me tell you that it was Orsi himself, more than anyone else, who pressed the Party to make you their candidate for the Senate.

ORSI: Yes, it was I!

FOX: I do know that.

GATTI: Not that CPA, Mr. Grillo, nor that professor Vespa, nor that lawyer, Mr. Aquila...

ORSI: Connivers, all three of them.

GATTI: Right, well known connivers, all three! Out to pull the rug from under you. That's a fact!

ORSI: That's a fact!

GATTI: Right! A fact!

ORSI: But since Rome, by Jove, is the center for everything...

GATTI: Right! *Caput mundi!*

FOX: Yes, yes. Still, my concerns and my interests belong here. You both know that.

ORSI: Of course we know that. Everyone knows that. They call you the Don, the godfather.

GATTI: In an affectionate way, of course.

ORSI: But as things stand now, everything is in Rome, and everything comes from Rome. All the control rooms are there. That's where the decisions are made, the laws and the amendments, the corrections, even the exceptions. If one wants to re-pave the road between Verona and Padua, the decision does not come out of Verona or Padua, it comes out of Rome. It's in Rome where they let the contract. In Rome, they can quietly shift the decimal point making ten out of zero point one. It's all sleight of hand stuff, illegitimate even, but the results can be very good for the Party as well as our province. Your concerns and interests may be here, but you can tend to them so much better in Rome.

GATTI: Right! In Rome! When Peter left Rome and met Christ, it wasn't he who asked, "*Quo vadis, domine?*" It was Jesus who asked Peter, "*Quo vadis, dummy?* Rome is behind you. Turn around!"

*(He and Orsi laugh.)*

FOX: But you, Mr. Orsi, you weren't on the ballot. Why not? Rome no longer has any appeal for you?

ORSI: Would that I could run for office! But, you know, with the rumors about me flying about...

FOX: Rumors? What rumors?

ORSI: Oh heavens, surely you remember that tiresome business about remittances from emigrants?

*(Fox does not appear to remember it.)*

For many years, I busied myself with collecting *francs* from Italian workers in Switzerland and paying the equivalent in *lire* to their families here in Italy. I built up an entire organization for the cause, and called it "Casa Nostra." You know, "Our Home." It's a great service to our countrymen but is also incurs huge expenses. I only ask for the little difference that derives from the constant depreciation of the *lira* against the *franc*. That just covers my expenses and I don't ask for anything more. I take satisfaction from simply doing good works. So then, what happens? They castigate me. And for what? "Export of capital!" Not just "export of capital" but "*hidden* export of capital." What do they mean by "capital"? What capital? Face the facts, gentlemen: the paltry earnings of a poor workingman: you dare call that "capital"?

FOX: Multiplied by a thousand, two thousand or ten thousand, the paltry earnings could well become capital.

ORSI: Oh, well, yes, if you want to push the argument to the point of absurdity, then anything is possible. I refuse to stoop to that level. Why should I have to justify myself? Should I have to produce evidence of my

good behavior? I refuse to accept that there could be the least cause to doubt my honesty. For some time now I've wanted to ask you, my dear Fox, about some rumors about me that, if I am not mistaken, you started...

FOX: You had brought up the question of the zoning laws.

ORSI: Yes, but only because you had asked for an in-depth investigation of the Bank of Como...

FOX: I was obligated to respond to your request for an inquiry into illegal financing of the Pharmaceutical Union...

ORSI: Pharmaceutical Union? How do drugs come into this?

FOX: The same as the transit permits of the International Road Transport.

ORSI: Ah, no! I'm sorry, but really, none of that...

GATTI: Oh, brothers, brothers! My sons! No! Don't go on this way. For the love of Christ, what's the matter with you? Have we come to such a pass that...?

*(Fox puts his hand on his heart, closes his eyes for a moment, and breathes deeply.)*

GATTI: You see that? This is what happens when you allow the spirit of brotherhood to be subverted by personal, self-serving antagonism. You let this happen on this joyful day of triumph? Do you want to flip through old misunderstandings, pretty quarrels, nasty, insulting rumors? Or would you rather seek out new agreements that address the constantly changing conditions of our society? We must tap into those strong and eternal powers the Lord has granted us humans and use them for the sake of a brighter future. Peace, brothers. "*Et pax in terra hominibus bonae voluntatis.*" Now show your repentance.

*(Each of them brings his hands together in prayer, bowing his head. Meanwhile, Father Gatti proceeds.)*

The Honorable Mr. Orsi will remain here in our province and Senator Fox is going to Rome. The one can take care of local concerns and interests while the other can undertake major endeavors. The left hand can ignore what the right hand did in the past and now both hands can shake to confirm a fraternal bond. Shake hands as a sign of peace.

*(The two men shake hands. Father Gatti makes a gesture of blessing.)*

FOX: Gentlemen, I need friends. I am about to leave you...

ORSI: Oh, don't say that!

FOX: ...to go to Rome. To think that I will be leaving behind all those with whom we have woven such close bonds over the years (while keeping a sharp lookout for the public interest, of course) and to realize that they're being threatened from every quarter...

ORSI: Not by us, certainly. On the contrary, that's the reason we have come to you. You are wrong that you won't be able to look after your local concerns while in Rome, so much so that we – think of this! – came here to propose that you look after ours as well. That is, if this idea interests you.

FOX: Yes, dear friend, it would interest me, yes, immensely. But you see, I really know so little about your business affairs.

GATTI: That's why we're here: to explain it all to you.

FOX: I know vaguely that the National Initiative for Mothers and Infants...

ORSI: You mean the Home for Abandoned Children?

GATTI: An upright institution that has gathered more than three hundred innocent young people from all over Italy...

FOX: ...and taken the government's fifteen thousand *lire* every day for each child.

ORSI: You can't tell me that your daughter costs you less than fifteen thousand a day.

FOX: No. (*Pious.*) But I feed her, too.

GATTI: I can assure you, Mr. Fox, the food at the Home is ample and well prepared.

ORSI: Father Gatti is our spiritual father. Anyway, why overfeed them? To force them into an adult life of diets, counting calories, and worrying about every extra pound?

GATTI: Don't let us get lost in the details. The Home is in Rome where so many like it face closure because of demagogues in government. Now, what would help is for you to appoint someone – perhaps even yourself – to serve on the Board of Directors... someone who would be in contact with you in Rome.... Are you up to taking a short walk? .

FOX: Yes.

GATTI: Come along. I'll lay it all out for you.

(*He takes Fox by the arm and the two exit.*)

ORSI: (*With a gesture of impatience, he turns to Giacomo as if finally able to speak freely with him.*) Are you sure about this?

GIACOMO: With the pressures he is under, he won't live another two months. You saw that he can hardly stand up.

ORSI: Yes, but his nails and his tongue are as sharp as ever.

GIACOMO: I urge you not to tell anyone this, but he had an attack just last night.

ORSI: Ah! We followed your advice, you know. To review: we take him aside, we spend time with him, we offer him key posts, and also give him...

GIACOMO: Give and you shall receive.

ORSI: Yes, of course, well said. But the fact is that he hasn't slipped us anything under the table or awarded any opening to us. Suppose he croaks all of a sudden. I'd be left empty handed.

GIACOMO: I am here. And I assure you I know everything.

ORSI: *(After a pause.)* Does the Board of Directors of the Home for Abandoned Children interest you?

