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I Married You for Fun: A New Translation and Adaptation of Natalia Ginzburg's *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*

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I Married You for Fun:
A New Translation and Adaptation of Natalia Ginzburg's
Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
and
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Introduction

For my Senior Project I translated and adapted Natalia Ginzburg's play *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria* (1965), workshopping the text with actors and finally presenting a staged-reading of it for an audience. During my time at Bard I studied different Italian authors from the 20th century. After reading *Family Sayings* (1963), I quickly became very fond of Ginzburg's writing and decided to read more of her works, which included some of her short stories and essays, two of her novels, *Voices in the Evening* (1961) and *The Road to the City* (1952), and finally her play *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. One of the striking things about Ginzburg is her ability to capture a character's idiosyncratic voice. This is a prominent characteristic of her prose, and it is no surprise that her characters' voices would find a place on the stage as well. When I first read her play I was absorbed by the language as well as the mindscape of the characters, and how they chose to express themselves, in particular Giuliana, whom the audience gets to know through her relentless storytelling. In my Senior Project I got to analyze her narrative voice as an actor, as well as a translator and writer. These experiences revealed to me something important about Giuliana's character. In Chapter 1 I analyze what it means for her to engage in storytelling with other characters, and what it reveals about her identity. Chapter 2 recounts challenges and discoveries made while working on my translation, adaptation, and staged-reading. Particularly serendipitous is the realization that performance is an incredibly helpful tool for translation. Both my translation and adaptation are included and present the transformation that the text underwent in order to satisfy the vision for my production. Altogether it has been a challenging and insightful project that I am very excited to share.

Chapter 1 Storytelling and Identity

Natalia Ginzburg (1916-1991) was a prolific 20th century Italian author whose work has been highly regarded but also criticized by some for being “shallow” and “trivial.”¹ Ginzburg herself has acknowledged a lack of purpose in her work, meaning no particular intention other than an effort to “achieve clarity of expression” while “concerning oneself with the things of this world through the written word.”² This, she has done with incredible skill and precision. Alan Bullock describes her as “Highly sensitive to the rhythm of family life, and deeply conscious of the difficulties facing women in what is even now an essentially masculine society.” In 1948, Natalia Ginzburg published an essay titled “Discourse on Women,” where she describes the unfortunate fate of women who struggle to succeed like men do because, according to her, they are always at risk “of falling in a deep dark well,” where they “let themselves be seized by a terrible melancholy.”³ Ginzburg writes about the different kinds of women she has met, and how they all share this fate. She concludes that women must work introspectively to become “freer everyday” in an effort to defend themselves from this “well” she describes. She writes that she must do so as well if she wishes to ever “accomplish anything serious,” for the world can “never move forward as long as it is populated by a multitude of beings that are not free.”⁴

In *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*, Ginzburg explores this internal struggle that women face through Giuliana, a character that has fallen in and out of this “well,” and throughout the play, walks along the edge, retracing her past, while questioning and trying to figure out who she is becoming. Storytelling becomes crucial to Giuliana’s crafting of her identity. In many scenes, we

¹ Bullock, Alan. *Natalia Ginzburg: Human Relationships in a Changing World*. Berg, 1991. 8.

² Bullock, Alan. *Natalia Ginzburg: Human Relationships in a Changing World*. 8.

³ Quoted in Picarazzi, Teresa. *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters*. Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2002. 195.

⁴ Quoted in Picarazzi, Teresa. *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters*. 195.

see her engage her maid Vittoria, and her husband Pietro, in long narrations that become essential to understanding how she got to where she is. In *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: Filosofia della narrazione*, Adriana Cavarero writes about “the necessary other,” the person who must be present in order for an identity to reveal itself and exist through storytelling. In *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*, Ginzburg uses this narrative tool in order to explore the identity of a female character that is caught between the desires to resurface from the “well” described in “Discourse on Women,” and the inability to fully reach independence and freedom.

Cavarero writes about the different modes of storytelling that exist and the various roles that the subject of these stories can take on. She explores the possibility that one’s story can only be told from an outsider’s perspective, someone who “does not participate in the events,”⁵ therefore placing the listener, and subject of the story, in a state of discovering one’s own identity by hearing another’s narration. However, this can be juxtaposed to another method of storytelling that may occur through autobiography, where the subject is the narrator. We see this kind of storytelling in *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*, as Giuliana tells her story to anyone that will listen. This mode includes the revealing of an identity characterized by performance, as the narrator must have a spectator that can listen to their story.⁶ It is in this performance that one’s identity can exist, because it is being seen and acknowledged. Throughout the play, we see Giuliana’s need to engage in this kind of storytelling as a way of lifting herself out of the “well” described in “Discourse on Women.”

In the very first scene of the play, Giuliana begins retracing her past as she tells Pietro about the last time she saw Lamberto Genova, someone who presumably is the same doctor who

⁵ Cavarero, Adriana. *Tu Che Mi Guardi, Tu Che Mi Racconti: Filosofia Della Narrazione*. Feltrinelli, 2011. 8. This quotation has been translated by me.