GIACOMO: Only as a side dish.

ORSI: Ah! What would interest you?

GIACOMO: I like banks.

*(Maria enters on the veranda and comes to stop, glaring at the two as if to force them to go off into the garden.)*

ORSI: I'm afraid I have very limited power when it comes to banks.

GIACOMO: You are too modest, Mr. Orsi. Suppose I told you a thing or two about "your" Catholic Bank of the Holy Spirit. Here, let's adjourn to the study.

ORSI: Would that be wise? The walls have ears, you know

GIACOMO: So do trees.

*(Orsi looks around at the trees, perplexed and confused. Then he follows Giacomo into the house. Maria now has the place to herself. She walks down into the garden carrying a book. After a moment Bianca follows her.)*

BIANCA: Why did you get up and leave like that. I was talking to you

MARIA: Mamma, I don't want to hear another word about this business.

*(She opens her book and plunges into it.)*

BIANCA: What are you doing?

MARIA: *(Annoyed.)* I'm reading. Can't you see?

BIANCA: Why do you take that tone?

MARIA: Because it's a stupid question. Obviously I am reading.

BIANCA: Not all that obviously. You're holding the book upside down.

*(Maria angrily turns the book around, then slams it shut and gives up the pretense.)*

BIANCA: You don't even know what I'm trying to tell you. I've thought this over last night. Yesterday I was taken by surprise. I was here with your father and my knitting and my violin, and I reacted as I felt I should. But last night, I could relax and think things over. I pretended to be asleep while your father read. That way I could reflect on your love story and how it was snuffed out and your life destroyed. And I asked myself if this was perhaps God's punishment for my sins.

MARIA: *(Interrupting and snorting.)* Your sins, Mamma!?! You're talking the language of melodrama again: my "life destroyed"! So now I should die

a spinster's early death because of that jerk?! Oh, Mamma, don't faint, please don't!

BIANCA: Please, let me have my say.

MARIA: I'm listening!

BIANCA: First I thought about your happiness, how it is more important than anything. Now I know this has been a heavy blow, but don't forget that all men are created equal. You don't have to be a bleeding heart liberal to recognize that. So, what happened is not really his fault. No one should be judged guilty for things that happened before he was born. I think there's something about that in the Gospels, somewhere. So, marry him and be happy.

MARIA: Mamma...

BIANCA: I know what you're going to say. It's about your father. Well, I thought about him, too. He's never been opposed to the concept of all men created equal, unless maybe on an economic basis. So he really can't have anything against Mr. Colombo. After all, he's known him for years. I know your father puts family above all else, but we can work through this. You see, respectability of the family depends first and foremost on appearances. That means all we need do is keep Mr. Colombo's situation absolutely secret, so that even your Aunt Angela would never know about it – not she nor anybody else.

MARIA: Mamma, this is hypocrisy pure and simple!

BIANCA: You dare call your own mother a hypocrite? (*Pause.*) And why "pure and simple"? It seems to me that it is reasonable, well thought out, and even clever. It's what the Jesuits call "honest simulation."

MARIA: Oh, for crying out loud, Mamma!

BIANCA: (*She has gone back to knitting and she tells this as if it were a fable.*) One time, when you were still a little too young to understand these things, your father put a long-time atheist named Gallina in as President of the Parochial Council. You must not confuse hypocrisy with the ability to mediate. I have never contradicted your father, Maria Vittoria, except one time soon after we were engaged. He made a grammatical mistake. He said something about "indexes." I corrected him saying the plural of "index" is "indices." I knew I was right and wouldn't let myself be intimidated. And now today he says "indices".... and "appendices" and "vortices" ... just as he should. You see, he's not quite so stubborn as he seems at first.

MARIA: What do you mean, "at first"? You talk as though I only met him yesterday.

BIANCA: But now that you are involved, Maria Vittoria, I have decided to talk this over with him. I'll throw into the balance my twenty-six years of

devotion and obedience. This time I won't give in. And you, you will marry the man and you'll both be happy.

MARIA: Oh, Mamma, where have you been reading such things? There's one thing you are not taking into account. I don't want him! He's a spineless creature, a filthy profiteer, an opportunist, a coward, a turncoat, a hypocrite, a jellyfish, a worm, a sanctimonious imposter! After what he has done, after the way he suddenly chickened out, how can you expect...

BIANCA: Dear, look me in the eye. Really, do you love him or don't you? *(Maria is suddenly silent.)* Well then, how can any of those details matter?

MARIA: *(With a gesture of impatience.)* Mamma, how could I possibly live with a man I despise?

BIANCA: Now it's my turn to ask, "Where have you been reading such things?"

MARIA: God in heaven, you talk about marriage like we were in a soap opera. "So long as there is love..."

BIANCA: And you young people, what have you done, with all your non-conformism and rebellious spirit? You put aside the word "love" and put "esteem" in its place. But I tell you, marriage is...

MARIA: ...is what?

BIANCA: I don't know.... Above all, it's... habit. Love, esteem, attraction may be the trigger, the initial nudge, that prompts – that's it -- prompts a person to marry. Marriage can be justified on much less. You don't need any great, compelling reason; you don't need passionate or deep feelings. You build up a marriage on little things, on the thousands of everyday experiences you share. It's much harder to put up with a husband with bad breath, or one who picks his nose or scatters cigarette ashes on the floor than one such as you described: a coward, a worm, or even a would-be killer. Great moments occur rarely in real life. Who knows how many would-be killers there are who never actually kill anyone? Meanwhile, bad breath is awful, Maria Vittoria, and if your husband drops ashes all over the floor, you'll be forever be bending over cleaning the carpets ... *(She sighs.)* Look, I married your father just when my own father died. Because...I didn't know whom to obey. In fact your father never asked me to marry him; he ordered me to.

MARIA: You didn't love him?

BIANCA: Oh God, how can I answer that? It was all so long ago.

MARIA: You must have respected ...admired him..!

BIANCA: No more than other available men that I didn't marry and never would have.. You have a strange notion of marriage, Maria Vittoria! I was used to obeying, like all women in those days, so I married the first man who

ordered me to do so; well, the first who did not have bad breath, or picked his nose, or dropped ashes on the floor. The rest came after. I said to myself, this is my husband and will be my husband for the rest of my life. I must obey him, he must look after me, I have to be kind and affectionate, and he must protect and respect me. Let's try to do our best playing the role that has been given us. It's really like playing a part in a play! If you ask me now what I think of your father, if I love him or admire him, it's a bit hard to answer. I'd have to dig below the surface of habit and think it over. But meanwhile, I go on playing my part. And he goes on playing *his*. He has never failed to provide for me, he respects me and protects me; he loves me and admires me. In a word, I am his wife and he is my husband.

MARIA: Mamma, that's terrible!

BIANCA: That's marriage, my dear. It would be terrible if it weren't also a play.

MARIA: You have managed to live all this time...

BIANCA: (*Interrupting.*) I lived the life I was brought up to live. And I have been very lucky. Make no mistake about it: the marriage your father and I share is perfectly successful. (*Pause.*) So you mustn't worry about your future. Everything will fall into place. You'll marry Giacomo – I may call him Giacomo, right? – because your feelings for him are more than enough for a marriage -- and you'll be as happy as anyone can be and you can quit going out in the evening making your father and me anxious. Here comes your father. Go back in the house. I'll have a talk with him.