⁶ Cavarero, Adriana. *Tu Che Mi Guardi, Tu Che Mi Racconti: Filosofia Della Narrazione*. 34.

recently passed away, and whose funeral Pietro is attending.⁷ She tells Pietro about how they met on a bridge in a moment when she was contemplating suicide and preparing to jump in the river.⁸ From the very first scene we know that Giuliana has struggled with depression and experienced the worst symptoms that can arise from falling into the “well.” Ginzburg says that when experiencing melancholy, women can “drown in it,” and “struggle to resurface,”⁹ which would quite literally have been Giuliana’s fate had it not been for Lamberto Genova, who happened to be walking on the bridge when she was ready to jump in the river. In that moment Giuliana decides that marrying Lamberto Genova is the solution to her predicament, and as she attempts to resurface from the “well,” she agrees to go to lunch with him, in the hopes that he will ask her to marry him, despite already having a family of his own.¹⁰ In this instance we see how marriage for Giuliana is a way to escape from the bottom of the well she has fallen into. Pietro, however, ends up being the one who lifts her up, that is, temporarily. In truth these, men provide some relief, but are not the solution. When Giuliana tells her story to her maid Vittoria, we find out how she ended up in the well in the first place, and what were the circumstances that actually helped her get out of it.

Giuliana recounts how she ran away from home when she was seventeen and moved to Rome so that she could become an actress or a ballerina.¹¹ Despite not succeeding, and instead working as a clerk at a record store, she was doing well, but what plunged her into the well was a relationship that began with a man called Manolo, whom she met at the record store.¹² She

⁷ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. Giulio Einaudi, 1966 and 2010. 7. All quotations derive from my own translation.

⁸ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 7.

⁹ Picarazzi, Teresa. *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters*. 195.

¹⁰ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 7.

¹¹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 12.

¹² Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 13.

describes him to Vittoria as a man who had a “sad face,”¹³ and who would invite her to his home regularly, eventually even asking her to move in with him, but would always say that “he could never love again because he always thought about his wife who had left him.”¹⁴ Giuliana tells Vittoria how she loved Manolo and how his rejection made her plunge into a state of melancholy. What perhaps affected Giuliana the most, however, was the fact that she felt intellectually inferior to Manolo and that she could not live up to his standards because he found that everything she said was always “trivial.”¹⁵ A result of this insecurity was Giuliana’s inability to express herself with Manolo. In Act II, she tells Pietro that when she was with Manolo “I didn’t talk, I stopped breathing. I was still like a statue. I was disoriented. Bewitched.”¹⁶ This meant that Giuliana could not engage in storytelling, as her sense of identity was impaired while faced with a careless spectator that deprived her of acknowledgment. This kept her from resurfacing from the well she had fallen into as a result of Manolo’s rejection.

Giuliana falls even deeper when Manolo abandons her upon finding out that she is pregnant. After days of crying and feeling helpless, however, she meets Manolo’s wife Topazia, who shows up to Manolo’s house one day and asks if she can take a bath.¹⁷ Giuliana describes how Topazia is the opposite of what she had imagined her to be like, and because she does not find her to be “scornful, arrogant” like she thought she would,¹⁸ she tells her everything that happened between her and Manolo, finally engaging in storytelling again and tracing her experience in front of a worthy spectator. She is able to talk to someone who understands what she has gone through, because Giuliana finds out that Manolo also abandoned Topazia. In

¹³ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 14.

¹⁴ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 14.

¹⁵ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 16.

¹⁶ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 40.

¹⁷ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 18.

¹⁸ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 18.

“Discourse on Women” Ginzburg writes, “two women understand each other very well when they start talking about the dark well in which they fall and can exchange many impressions on wells and on the absolute inability to communicate with others that they feel.”¹⁹ When Giuliana tells Topazia her story, we start seeing the very exchange that Ginzburg describes. Topazia tells Giuliana about her experience and how she coped by becoming a photographer for a weekly publication, ultimately freeing herself and becoming independent. Topazia does not let the experience drown her in a well of melancholy because she realizes that Manolo is someone who “doesn’t like women that much.”²⁰ Upon hearing this, Giuliana tells Vittoria that she “felt relieved, liberated, light, because in all those months this terrible anguish had been growing inside of me, and I thought that he didn’t love me because I was stupid, trivial, vulgar, and because I didn’t have style.”²¹ By sharing her story with Topazia, Giuliana is able to regain ownership of her identity, one that is positive and not characterized by the things that she was afraid of being when her spectator was Manolo. Soon the two women start living together and helping each other.

With the support of Topazia, Giuliana is able to get an abortion, shifting her narrative away from the influence of Manolo, and slowly resurfacing from the well. She tells Vittoria how she “felt good with Topazia and had fun with her, more than with anybody else.”²² With Topazia, she was able to experience a kind of freedom that was new and not characterized by a sense of identity in relationship to a man. Unfortunately however, she plunges back into the well when Topazia leaves for America due to job relocation for her weekly publication.²³ Giuliana moves in with her friend Elena with whom she has a very different relationship, because unlike Topazia,

¹⁹ Picarazzi, Teresa. *Maternal Desire: Natalia Ginzburg's Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters*. 196.

²⁰ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 18.

²¹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 18.

²² Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 20.

²³ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 20.

she “sees trouble everywhere”²⁴ and reprimands her for getting herself into such a mess with Manolo. Elena’s negative reaction does not allow Giuliana to tell her story the way she wants to, affecting her own sense of identity as it becomes characterized by a spectator that only sees the “trouble” in her narration, placing her into an even deeper well, one that almost leads her to suicide.

Thankfully Giuliana meets Pietro at a party, and during their first night together, tells him “everything.”²⁵ Every time she uses this expression, it means that she tells someone her life story, carefully constructing her identity in front of a new “necessary other.” Unlike Manolo, Pietro listens to Giuliana and is a patient spectator; however, he is not as successful as Topazia in helping Giuliana resurface from the well. Toward the end of Act I we see Giuliana accuse Pietro of making her “melancholic” because she feels he is judging her.²⁶ In a moment where he tells her that her inability to accept the truth means that she is not an adult, Giuliana turns on him and says, “You’re judgmental, confident, scornful, and very unpleasant. You talk about me as if you know me like the back of your hand.”²⁷ Giuliana is upset because she does not want Pietro to narrate her story, and therefore, be the one to reveal her identity to her. This is the biographical narration that, as previously mentioned, Cavarero explores as an alternative to the autobiographical narration, and in this instant, Giuliana refutes it. Her lack of agency over how Pietro sees her makes her tiptoe again along the edge of the well, and she tells Pietro that she does not want to take a bath because he made her “melancholic.”²⁸

When Giuliana has previously fallen into this well, she has looked for relief in her relationships, meaning the spectators that have allowed her to recount her story. She initially

²⁴ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 20.

²⁵ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 21.

²⁶ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 24.

²⁷ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 24.

²⁸ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 24.

believes that marrying Pietro is the solution to her problems and that it will help her resurface from the well, seeing how he could alleviate her financial concerns, but even more importantly become a consistent spectator; however, we see Giuliana relentlessly question her marriage and worry about what her decision says about her identity. In different instances, Giuliana tells Pietro that she was “ready for anything” when she married him, and that she simply wanted to “get out of that situation. Or drink, or drown,”²⁹ in other words lift herself out of the well or get submerged. Ginzburg, however, presents the failure of marriage and its inability to cure Giuliana of her melancholy. It is not a task that one can solve through becoming dependent on another, and certainly not on a man.

When joking with Pietro about how they will get divorced if things do not work out, Giuliana talks about the life that she imagines for herself and how she will become a photographer and travel the world with Topazia.³⁰ Here we see her engaging in a different kind of storytelling, one that is characterized by her imagination. Nonetheless, it reveals the part of her identity that wishes to be free and independent. She contemplates the idea that perhaps she will not need Pietro to pay for her alimony, and she will turn it down instead because her job will pay her well.³¹ Giuliana wishes that she did not need marriage in order to stay afloat. The idea that she might have married Pietro just for the money upsets her because it reveals an identity that she does not want to own. She consistently questions it and unsuccessfully tries to find an alternative answer. By the end of the play, we only know why Pietro married Giuliana,³² as opposed to the other way around, and it is not clear whether Giuliana ever learns how to lift

²⁹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 8.

³⁰ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 32.

³¹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 33.

³² Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 35.

herself out of the well. If anything the audience is left even more confused than when the play started.

In the final line of the play Giuliana says “I think that maybe I never actually met this Lamberto Genova.”³³ This is a twist that has a significant impact on the way we view Giuliana’s identity. As spectators, we get hints throughout the play that Giuliana is an unreliable narrator. There are several instances where her stories about Lamberto Genova do not match up to the descriptions of the Lamberto Genova that Pietro knew. During the lunch with Pietro’s Mother and sister, the characters share physical descriptions of him that differ greatly, allowing them to come to the conclusion that they knew two different Lamerto Genovas.³⁴ At the end of the play however, we realize that perhaps Giuliana did not know him at all, and that every single story attached to him could be false, raising a number of questions. For example, who was the man that ran into Giuliana on the bridge? Who was her psychoanalyst? Did she actually ever get psychoanalyzed? Ginzburg leaves all these unanswered questions, letting the audience decide how much they are willing to trust Giuliana’s storytelling. Who would she be however, without her stories?

Perhaps the lacunas in Giuliana’s storytelling are a greater marker of her identity. While reflecting on her play and the formation of Giuliana’s character, Ginzburg writes that she “fashioned a young girl, slender and fragile” who was “very small, untidy, and rootless.”³⁵ It is this rootlessness that best characterizes Giuliana, because she does not know who she is and can only exist moment-to-moment as she recounts her story to whomever will listen. Under these circumstances, Vittoria and Pietro become essential to her own sense of identity, as she relies

³³ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 64.

³⁴ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 57.

³⁵ Quoted in Ginzburg, Natalia, and Wendell Ricketts. *The Wrong Door: the Complete Plays of Natalia Ginzburg*. University of Toronto Press, 2008. xxvi.

heavily on this relationship between actor and spectator. It is not a coincidence that Giuliana wants to become an actress or a ballerina.³⁶ There is no doubt that she is a storyteller; however, she is only able to perform for the spectators in her own personal life.