(*After a moment's hesitation, Maria gives up and goes into the house. With studied serenity, Bianca goes back to knitting. Fox and Orsi enter from the garden.*)

ORSI: This business of the Chinese gloves is really very simple. We buy them in China at a bargain price because they scarcely pay their workers. Before shipping them, we split the gloves up, the right hand gloves on one side, the left on the other. The right hand gloves are sent to Venice, while the left hand – you follow? – go off to Naples. No duty on either shipment because half a set of gloves has no value, see? What's more we can even take advantage of a subsidy for merchandise intended for invalids, thanks to the National Board for the Handicapped where we have some friends. Then the gloves come together in Florence, where they are re-assembled as pairs. The right meets its left, so to speak and they go on the market as full sets of gloves. Got it?

FOX: Very cunning.

ORSI: Note, also, that this allows a very competitive price...

FOX: ...all to the consumer's advantage.

ORSI: You take the words right out of my mouth. All to the consumer's advantage. *(He turns to Bianca)* Ah, dear madam! *(He kisses her hand.)* I tell you, your husband has the spark of youth in him!

FOX: The heart attack did me a lot of good.

ORSI: Ha, ha. But in a way you're right. It has put you on the right path, where we all should be. You have a good regimen and a sensible diet. I tell you, good can often come out of evil. *(He helps Fox to sit down.)* Settle yourself gently. Easy does it. That's it! Now I'll find Father Gatti and we'll be on our way. I think our time here this morning has been very interesting! By this evening you'll have my notes on all that we have discussed: the gloves, the olives...

FOX: The Catholic Bank of the Holy Spirit...

ORSI: Not to worry! So... all the best!

FOX: Thanks, dear friend. Goodbye.

*(The Honorable Mr. Orsi exits into the house. There is a brief pause. Fox wipes his brow and smiles at his wife who is busy knitting.)*

FOX: Ah, my dearest!

BIANCA: My dear!

*(Fox gets up and goes to her, takes her hands and kisses them.)*

BIANCA: Have you finished working, my love?

FOX: Almost, my treasure.

BIANCA: You work too much.

FOX: Work ennobles a man.

BIANCA: Dearest love!

FOX: My treasure! And how's our little girl?

BIANCA: She's in the house. I sent her in there myself.

FOX: You did, Bianca Maria? With this beautiful sunshine, I'd rather she spent some time out of doors.

BIANCA: I know, dear. The fact is that I wanted to talk with you... alone.

FOX: I hope it's not about what happened last night.

BIANCA: Please, Vittorio Emanuele, let me speak. Twenty-seven years ago – I'm sure you remember this – I brought to your attention the plural of the word "index." We were at the Viscontis' house.

FOX: I remember that very well, Bianca Maria. And you know my opinion on the matter: it would have been better to wait until we were alone. It led to an unpleasant argument, very embarrassing to me.

BIANCA: *(Very patient and a little timid.)* It would not have lasted so long if you had not insisted that you were right. Now, you know it pleases me to see you firm in your convictions. Still, once faced with a dictionary that

clearly stated that “indices” is the plural form, not “indexes”, you went right on insisting it had to be a typographical error...

FOX: That was not outside the realm of possibility.

BIANCA: Certainly not, Vittorio Emanuele, but three more dictionaries with the same misprint makes it statistically unlikely. Anyway, that is neither here nor there. All I wanted to say, my love...

FOX: My treasure!

BIANCA: ...is that the argument could have ended well before the fifth dictionary.

FOX: All right, all right! Case closed! I don't know why you bring this up when I long ago forgave your behavior ...your lack of tact

BIANCA: Just to say, Vittorio Emanuele, that I can have my own ideas and they could also be right.

FOX: Dearest, I never doubted that your ideas could be right. You have always agreed with me.

BIANCA: What I am saying is that my ideas could be right even if they might not be in full accord with yours.

*(Pause. Bianca has stepped into dangerous territory. Fox is astonished.)*

FOX: Bianca Maria, what are you saying!?

BIANCA: I am saying, for the sake of our daughter's happiness, it would be better if she married the man she loves.

FOX: *(Astounded.)* Impossible!

BIANCA: Vittorio Emanuele, let me insist on this.

FOX: You know, Bianca Maria, that there is nothing that could ever sway my conviction about the sacredness of the family.

BIANCA: All men are created equal.

FOX: Yes, before God, Bianca Maria! *(Said as a powerful reminder to her. Then he turns very humble.)* But as for me, I am not God. I am a poor sinner, a mere man, dust I am and to dust I shall return. How could I dare to be as wise and good as God? So, you see...

BIANCA: Suppose we could reconcile things. They get married and we keep the truth hidden. Not even Auntie Angela needs to know.

FOX: Bianca Maria, you have overstepped your bounds.

BIANCA: There have been many times when you compromised your convictions for the sake of your personal interests.

FOX: *(Correcting her.)* Reconciled, not compromised. But in this case...

BIANCA: In this case, it is our daughter's happiness that is at stake.

FOX: Impossible! I have stood here listening to your ideas with far greater patience than they deserve. I repeat: impossible!

BIANCA: Very well then, Vittorio Emanuele. Now, twenty-seven years after that evening at the Viscontis' place, I have come to another evening when reason, justice and truth are on my side. If you refuse them your consent – Notice: I'm not fainting -- they shall have mine! You will simply have to lump it!

*(Fox looks at her with astonishment and disdain. Giacomo enters from the house carrying a huge folder of papers. He senses the tension in the air and comes to a stop.)*

GIACOMO: May I?

FOX: *(Quickly recovering his composure.)* Oh, please, dear fellow...

GIACOMO: The documents Mr. Aquila brought us.

FOX: Ah, good. Interesting?

GIACOMO: Very interesting. Over and above everything you already know, they would give you control of the Housing Projects for the entire province, including issuing of contracts and shares. There's also a seat on the administrative council of the Rural Electric Company.

FOX: If you like...you take it.

GIACOMO: *(Bowing his head.)* Thanks. Actually, I was counting on it. *(He leaves the folder on the table and starts to leave)*

FOX: *(Calling him back.)* Giacomo...er, Mr. Colombo... *(Giacomo stops.)*

FOX: My wife wants to re-open that unpleasant argument from last night. She is talking about you two eloping or just living together as a sort of common law marriage.

*(Pause. Bianca Maria looks at Giacomo awaiting his response.)*

GIACOMO: *(He speaks directly to her.)* Impossible

FOX: *(Giving him leave to go.)* Thank you, Giacomo.

BIANCA: But why? Why?

GIACOMO: I have nothing to add to whatever Mr. Fox has to say. Excuse me. *(He exits.)*

BIANCA: What does he mean, Vittorio Emanuele? What did you say to cause him to change his mind? Did you buy him off? Did you blackmail him? What did you do to him? Why? Don't under estimate me. I warn you, don't under estimate the love of a mother! My devotion and obedience over twenty-six years give me the right now to rebel for the sake of my daughter's happiness. I'll create a scandal! I'll go to Auntie Angela...!

FOX: Sssh! Don't shout!

BIANCA: Do you want to see me faint?

FOX: Oh, for Christ's sake!

BIANCA: I want to know why! I know you. You have never let your principles get in your way. You always spoke well of Colombo (your “crown prince”.... “just like me”... “a great career ahead of him”...your “favored disciple”... “determined in his flexibility and flexible in his determination”)... to refuse him now as your son-in-law just because some scoundrel, thirty years ago, refused to give him his name... Why!?