Janet Varner Gunn says that a first person narration is always a story that discovers, and at the same time creates the relationship of the self to the world in which the self appears to others and is only understood through performance.³⁷ Through this kind of performance, Cavarero explains that one's identity might be revealed although it is also dependent on it, making it difficult for the narrator to have ownership of their identity since it can only exist in relation to its spectators.³⁸ Ginzburg however, does not let anyone have ownership of Giuliana's identity, because by the end of the play it is not clear which parts of her story are true and which ones are false. The only thing that is clear is that she is an unreliable narrator who frequently comes across her own lacunas and struggles to remember names and events that she previously stated with great confidence. Her rootlessness however still pushes her to search for an anchor in others, in spectators that might be kind enough to listen to her story, despite the gaps. Through this kind of performance she is less at risk of falling into the well when she knows someone is listening.

Although Ginzburg wrote "Discourse on Women" almost 20 years before writing *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*, she still creates a character that experiences the dangers of falling into the well she describes, and the difficulties of curing oneself of melancholy. Though we do not know if Giuliana ever succeeds in resurfacing from the well, we learn about the moments when she was her happiest self. Through her imagination we also hear about the circumstances that could help her free herself from melancholy, which she describes as a life where she is traveling with

³⁶ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 12.

³⁷ Quoted in Cavarero, Adriana. *Tu Che Mi Guardi, Tu Che Mi Racconti: Filosofia Della Narrazione*. 51.

³⁸ Cavarero, Adriana. *Tu Che Mi Guardi, Tu Che Mi Racconti: Filosofia Della Narrazione*. Feltrinelli, 2011. 36.

Topazia, a woman that was able to rid herself of her own melancholy and essentially free herself. Marriage for Giuliana is scary and nonsensical and she is consistently afraid that she married Pietro for the wrong reasons, meaning conventional ones. Perhaps however, he is the most reliable spectator she has, since he enjoys her stories and expresses that he wanted to marry a woman that made his life fun.³⁹ In truth, despite the fact that Giuliana often wishes to elicit pity through her storytelling, her delivery is always unintentionally humorous, and it never feels as though she is disclosing a secret for the first time, but rather a story she has told before and therefore rehearsed and crafted for an audience.

Chapter 2.1 Discovering Tools for Translation

During the second semester of my junior year, I took on the challenge of translating five pages of Ginzburg's *Family Sayings*. Seeing as I am perfectly bilingual in English and Italian, I made the foolish mistake of thinking it would be easy. I am used to translating in my day-to-day life, for example when I am thinking of an idiomatic phrase that I would like to express in one language or the other, or when I am discussing a topic that I have learned in Italian but must now discuss in English and vice versa. Translating prose, however, was a very new and different experience. When translating prose, one is suddenly faced with the importance of rhythm, as well as tone, and diction. The words cannot be translated individually because they must never stand alone, but rather fit together as they were intended to in the original language. Cesare Garboli would say, "Every writing, every text, even the theme scribbled by the test-taking student in the third year of high school, even a notarial contract, is the prisoner of rhythm, caged in laws and measures."⁴⁰ Being faithful to this rhythm has been particularly challenging with

³⁹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 35.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Goldstein, Ann, and Scarpa, Domenico. *In Un'Altra Lingua: In Another Language*. Einaudi, 2015. 194.

Natalia Ginzburg's writing, which is so exquisitely rhythmic and idiomatic. In addition translating a play meant I also needed to find the right words and expressions that would seem realistic for a person to use in conversation, which is why being an actor, and working with other actors in order to workshop the text, helped me tremendously to shape the text during my final revision.

I committed to translating Ginzburg's play conscious of the fact that aspects of her brilliant writing would very well get lost in the English, but nonetheless I was determined to do my best. In regards to translation, Primo Levi says, "every translation entails some inevitable degree of loss, comparable to that of someone who goes to a money changer. This loss varies in scale, from large to small depending on the translator's skill and the nature of the original text."⁴¹ In my own translation, I have done my best to curb this loss and hope that the characters have maintained the qualities that Ginzburg intended for them to have. Certain idiomatic phrases have been inevitably transformed, but I hope that a reader and audience member can still get a sense of the playfulness between the characters. Regardless of how serious the topics that they are discussing might be, there is this back and forth between them that is almost like a game. If anything, I hope that the author's humor has endured, and that the characters' language and styles may come through as the author had intended. It is this distinction between voices that has always stood out to me in Ginzburg's writing; I hope that I was able to preserve it.

The first thing I needed to translate was the title of the play, *Ti Ho Sposato Per Allegria*, which actually means "I married you for the sake of joy," or "cheerfulness," but such a title would have been too long and not quite as rhythmic. Wendell Ricketts, who also translated Ginzburg's play, titled his translation *I Married You to Cheer Myself Up*. Upon reading his title for the first time, however, I had already completed my translation and was set on it being *I*

⁴¹ Quoted in Goldstein, Ann, and Scarpa, Domenico. *In Un'Altra Lingua: In Another Language*. 174.

Married You for Fun. I therefore had to carefully examine my choice and provide an explanation for my decision. The title of the play is one of Pietro's lines in Act II, when he tells Giuliana for the first time his reasons for marrying her. Pietro tells Giuliana, "Ho sempre sentito, guardandoti, una grande allegria,"⁴² and he then continues, "Ti ho sposato per allegria. Non lo sai, che ti ho sposato per allegria?"⁴³ Ricketts explains that Giuliana would not have liked Pietro's response if she had understood that he was implying that he had married her "for the fun of it," and that "such a motivation would have been insulting,"⁴⁴ but I would like to offer a different interpretation. Giuliana responds to Pietro, "Mi hai sposato perché ti divertivi con me, e invece ti annoiavi con tua madre, tua sorella e la zia Filippa?"⁴⁵ Ricketts translated "divertivi" to "had a good time," but the word quite literally means, "to have fun," and it does not sound rhythmically off to stick with the word "fun," which is why I translated the phrase to "You married me because you had fun with me?" So with this in mind, I felt that it would be plausible for Giuliana to accept Pietro's response without immediately interpreting it as Pietro stating that he married her on a whim just "for the fun of it," because Giuliana's line in response is inquisitive. There is a chance that Pietro might have married her "for the fun of it," but that is why she asks Pietro if he married her because he had fun with her and would get bored with his family instead; she is looking for more clarity and giving him a chance to confirm the interpretation that she prefers, which he does.⁴⁶ Given the fact that Pietro often teases Giuliana and in some cases baits her willingly, I would like to entertain the idea that the word "fun" in this case can be expressed with both humor and sincerity, and that although it might sound like Pietro is giving a simple

⁴² When looking at you, I always felt this great joy (all quoted translations are my own).

⁴³ I married you for fun, don't you know that I married you for fun?

⁴⁴ Ginzburg, Natalia. *The Wrong Door: the Complete Plays of Natalia Ginzburg*. Translated by and Wendell Ricketts. University of Toronto Press, 2008. 54.

⁴⁵ You married me because you had fun with me, and you'd get bored with your mother, your sister, and Aunt Filippa?

⁴⁶ Pietro responds, "I'd get bored to death."

response, the exchange between them that follows adds meaning to the word “fun.” It is up to the actors playing the role of Pietro and Giuliana to convey this through their delivery of the lines. In addition, I chose the title *I Married You for Fun* because deciding to marry someone is generally thought of as an important decision that one must carefully consider, which is why this title is shocking and it evokes a paradox that is consistent throughout the play. One of the things that is so entertaining about watching Pietro and Giuliana question their marriage is the fact that it occurs under such unconventional circumstances, where two characters make such an important, life changing decision, without having confirmed their reasons with each other. I believe that the title should therefore be as unconventional as possible and match the humor that is consistent throughout the play.

My process of translating went through a couple of different stages. I started by translating a rough draft. Whenever I encountered a sentence or word that I was not sure of, I would write the different options in parenthesis and keep translating. I relied on my own knowledge of the language when I could, but also used WordReference as my primary dictionary source; I would often find an English word that I would then look up online in order to find its synonyms and consider the different options and definitions. I would choose a word based on how it fit in the rhythm of the text, as well as the faithfulness to the meaning in the original language. Striking a balance between the two is what I always aimed for, although it was definitely challenging. After a couple of revisions, I highlighted the passages and words that presented issues I was not sure how to address in the moment. It was not always easy to compromise, but after meeting with Professor Karen Raizen from the Italian Studies Department, who assisted me throughout my revision process, I was able to understand to what extent I am allowed to break out of the literal meaning of certain words or phrases and find their closest equivalents.

Working with Professor Raizen allowed me to tackle my most significant translation issues. After I had completed my first rough draft, we met once a week throughout the month of December and worked our way through the text, pausing to discuss the words or phrases that posed problems that needed to be further investigated. One of those phrases was the Italian expression “saltare di palo in frasca,” which Giuliana uses in Act III to tell Pietro that they always “jump from one subject to another” and struggle to have a well-constructed conversation.⁴⁷ The literal meaning of “saltare di palo in frasca” is to jump from pole to branch, and in English there is not quite an equivalent expression other than to “jump from one subject to another,” but where this problem becomes even more complicated is when Pietro responds “No di palo in frasca. Di palo in foglia,”⁴⁸ humorously referencing the color of the overcoat Pietro’s Mother wants to have her friend Virginia make for Giuliana. The color in Italian is “verde foglia morta,” meaning “dead-leaf green,” which I translated to “olive green.” Therefore in order to preserve some of the humor, Professor Raizen and I decided to have Pietro respond “Not from one subject to an-*other*. From one subject to an-*olive*.” In this way, the pun is still delivered and though it is not literal, it keeps a bit of the humor.