FOX: Take it easy, take it easy. Don’t let’s talk about things we know nothing about.

BIANCA: I want to know the reason. Why? Why can’t you convince me when you managed to convince him? (*Pause.*) Well? I’m waiting!

FOX: (*He hesitates. He goes to the table and picks up a book bound in black. It is the Bible. He walks downstage and stops, raises his eyes to the heavens as he opens the book and points with his finger and lowers his eyes to the passage his finger has indicated.*) “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.” (*He closes the book.*) Amen. (*He puts the book back on the table.*) I beg you, Bianca Maria, try hard not to faint. Don’t make this confession any more difficult than it already is.

BIANCA: You’re talking about confessing, Vittorio Emanuele?

FOX: Yes, I am. And maybe it is right that I free myself from this one stain on my conscience on this election day so that I can face my new duties fully purged. (*Pause.*) I am not the man without blemish, the near perfect man, you think I am.

BIANCA: Oh, I know that, Vittorio Emanuele.

FOX: (*Annoyed.*) What do you mean, “I know that”?

BIANCA: I know what you’ve always said: that politics is dirty business and once you get involved, it becomes hard to keep your hands clean and your heart pure.

FOX: What’s that have to do with any of this?

BIANCA: It means you had to behave like all the others.

FOX: In my case only in self-defense, darling.

BIANCA: Forgive me, my treasure.

FOX: I beg you, don’t interrupt me, please. My sin is an altogether different matter, Bianca Maria, and it touches upon what I most value in the world: our family, you, me and Maria Vittoria. I was young at the time and like other young men, I was frenzied – in flesh and spirit – by the great hope for a Europe just freed from the yoke of Nazi-Fascism. I was a member of the Catholic Society at my university mixing not only with the fellows in the society but also with the girls. One struck me for her discreet language, her decent way of dressing and her sound, moral sentiments. We spent time

together, talking about the great issues of the day or making plans for a Sunday outing or a group excursion into the foothills of the Alps. A mystical aura developed between us. But I did not know -- how could I have known? -- that that very atmosphere, so serene and so pure, could open the way for the devil to tempt me. Yes, Bianca Maria, this I can say with my head held high: it was a mystical ecstasy that united us more than a perturbation of the senses. Nonetheless, she got pregnant. Nine months later, she gave birth to a boy. As for me, my career was just taking off and I did not want it compromised by scandal. So I had fled eight and a half months before. *(Pause.)* The child was given a surname often used for those God would claim but whose fathers would not. He was called Colombo. They named him for the saint's day of his birth: Giacomo. So, Giacomo Colombo! Now you know it all.

*(Pause. Fox has made his confession well downstage with his back to Bianca. Hearing no reaction from her, he turns to look at her. She is stock still, in shock, like a statue, her eyes staring blankly into space, her hands frozen onto her knitting needles.)*

FOX: Bianca Maria! Bianca Maria, say something, talk, respond!....Faint!  
*(Bianca still gives no sign of life. Fox is taken with panic. He approaches her. He doesn't know what to do.)*

FOX: Giacomo! Maria Vittoria! Giacomo! Someone, quick, help!

GIACOMO: *(Rushing in from the house.)* What happened?

FOX: My wife. She didn't even faint. Call a doctor!

*(Giacomo rushes back into the house. Bianca begins very slowly and mechanically to undo her knitting, still staring straight ahead.)*

FOX: Oh, Maria Bianca, I beg you... She will never forgive me...never!  
*(Disconsolate, he spreads his arms.)* And we still have got to go vote!

### ACT THREE

*It is a few hours later. The scene is empty – or at least appears to be.*

*(Mr. Aquila, Esquire, enters from the side opposite the house. He moves slowly and deliberately checking to see if anyone is there. Satisfied, he goes to the table and glances at the papers piled there. He leafs through a pamphlet with an air of indifference trying to look casual in case anyone should enter. He begins to move around the table and suddenly cries out in alarm.)*

AQUILA: Ah!

GATTI: (*He emerges from behind the table, a little drowsy.*) The Lord be with you...

AQUILA: You here, Father!? ...and also with you.

GATTI: I chanced by just to say hello and while I was waiting here, I don't know why, I took a notion to hide.

AQUILA: Perhaps... you heard something?

GATTI: What, me!?

(*Orsi enters from the opposite side moving along the base of the steps to the house. He appears both wary and out of breath. He sees the other two and gasps, stopping in his tracks. He quickly regains his composure.*)

ORSI: Ah, you're both here! Then it's not an idle tale. You heard something, too.

AQUILA: Heard something?

ORSI: The ambulance.

AQUILA: The ambulance?

ORSI: (*Losing patience.*) Come on, gentlemen. Please. This is no time for us to be playing games with one another. We've got to join forces. You do realize that, don't you? We've made a blind leap into the void without knowing where the other side might be. We have opened ourselves to the man, provided him with information, made promises, all the time expecting some sort of compensation. So far what have we had in return? Nothing. Suppose he changes his mind? Suppose after he's gotten everything he wants out of us, he'll say, "Gentlemen, thanks a lot. I'm off to Rome"? Or, maybe before it comes to that, he just dies? (*Pause.*) Well? He's had a heart attack. We've all seen the state of his health. We have been reckless and much too hasty. From the word go, we have followed every piece of advice that fellow Colombo has given us. It's hard to believe how careless we've been.

GATTI: (*After a pause.*) That's clear.

ORSI: So, let's drop our masks, at least between us. You both know about the ambulance. You have your informers, and so do I. They alerted you and here you are. Now, the ambulance arrived half an hour ago, its siren blaring. Then twenty minutes later it left, without the siren and in no hurry. Why?

AQUILA: Yes. Why?

GATTI: That is the question.

ORSI: The problem was taken care of or else there was nothing to be done. Was it a false alarm or a call made too late? Was it empty or was there a body inside? That is the question. And that leads -- let's face it -- to the crucial point: has he got us by the short hairs or are we still in time?

*(He allows a dramatic pause.)*

AQUILA: Here he comes!

GATTI: No, it's his accomplice.

*(Giacomo enters from the house. Gatti goes to meet him at the foot of the stairs, assailing him before he can even reach the last step.)*

GATTI: Now, don't you deny it! An ambulance raced here a half-hour ago and crept away quietly after twenty minutes. We've been told...we ran over here...we want to know...Another attack?

GIACOMO: The Lord be with you, Father.

GATTI: Okay, okay. Now answer me.

GIACOMO: I've never known you people to be so concerned about Mr. Fox's health.

GATTI: He's come to know too much about us, and we know too little about him. We have followed your advice, but up to now, what have we got in hand? A fat lot of nothing.

GIACOMO: Mr. Fox may be dying and *this*, Father, is what you are worried about? Shouldn't you be running to his side to give him last rites?

GATTI: And pack him off to heaven? There! *(He shoots a bird toward the house.)* To hell, right into the circle of thieves, turncoats and traitors.

AQUILA: And sons of bitches!

GIACOMO: *(Allowing a dramatic pause.)* Very well. Inasmuch you are so deeply concerned for the state of his health, it is my pleasure to tell you that Mr. Fox is fine and that he has not had a cardiac episode in the last...twelve hours.