Ricketts has a different interpretation and believes that by saying “No di palo in frasca. Di palo in foglia,” Pietro is correcting Giuliana because he thinks she is quoting the saying wrong even though she is correct, and that “Though he is wrong, she accepts his version,”⁴⁹ however, it would be a bit out of character for Giuliana to take Pietro’s correction lightly, and knowing how she has previously responded to Pietro correcting her,⁵⁰ she would have most likely stubbornly stood by what she said. I therefore see their exchange more as humorous wordplay rather than an

⁴⁷ “Come parliamo sempre a vanvera noi! Come parliamo saltando di palo in frasca!” We always talk such nonsense! We always jump from one subject to another!

⁴⁸ Literal translation: Not from pole to branch, from pole to leaf.

⁴⁹ Ginzburg, Natalia, and Wendell Ricketts. *The Wrong Door: the Complete Plays of Natalia Ginzburg*. 56.

⁵⁰ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegría*. 63.

instant of characters misquoting a saying. This is one example of how different interpretations of a text can lead to a different translation. I find that consulting with another person was essential to my process because it allowed me to see another person's interpretation and understanding of the text and thoughtfully consider different options when translating. My advisors Franco Baldasso and Lynn Hawley also provided helpful feedback during my midway, and although at that point my translation was in its final stages, there were still things that I needed to revise before starting my adaptation and performance process.

Translating a play as an actor does provide some advantages because I was constantly able to test and revise my translation out loud and in character. If something didn't sound like a word or phrase that a person would say on stage to their scene partner, I immediately had to find a different solution. One example was the word "sdrammatizzare." Giuliana often talks about how she likes people who are able to "sdrammatizzare,"⁵¹ a word that in Italian translates to "defuse," but it is not very often that one would say, "I like her, she knows how to defuse things." I tested different alternatives and one of them was the phrase "downplay the drama." I liked that the word "drama" was present, because it was slightly more faithful to the Italian word, but eventually it started to sound funny as well: "I like her, she knows how to downplay the drama." Realizing that I had never heard someone use this phrase, I finally settled on "not make a big deal of things." This phrase made a lot more sense. At first I did not know if I was allowed to turn one Italian word into an English phrase, but I definitely learned through this process that it is not just about being faithful to the word, but to the "whole." As Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini said while reflecting on translation, "the translator has to be prepared for the

⁵¹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 20.

occasional betrayal, to save the whole. A fundamental condition is, therefore, that he realize there is a 'whole' to save."⁵²

There were other challenges however that were not as readily resolved. Aside from idiomatic differences, there were purely cultural differences that had to do with references to prominent figures or literary works that are not widely diffused outside of Italy. Pietro's sister is called Ginestra, and it comes up in the play that she was named after Giacomo Leopardi's poem "La Ginestra," which means "The Broom." It is obvious that I could not change her name to "Broom," therefore, I kept it the same and when Pietro's Mother references the common name of the flower as she explains the origin of her daughter's name, she uses the Italian. I found that this solution made sense for her character because she scoffs at Giuliana for having a pretentious name, while hypocritically explaining that she named her daughter after an Italian poem. Speaking in Italian and giving an answer that audience members might not readily comprehend, increases her pretentiousness.

Other challenges came about simply based on the fact that the play was written in 1965, adding differences in regards to time and culture. At the beginning of the play, Pietro is looking for his hat, and Giuliana tells him that Vittoria might have put it in "naftalina"⁵³ in order to keep it away from moths. Looking up this chemical, I found out that it is no longer used because it is toxic, and also perhaps in English it was more commonly referred to as "mothballs" rather than naphthalene. "Mothballs" therefore definitely seemed like the better word to use, because since I was translating a play, I knew that I wanted a word that an audience could recognize as they heard it, as opposed to a novel, where the reader most often has the time to look up definitions

⁵² Quoted in Goldstein, Ann, and Scarpa, Domenico. *In Un'Altra Lingua: In Another Language*. 210-12.

⁵³ Naphthalene.

for the words they might not understand. I knew that I wanted to create a translation that felt contemporary, so as to not discourage theater makers from producing a play written in 1965, Italy. Languages change through the decades and since I was translating a playwright whose work is not particularly popular in English, I wanted to make sure that it could be relevant and appreciated by contemporary ears.

Another challenge I encountered was the double meaning of “povero,” most often used by Pietro’s Mother as she refers to the “povero Lamberto Genova.”⁵⁴ “Povero” can mean not only “poor,” but also “the late.” This double meaning becomes very useful in the play because it is a source of humor in many instances as it highlights the way the mother is overly dramatic on many occasions, but in English repeating “the late” every time the mother refers to Lamberto Genova sounds unnatural and not quite as funny. Furthermore, there is a scene where the mother also says “la povera Virginia,” to which Pietro responds, “Perché la chiami povera Virginia? Non é mica morta anche lei?”⁵⁵ In Italian this double meaning works perfectly, but in English it is not quite as easily translated because one would not say “the late Virginia,” unless she was in fact dead. I have settled on saying “poor Virginia,” and “poor Lamberto Genova” depending on the rest of the phrase, and this is certainly an example of the kind of loss Levi points out when comparing translating to exchanging currency, however it still illustrates the dramatic qualities of the mother.