*(Pause as the three eye one another hesitantly.)*

GATTI: What about the ambulance?

GIACOMO: Mrs. Fox.

ORSI: Mrs. Fox? Why?

GIACOMO: A little shock.

ORSI: Caused by?

GIACOMO: A private matter.

*(Again the three eye one another, now a bit perplexed.)*

ORSI: A private matter? Can that be?

AQUILA: A private matter.... What private matter?

GIACOMO: *(He is quiet then holds up his hand to indicate that he can add nothing. The three men give up.)* You might ask how she is. Or perhaps Mrs. Fox's health is of no interest.

ALL THREE: Oh! How is she?

GIACOMO: Fine, thanks. The critical phase has passed. What she needs is a few days of rest.

GATTI: That's good.

ORSI: What a relief!

AQUILA: I am glad!

GATTI: (*Speaking for the three of them.*) Would you please extend our...

GIACOMO: Of course.

(*A new pause. The conversation grinds to a halt.*)

AQUILA: Nevertheless... putting that aside, our problem remains.... By this evening, before the election results start coming in, we need to know how he plans to reward us for the generosity we have shown. Fox now has all our papers. You yourself, if I am not mistaken, have secured three seats on administrative councils that usually are awarded – and I'm not just shooting the breeze here, I know – to people the high placed lobbies put forward. As things are turning out, we suspect that your advice to us has served your interests far more than ours.

GIACOMO: I never denied it.

AQUILA: Oh, sure! "It's over with him and I must re-align myself."

GIACOMO: Exactly.

AQUILA: Oh yes, you are well provided for. But what about us? If Fox dies, we...

GIACOMO: I am here, his...natural heir.

AQUILA: You are not enough. Colombo. You may have a future, but you don't have a present and it's the present that interests us: today's contracts, today's seats of power, today's alliances. And, for better or for worse, the "present" is still Fox. We need to seize the moment. Otherwise it will become the past and that we can't risk.

GIACOMO: We may not have quite reached that point.

ORSI: What do you mean, not reached? You just have to look at him. You yourself said that he's got more than a foot in the grave. He can't walk, he can't stand, he babbles, he can't hear, he can't understand, you have to repeat things, he doesn't answer, he has no reflexes. In short, he's holding on by a thread.

(*For a while now Fox has stood watching. Once he has heard Orsi's last words, he descends energetically into the garden.*)

FOX: My greetings, gentlemen.

(*The three are thrown into confusion, bewildered by what they see.*)

AQUILA: What?! Do you see what I see? (*To Fox.*) Wait a minute... your heart attack?

FOX: (*Quietly.*) Not as serious as my friends had hoped.

*(He approaches Father Gatti who is at the table nervously attempting to break open a walnut with a nutcracker. Fox takes the nut from him and cracks it by hand and returns it to Father Gatti.)*

GATTI: What does this mean?

FOX: It means that, just as you took advantage of my episode, a little heart murmur, to get rid of me, so have I used the advantage to get rid of you.

GATTI: “Get rid of you, get rid of us.?!” What an expression!

ORSI: Be quiet, Father. Let’s quit fucking around, boys. I am going to settle this matter once and for all. We’ve been taken for a ride, but now we shall see if there’s been a heart attack or not!

*(Quickly, he pulls out a pistol and points it directly at Fox, his arm outstretched making the gun visible to all. Everyone is horrified and someone screams out. He shoots. There is a puff of smoke, but that is all.)*

ORSI: It’s all right. It was just a blank. *(He points at Fox who stands stock still, perhaps because paralyzed by momentary terror.)* You see? Not even a ripple. *(He points to Aquila, who has fallen into a chair, panting, with his hand over his heart.)* He’s in much worse shape. *(Turning to Fox.)* It seems your heart is hale and hearty. Congratulations, “Senator” Fox! Congratulations to you and to your doctor as well.

GATTI: What is this, a Western? Are you out of your mind?

ORSI: *(He puts his pistol away.)* Now, we’ve had enough courtesies between us. *(Brief pause before he launches into his declaration.)* We have been cheated. There’s no point in lying or pretending, either among ourselves or with the “victor”, but we must see if this is endgame or only the first round. Have you given any thought to that, Senator Fox? Listen: you go off to Rome and we stay behind. No doubt about it, we’re going to pay for our mistake trusting you. You’ve found out enough about us that you could cut us off at the knees. Remaining here, however, we have the power to cut you off altogether. Your bullying like a godfather, your strutting about like a provincial Duce, those are now all in the past. We’ll see to it that new times emerge with new forces, new alliances. You, perched on your senatorial rampart, tied up in legislative bargaining, with all those obtuse, worn out slogans of the Old Guard, you will find yourself out in the cold. We, more prudent, more open, with new faces, we’ll herald the new age of balance and civility!

FOX: An alliance with the Left? Here, in my...

AQUILA; “In my fiefdom”... where he is lord! *(To Father Gatti, spreading his arms.)* The man has no shame.

ORSI: The historic compromise, yes.

FOX: And maybe with the Communists!

ORSI: With the Communists, yes. Why not?

FOX: (*Calmly.*) I don't think it'll work for you.

ORSI: If we jump on the victory horse in time, we'll find a way. True enough, the golden age is over and, as they say in the romance novels, it was beautiful while it lasted. We'll manage just fine. The minute the left wing is ready for full participation in local government, shazzam! Fox's fiefdom will be history. And once in power, we along with the Left, the Reds and the Communists...

FOX: What will happen then?

ORSI: What will happen? How much longer can you run your fiefdom with its fragile foundation of fraud, favoritism, blackmail, back scratching, paternalism?. We may be at the end of the golden age... but what about you? Beyond packing you off to the Senate -- a scheme you well understood and reacted to -- this will be the end of the line for you. You've had it, fella! You've had it! The new wave will bury you! You'll be nothing but food for worms.

FOX: (*He smiles condescendingly.*) "The new wave"? An end to fraud, blackmail, corruption, huh? In short, you're expecting it to bring an end to closed-door government, lobbies, the military-industrial complex, petroleum kings, right? (*He shakes his head to emphasize his disdain.*) Oh my dear Orsi, honorable Mr. Orsi, if it would take so little, how badly we must have worked behind those closed doors! What a failure we must have been if all that we created over more than thirty years in those smoke-filled rooms can be dismantled and destroyed in one day, erased in one swipe like from a blackboard. But we! We weren't writing with chalk on a blackboard.--we made deep incisions. We created a process, a standard, a code! Nobody can escape it: neither friend nor foe, neither those who gain by it nor those who must bear the burden and pay the price! The Communists, you say? Hah! They're no longer those idealists in baggy trousers exiled for ten years in the cold of Moscow or the prisons of Stalin or Hitler, no longer those who fought in the Resistance, ate only once a day to give money to the Party, nor those who knew where the Promised Land was even if they also knew they would never get there. They are all dead. Others have replaced them and these were born under our watch and grew up to fit in with our code. We have enticed them. They drive big cars, spend weekends at the seaside, run up their Visa cards, and wallow in all the comforts money can buy. They've caught the contagion of our system, and that has drained their moral fervor! This is our mission accomplished!

ORSI: Whaaat?!

AQUILA: What cynicism! But really, if even Communists are no longer honest...

FOX: Rest easy gentlemen. The sun is not about to set on our empire, despite your puny efforts.

ORSI: This is an outrage! It's a declaration of war!

GATTI: Friends, brothers! Once again I have to unfurl the flag of peace, understanding and tolerance. How can you let things get to this point? Mr. Fox is right: why should you go off seeking new partnerships when things are fine as they are? What's the point of forcing change when mankind never changes? An agreement among ourselves, gentlemen; there's ample room for it. We can tap our mutual interests. Mr. Fox has been a naughty boy, that's true, but I'm sure once he's satisfied his legitimate desire to dupe us – shall we say – and after finding himself – shall we say -- duped! – he is too intelligent, too flexible, too realistic not to agree – even in consideration of the superior position he's gained by his little trick – to agree, as I say, to divide the pie with us, a pie, I might add, with plenty enough slices to go around, multiplied in abundance as if by heavenly grace. Isn't that right, dear friend?

FOX: You have taken the words out of my mouth, Father Gatti. Once we recognize my superior position...

*(Maria enters from the house.)*

MARIA: Papa, tea is ready.

FOX: Gentlemen, may I offer you some tea?

*(Orsi and Aquila exchange a wary look.)*

GATTI: The tea in the Fox household is well known for its quality.

FOX: And it's always better to discuss matters over a cup of tea.

*(All four begin to move off.)*

ORSI: You are too kind.

AQUILA: We surely wouldn't wish to trouble you.

*(They all pass in front of Maria and go into the house. She waits until they are gone and turns to Giacomo.)*

MARIA: You aren't having tea? *(No response.)* I have something to say to you.

GIACOMO: *(Disconsolate.)* Maria Vittoria, I...

MARIA: One quick thing: I don't understand what's happening in this house, but it doesn't matter. What I do know is that I could never marry a spineless slug. I give you twenty-four hours to show me some backbone. Either you recognize what a worm you have been and defy my father, ask my forgiveness, and marry me; or I'll banish you from my life and forget you ever existed.

GIACOMO: Maria Vittoria...

*(Bianca enters at the top of the steps. She appears intense and resolute.)*

BIANCA: Maria Vittoria, I'd like to talk with Mr. Colombo. Do you mind going inside just for a while?

MARIA: I'm leaving. I've said what I have to say.

*(Maria goes into the house as Bianca descends the stairs.)*

BIANCA: My husband has told me everything.

GIACOMO: Oh!

BIANCA: I have no comment. If I feel the need to speak, it is only because the one thing I care about is my daughter's future and her happiness.

*(Giacomo makes a gesture as if he wants to cut off the conversation.)*

BIANCA: What do you mean by that?

GIACOMO: The one thing I can do for her happiness is...disappear...at least until more suitable feelings can replace those presently .... Please, Mrs. Fox, don't make me say any more.

BIANCA: Certainly, my dear. I understand. *(She sighs, sits down. She shakes her head and smiles.)* What I don't understand is why you young people have to be so stubborn. Is the situation really so hopeless?

GIACOMO: Hopeless, you say?

BIANCA: I mean, where is it written...?

GIACOMO: Excuse me, but what exactly has your husband told you?

BIANCA: Everything.

GIACOMO: It can't have been everything if you come at me with such statements.

BIANCA: He told me that...you are his...

GIACOMO: Right. That makes me Maria Vittoria's half brother.

BIANCA: *(She giggles.)* Oh heavens, well, yes! But, after all, as the proverb says, "If the heart does not see, the eye does not weep." My sister, the famous auntie Angela you've heard so much about, won't know anything about it. As far as she's concerned, none of this ever happened.

GIACOMO: I'm... baffled!

BIANCA: There must be a lot of people who get married without knowing whose children they are.

GIACOMO: All right, but that is not the case here. I know exactly whose son I am.

BIANCA: Oh, well, sure. Still I ask: is it so hopeless? Can't we...look the other way?

GIACOMO: *(Becoming righteous.)* Incest, Madame! Incest! That's the word for what you dare to mention...the mud-and-blood word for what the

most primitive and savage tribes of Papuasias encase in taboo knowing God will punish them with the birth of horrible, deformed monsters.

BIANCA: Enough, please, that's enough. I thought...I don't know...I thought now at the end of the twentieth century, those old taboos, as you call them, might...

GIACOMO: God and nature, Madame! These are laws of our very blood and flesh.

BIANCA: Of course, of course, I know. It's all about Xs and Ys, things like that. But, just the same, the pharaohs of ancient Egypt permitted this; and even required...

GIACOMO: The pharaohs suffered serious hereditary faults.

BIANCA: But Siegfried... he was the son of brother and sister.

GIACOMO: That's theatre, Madame, grand opera! *Pause.*) How could you!...

BIANCA: *(Now becoming very serious.)* Giacomo!

GIACOMO: *(Astonished by her change of tone.)* Yes?

BIANCA: Giacomo, listen to me. I see I shall have to drink up the whole bitter cup. Bear with me. Put yourself in mind of the person that more than any other you would consider above suspicion, the person you would think incapable of giving into base temptation, carnal desire, error or sin. This person... do you "see" her?

GIACOMO: Yes.

BIANCA: Good. And if this person, so immaculate, so superior, so upright, had actually, even she, once in her life, failed, sinned, transgressed?

GIACOMO: *(Indignant.)* My mother?!

BIANCA: Your mother?

GIACOMO: Didn't you say the person I considered above suspicion...?

BIANCA: Me, Giacomo! Me!

GIACOMO: *(Being courteous.)* Oh, pardon me. I didn't realize. I don't understand.

BIANCA: Well, if I, too, like my husband -- and I also believed him above any suspicion -- if I, too, failed...one time?

GIACOMO: *(Still not understanding, nor really caring very much.)* One time. So?

BIANCA: Not one time. That time!

GIACOMO: *(Still at a loss.)* What time?

BIANCA: *(She sighs, almost snorts.)* God, how difficult it is to get through to you. Oh, Giacomo! Jesus or somebody talked about "those who have ears but do not hear."

GIACOMO: All right, I'm all ears. I understand that you, one time, failed...one time.

BIANCA: That time, that time! Don't you see? Maria Vittoria...

GIACOMO: (*Suddenly alert.*) What? You mean she is not...

BIANCA: No, she's not.

GIACOMO: Then who was her...

BIANCA: I'll explain it all.

GIACOMO: Oh, no, no, please! I'm sorry, but I have no right to know this. I don't want to know. I'm not interested. (*He suddenly feels he is being rude.*) I mean, I am interested but... (*He decides this is worse.*) This is really none of my business. Yes, that's it. Except inasmuch as things might be just as you say.

BIANCA: You doubt it? Do you think I would confess such a thing on a whim? When my husband told me about you, I was dumbstruck. But not because of disillusionment, or pain, or surprise. No. It was because I realized that confessing my own secret was the only way to salvage my daughter's happiness. Now you doubt...

GIACOMO: Please, Mrs. Fox. My doubt concerns the reality of what you're saying. I mean, as the ancient Roman adage had it: "Mater semper certus, pater incertus" – "Mother always certain, father uncertain."

"Uncertain" does not only mean – as it usually does when people quote the adage – that the father might be someone other than the legitimate spouse; but also that – as in this case – the legitimate consort could be ...for once. (*He wipes his brow.*) What I am saying is...

BIANCA: ...how can I be sure? Right? At that time my husband was launching his political career and he was caught up in many dealings and meetings. I have the dates to back me up. (*Pause.*) You don't want to know who her father was?