Certainly I felt a lot of frustration while coming to terms with this loss, and divorcing from the literal meaning of certain Italian words or phrases was quite difficult. I was so attached to the Italian and how wonderful the writing was, that at times it became an obstacle. I finally had to realize that what I was translating were the characters and their story, while providing a language

⁵⁴ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 44.

⁵⁵ Why are you calling her ‘Poor Virginia’? She hasn’t died as well, has she?

that is not exact, but certainly as colorful and rhythmic as Ginzburg's writing. My love for the original text however also presented an advantage. Domenico Scarpa explains that, "Every translator is aware of undertaking a job that is necessary and inadequate. What sustains him and drives him forward is obstinacy, never being satisfied, and also faith in the good will of his own act."⁵⁶ Like any creative work, translating will always have room for improvement, which is why even after the staged-reading I presented, I still went back and revised my translation, and even as I write now, I know that if I were to look at my translation again, I would want to make changes. At some point however, we must let go of our work and share it with an audience, and in theater this process turns into another kind of translation.

Levi writes that translating "requires that you transfer from one language to another the expressive power of a text."⁵⁷ This notion goes hand in hand with what performance entails. On stage, one must always translate something to the audience through their own expression and interpretation of the material that they are given. Furthermore, the language must retain its flow in order to be expressed properly and be comprehensible to an audience. In his own commentary on translation, Cesare Garboli explains that,

To translate is to be an actor. The same attitude, the same condition of the spirit that leads us, institutionally, to perform, to create theater, to physically breathe the life of another (...). He has chosen, who can say why, to create, invent, bring into existence a thing that is already there, already exists, has already been written. To make it exist *as* it was written, and as no one ever imagined it before him, the one who is performing it⁵⁸

What better way then, might one test their translation than by workshopping it with actors?

Certainly as I have rehearsed with my cast, I have heard people's different interpretations of the

⁵⁶ Goldstein, Ann, and Scarpa, Domenico. *In Un'Altra Lingua: In Another Language*. 56.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Goldstein, Ann, and Scarpa, Domenico. *In Un'Altra Lingua: In Another Language*. 174.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Goldstein, Ann, and Scarpa, Domenico. *In Un'Altra Lingua: In Another Language*. 202.

material, and this has been very influential on my editing and revising of the translation. At the end of the day, it really is all about the flow and the expression of the text and whether or not it is reaching the audience.

Chapter 2.2 From Translation to Adaptation

In order to satisfy my Theater Major requirement, I presented a staged-reading of my translation. My ensemble consisted of Payton Smith '19 as my director, Ryan Cason '21 in the role of Pietro, Eleanor Bennett '19 in the role of Vittoria, Phoebe Hiltermann '19 in the role of Pietro's Mother, Mica Hastings '21 in the role of Ginestra, and myself in the role of Giuliana. When we had our first read-through we timed the play at 1 hour and 20 minutes, which well exceeded our target running time of 45 minutes. I realized that I was going to have to start cutting the script. This affected our rehearsal process because we were working with a moving script that each meeting would become just a little shorter but not enough. Casting myself also presented its own set of difficulties because as I was reading with my scene partner during rehearsal, I kept thinking about the script and my translation and how I could improve it, or what I could cut. This initially made delving into character work more difficult, but once we had a frozen script, I was finally able to focus on Giuliana and her story.

As I worked on cutting the script I kept thinking about what Fruttero and Lucentini said about translation and how the most important thing is to "save the whole." As I was cutting I kept asking myself: without this phrase or exchange, will this aspect of Giuliana's character still come through? Can I still tell the stories of Elena, Manolo, and Topazia, without mentioning Paoluccio?⁵⁹ I asked these same questions for every character, for example could Vittoria have a silly reason for being late to work despite her story being cut in half by omitting Mrs.

⁵⁹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 13.

Giacchetta's lover and his dog?⁶⁰ What was most important was highlighting her tendency to get easily distracted by social interactions and as a result neglecting her job, I therefore cut some lines and only kept what was essential, while also slightly changing one of her lines and adding the phrase "I lost track of time and fell asleep." While adapting the play, I took some creative license with certain transitions. I did so sparingly and only if absolutely necessary, such as in the case of Vittoria's story in Act III. In the end, I cut 20 pages, and the running time turned out to be about 1 hour. This was initially painful because I kept worrying about what Ginzburg would think and whether or not I was butchering her play, but as I read it in rehearsal, I realized that the "whole" was indeed preserved because the characters still had their voices, the elements of repetition were still present, and the humor was still consistent, as were the relationships and varying tensions between the characters.

Another way I preserved the "whole" was by creating an adaptation that included some of the Italian from the original text. I knew that I wanted to share with my audience a performance that brought them into the world and culture of the play in a subtle way. I decided to keep in Italian words and phrases that could be understood by the audience for three different reasons, the first, because they were exclamations such as "accidenti," meaning "Damn it," where regardless of whether one speaks Italian or not, one can infer the meaning based on context and the evident frustration of the character speaking the line. Second, because they were phrases that were repeated within the same sentence, for example when Vittoria tells Giuliana at the end of her long story in Act I, "Well, you really got incredibly lucky! After everything you went through, you got really lucky!"⁶¹ Since the line repeats itself and the intention comes through whether or not the last sentence is reiterated, I decided to let "you really got lucky" remain "una

⁶⁰ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 48.