GIACOMO: No. I don't believe in the call of blood and frankly all these revelations have troubled me deeply.

BIANCA: Let me tell you how it happened.

GIACOMO: Please don't bother.

BIANCA: I don't want you to think that it was a crude infidelity, some sort of tawdry affair.

GIACOMO: I could never think that.

BIANCA: After all, I'll be your mother-in-law.

GIACOMO: (*Resigned.*) I don't know what to say. Go ahead.

BIANCA: Do you know Bad Deutsch Altenburg?

GIACOMO: That's the father?

BIANCA: It's a small, charming Austrian village on the Danube a few meters from the Hungarian border. It was the birthplace of Joseph Haydn. But that is not why we were there, my husband and I. It was November, 1956, when the Hungarians were struggling to throw off the yoke of Soviet domination and Russian tanks were rolling in to snuff out the insurrection in the bloodiest way. We were there with a large group of old boy scouts, Catholic university students, and the "Little Knights of Malta," a religious order founded by the Archbishop of Turin to do battle against the spread of Communism throughout the world, and especially at the Fiat factory.

In that far eastern end of Austria, the border of the free world and the last outpost we could reach without dire risk, we tended helplessly to the martyrdom of the noble Hungarian people, but we welcomed the patriots who managed to escape the red hordes and sought asylum in the West. The men at the border handed out sandwiches and hot drinks, the women a little behind in Bad Deutsch Altenburg, as I said, cared for and nursed and hosted the patriots in little white tents, very simple but clean. We welcomed them with our smile, in our smart Red Cross nurses' uniforms, we handed them little images of Saint Stephen, patron saint of Hungary, and in the evening I played my violin, Brahms' Lullaby, of course.

That particular day, a Friday, had been quiet. My husband was far off, as he often was. I spent the day reading a book on the lives of the saints, a gift from my confessor. They were mostly women, saints especially devoted to prayer and contemplation. And I...I don't know, I don't know how, but the descriptions of those ecstasies, of those long hours that Saint Rita or Saint Theresa of Ayala spent kneeling in their cells, their eyes fixed on the body of Christ, pale, nude, bloodied and hanging on the cross ...instead of instilling pious, devout thoughts in me, aroused in me I don't know what sensuous turmoil. I felt strangely excited and titillated. I dreamt of my husband's return, but not the usual return with his kiss on my forehead, and routine inquiry into my headaches that were tormenting me at the time – perhaps the result of the emotional upheaval of our recent wedding.-- and then his customary and immediate disappearance into the bathroom. No. I imagined a passionate return like those you see in the films or read about in novels. But if I tried to focus on the details of my dream, I had to admit that the man whose homecoming I longed for did not have the features of my husband but rather the face of Christ on the cross – how could I forget it? – on page one hundred and eighty-two! A pale and bloodless face, with intense and penetrating eyes, and long, flowing red hair

Despite the cold day and the poorly heated tent, I felt flushed by waves of heat that passed through my whole body. I stood at the threshold. The sky boiled with accumulating dark clouds, but again this vision, rather than leading me to natural reflections on the wonders of creation, brought back to my mind the pages I had just been reading about the violence done to those holy martyrs, Saint Ursula and the eleven thousand virgins. And again, a strange excitement seized me,

At that very moment, a small caravan of fugitives, Hungarian patriots who had fled their own martyrdom, arrived in the camp. Ragged, tired, wounded, starving, tormented with longing for their homeland, one of them attracted my attention. He had the bloodless face of one who had suffered under the yoke of communism, the intense, penetrating eyes of one who had kept the faith in the cause of liberty, the flowing red hair of a brave warrior of the Danubian plain. He wasn't anything like my husband, and yet I looked at him. His gaze locked with mine. Then, with a strange smile he brusquely left the group and came toward my tent while his friends called joyful cheers after him. I became apprehensive and I stepped back to hide in the tent. But the door flap was pulled aside: dropping his knapsack on the floor, he crossed the threshold, came near me, while I, still stepping back, found myself next to my army cot.

I offered him an image of Saint Stephen, but he did not notice. He cried out something in Hungarian. I don't know what -- perhaps a salute to freedom or a glad offer of friendship. I could say nothing but what my heart brought to my lips: "*Ecce ancilla domini!*" -- "Behold the servant of the Lord!" I was his first encounter with the free world. And when he left, deep into the night, disappearing never to re-appear, his face shone with a new faith in mankind. That is all, Giacomo. In Maria Vittoria's veins flows the blood of Attila's Huns.

*(A long pause. Giacomo pours a glass of water and passes it to her.)*

BIANCA: Thanks.

GIACOMO: What about your husband?

BIANCA: *(Shaking her head.)* I don't think he'd have understood. I preferred to keep quiet about it.

GIACOMO: All right, but what about now?

BIANCA: I will do anything for my daughter's happiness, anything but tell this to my husband

GIACOMO: In that case, what's the use in your telling me?

BIANCA: Do whatever you want with this information. I have some errands to run. You go ahead and find a way to let him know.

GIACOMO: Me?!

BIANCA: Because of your newfound relationship with him, you may be the only one who.... Don't ask any more of me, Giacomo. Don't ask any more. *(Maria enters from the house.)*

MARIA: Mamma, didn't you say you had errands to run?

BIANCA: That is just what I was saying to Mr. Colombo, my dear. But I'd like to wait for the first results to come in. I don't feel fully recovered quite yet. Anyway, I'll go get ready. I'll leave you two alone. Take care, now! *(She exits toward the house.)*

GIACOMO: *(He turns to Maria, beaming.)* My love!

MARIA: *(Putting her hand out to stop him.)* What are you up to now? Did you do what I told you to do?

GIACOMO: What's that?

MARIA: Did you talk to Father? Did you lay out all your reasons? Did you confront him? No? If not, then what *are* you up to?

GIACOMO: My love, forgive me. I hesitated, that's true. I might have given you the impression that I had given up without a fight. Maybe you thought I didn't love you enough.... Well, here I am, ready to marry you whatever the cost, no matter who may oppose us.

MARIA: *(Not trusting him, she chooses to be direct.)* When? Let's talk dates.

GIACOMO: I don't know. Right away...but let's not rush into it.

MARIA: What about my father?

GIACOMO: We'll talk about it. We'll tell him...when the time comes.

MARIA: Oh, I get it. I can read your mind, Giacomo Colombo, even when your feet are doing the reasoning. "Let's not rush into it," you say. "Wait till the right time; he's already had a heart attack and in a few months maybe he'll have passed away and everything will fall into place." No! What I asked of you – and you know it – was to show me that you have a backbone. That's what I want! I want to marry with my father's blessing.

GIACOMO: Maria Vittoria, you don't give a damn about your father's blessing.

MARIA: True, but you have got to talk to him, stand up to him, show what I asked of you.

GIACOMO: But it's pointless.

MARIA: Afraid of a falling out, are you? Afraid you'll be left in the lurch before your career can take off.

GIACOMO: I have so little fear of falling out with him that I propose the most drastic measure we could take. Let's run away, elope, and put it all to him after it's done.

MARIA: You wretched fool! You already know I refuse! What about money? I want his blessing because his assent means an apartment in the city, a vacation spot in the Alps, furniture, a Maserati and a honeymoon in Bangkok.

GIACOMO: So that is the love you have for me.

MARIA: For God's sake, Giacomo, quit kidding yourself! We were both counting on his money. We never considered living by love alone. So, do something! Otherwise, one thing really *was* pointless: spending all that money on photocopying.

*(Suddenly there is activity at the top of the stairs. Orsi enters, smiling, his arms spread as if announcing the new Pope.)*

ORSI: Sixty-three percent of the vote. It's official: Senator Fox!

*(Fox, flanked by the other two, comes out of the house. He leads the others down the stairs where Giacomo is the first to greet him.)*

GIACOMO: That's no more than I expected, but it's great to have it confirmed. Congratulations, Senator.

FOX: *(Shaking hands with Giacomo.)* Thanks, Giacomo.

MARIA: Congratulations, Papa.

FOX: Thanks, my little girl. *(He kisses her.)*

GATTI: Congratulations to you as well, Mr. Colombo. At the next assembly you will take your seat on the board of the Catholic Bank of the Holy Spirit. *(Very deliberately, looking at the others.)* That is part of the package deal.

GIACOMO: *(Bowing his head in acknowledgement.)* I thank you and our friends.

AQUILA: Now all that's left are the election returns for the House. If they are in line with those for the Senate, I'll get some champagne for a toast.

ORSI: I am going to run over to party headquarters.

AQUILA: And I to the newspaper office.

GATTI: And I to the church to arrange for a "Te Deum."

ORSI: So long. And again, congratulations!

AQUILA: Oh, and thanks for the excellent tea.

GATTI: Our respects to Mrs. Fox.

FOX: I'll tell her. Goodbye dear friends and thanks. See you soon.

*(The three leave. Fox settles into a chair.)*

GIACOMO: A little tired?

FOX: Not at all. What a bunch of idiots! It was a lot easier than I thought. All I had to do was to throw a few crumbs their way and they just gobbled them up. Giacomo, I'll leave you in a position of real power when I go to Rome.

*(Maria starts toward the house.)*

FOX: Maria Vittoria, where are you going?

MARIA: I'm going in. Giacomo has to something to say to you, Papa.

*(She exits.)*

FOX: What's this all about? You need to talk to me? Go ahead.

GIACOMO: Maria Vittoria wanted to say...that she and I...we love each other.

FOX: You realize what you're saying?

GIACOMO: Certainly. *(He pauses, and then begins very quietly to describe a curious phenomenon.)* But you see...if I follow my instincts...well, I mean it's not the call of blood...no, it's just what it was before: the natural impulse a man feels when he loves a woman, and...

FOX: This is terrible...Giacomo!

GIACOMO: And yet...

FOX: Let's put aside this business of the call of blood -- probably only a literary invention. Even the most primitive and savage tribes...

GIACOMO: I know, I know... But perhaps science has yet to prove a link.

FOX: Incest, Giacomo! Incest! That's the mud-and-blood word for...

GIACOMO: I know that, too. But the pharaohs of ancient Egypt...

FOX: The pharaohs suffered serious hereditary faults.

GIACOMO: Siegfried, however...

FOX: I'm shocked, Giacomo! For the love of God, think about what you are saying! There are taboos so sacrosanct that even the most liberal politician would recognize them.

GIACOMO: And yet...

FOX: And yet what? Tell me! *(Pause.)* Giacomo, listen to me. You are too intelligent to argue such an absurd point. Is there something I don't know? Tell me. Have you discovered something?

GIACOMO: I don't know what that could be.

FOX: Something about your mother?

GIACOMO: What about my mother?

FOX: That she had had...I don't know...other experiences that could cast doubt on...

GIACOMO: *(He responds by vehemently denying any such implication.)*

My mother, Mr. Fox, has paid dearly by leading a life devoted to prayer...

FOX: Of course, of course. So then? Why do you hesitate? Say something, Giacomo! Ah, so it's true, is it? There really is something I don't know. Tell me, my son...

GIACOMO: (*Overcoming his last qualms.*) I will tell you...I'll tell you... I'll tell... like they say in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*... Papa, you have found a son but you have lost a daughter.

FOX: (*Pause.*) Is that true? No. Impossible. (*Giacomo says nothing.*) Did she...did my wife tell you that? (*He doesn't wait for a response.*) Yes, of course. (*Pause. He looks around uneasily.*) Where is my wife?

GIACOMO: In the house, I believe  
(*Fox rises and moves slowly toward the house.*)

GIACOMO: Senator...!

FOX: (*He stops and turns to him.*) Don't worry. I just want to look at her. It's strange. I have always seen her and never looked at her.  
(*He exits slowly into the house. Giacomo remains standing perfectly still. The atmosphere turns to evening. We hear voices off, and the three cohorts enter chatting happily among themselves.*)

AQUILA: So, wonderful news on all accounts. The Christian Center has held firm. The Communists have taken it on the chin.

ORSI: The Italians have declared that they want to stay the course. We have another thirty years of good government ahead of us..

AQUILA: Good...for us.

GATTI: The moment is right to break out the champagne. (*He looks around.*) But where is the Senator?  
(*Pause as they become aware that something is strange and deeply disturbing. They all turn to Giacomo. He does not react which itself implies that something is wrong. Suddenly he bolts for the house, leaping up the stairs two steps at a time. He is gone. The three study each other warily.*)

AQUILA: But...what has happened?

ORSI: Did something happen?

GATTI: What's happening?

(*Long, tense pause. Giacomo reappears. He stops a moment at the top of the stairs, reaching for the banister for support. Aquila is the first to notice him.*)

AQUILA: The Senator?

GIACOMO: (*He comes slowly down the stairs.*) Senator Fox has had another heart attack. Unfortunately, this time his heart could not hold up. He is dead.

(*Another pause as the three look at each other in astonishment. Their reaction is almost comical in its mechanical precision.*)

ORSI: Well! Now what?

AQUILA: But he was just elected!

GATTI: ...just when we had settled all our differences.

GIACOMO: He always seemed a man of iron, but he had a weak spot. He had certain feelings, and a strange faith in something. And so his heart just gave way, whereas real politicians just die of old age.

ORSI: But this is a joke!

AQUILA: A comedy!

GATTI: A farce!

GIACOMO: That's how it began, but it has had an unforeseen conclusion. It's not a happy ending. I can make up for it – even if this may not be the most opportune time – by announcing my engagement to Miss Maria Vittoria Fox, daughter of the late Senator Fox. Naturally, the wedding will take place after an appropriate period of mourning.

ORSI: How can you talk in this way? Was the man nothing to you?

GIACOMO: (*Smoothly.*) A father. And the fact is that I – waiting like all of you for him to clear the way – sense a strange uneasiness. I hope that this too is not a “feeling” because if we are to govern for the next thirty years, we'll have to avoid such a fatal error. Acquiring an inheritance from Senator Fox energizes me with the highest resolve. In any case, you will see it soon. (*Pause. He points to the house.*) Gentlemen, please... his widow and daughter would welcome a word of sympathy.

*(The three move mechanically toward the stairs. At the top Maria appears. The three pass in front of her shaking her hand and muttering words of comfort. The oldest of the men kisses her on the forehead as he mutters his sympathy. Then they disappear into the house. Maria comes down the stairs to confront Giacomo.)*

MARIA: What did you say that would kill him?

*(Giacomo makes no response.)*

**THE END**