⁶¹ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 22.

bella fortuna!” Third, because the line in response to the character speaking in Italian allowed for the audience to understand what was said, or at least infer the meaning. One example is when Giuliana asks Pietro, “Are you a mama’s boy?”⁶² I kept the Italian “sei mammone tu?” because he then responds, “I’m not a mama’s boy.” I also kept names of foods in Italian, such as “Melanzane alla Parmigiana,”⁶³ or “Panzarelle alla Ricotta,”⁶⁴ and I actually served “Melanzane alla Parmigiana” before the show started as another way of bringing the audience into the world and culture of the play, since it is a dish that is referenced several times and is Giuliana’s go to meal.⁶⁵ Lastly, I had every actor pronounce names of other characters, as well as cities and villages, in Italian.

I helped my actors learn the Italian pronunciation in two different ways. I recorded voice memos of each word or phrase in Italian so that they could listen to my pronunciation, and I worked with them individually so that I could listen to their progress and help them work on their inflections. I noticed during rehearsal that when they delivered a line in Italian, they often slowed down so that their line was almost delivered robotically. I tried to work a lot with them on repeating their lines quickly so that the words could just flow out naturally and without an abrupt shift in pace from the English to the Italian. I also made sure that they practiced the Italian line within the context of the rest of their lines so that their character’s intention could come through and it would not sound like they were concentrating on simply getting the pronunciation right. I was very pleased and impressed with their commitment to getting the words and phrases right and their delivery exceeded my expectations.

⁶² Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 27.

⁶³ Eggplant Parmesan.

⁶⁴ Fried dough stuffed with ricotta cheese.

⁶⁵ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 9.

The best outcome of workshopping the play with actors was being able to share our adaptation with an audience. During the performance, I was surprised and incredibly pleased by all the audience's reactions. They were laughing so much and in moments that I did not even realize were funny. People told me that the play sounded contemporary, they loved the humor, each character had their own voice, and that I managed to translate Giuliana's neurotic behavior really well. As a translator and actor, I was incredibly happy. All I wanted was for people to enjoy Ginzburg's writing and storytelling, and the fact that they did simply made this experience all the more rewarding.

The weeks following the performance I revisited my translation and decided to change a few things. Something different happened when my actors and I finally dropped into our characters and found their voices. During our dress rehearsals I heard the lines that were delivered with spontaneity, even though they were not necessarily word for word what was written on the page. One example was Giuliana's line "La minestra? Non avevamo detto di non fare la minestra?"⁶⁶ Which I had originally translated to "The soup? Didn't we say no soup?" but during the rehearsals and the shows I kept saying "Soup? I thought we said no soup." It is a subtle change, but it happened frequently enough that I decided this is what comes naturally in Giuliana's voice and since it remains faithful to the text and the character, I should change it. Other subtle edits such as this one occurred and they added specificity to the characters' natural expression. It was a translation tool I had not anticipated I would have at my disposal, and it made me appreciate even more the relationship between performance and translation.

I certainly learned so much throughout this process and every step taught me something different and necessary. I am grateful I got to work with such incredible material and that I was able to bring it to life and translate it not just through a written medium, but through a theatrical

⁶⁶ Ginzburg, Natalia. *Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. 26.

one as well. I would recommend any translator working with plays to become an actor and live and breathe through their translation. It taught me so much about the characters and it allowed me to truly hear their voices, the same voices I loved when I read them in Italian for the first time.

*I Married You for Fun*ACT I

PIETRO

My hat, where's my hat?

GIULIANA

You have a hat?

PIETRO

I had it. Now I can't find it anymore.

GIULIANA

I don't remember this hat.

PIETRO

Maybe you can't remember it. I haven't worn it in a long time. We've only known each other for a month.

GIULIANA

Don't say it like that, "known each other for a month," as if I weren't your wife.

PIETRO

You've been my wife for a week. During this week, and this whole past month I never wore my hat. I only wear it when it's pouring rain, or when I go to funerals. Today it's raining, and I have to go to a funeral. It's a soft, brown hat. A good hat.

GIULIANA

Maybe it's at your mother's house.

PIETRO

Maybe. You haven't seen it by any chance, in the middle of all my stuff? A hat?

GIULIANA

No. I had all your stuff put in mothballs. It's possible that your hat was there too. You're going to a funeral? Who died?

PIETRO

Someone. How many days have we had Vittoria?

GIULIANA

Since Wednesday. Three days.

PIETRO

And you made her place our winter stuff in mothballs right away?

GIULIANA

Yours. I don't have winter stuff. I have a skirt, a sweater, and a raincoat.

PIETRO

You made her place all my stuff in mothballs? Right away?

GIULIANA

Right away.

PIETRO

Brilliant. Just brilliant. But now let's find a way to fish my hat out. I have to go to this funeral with my mother.

GIULIANA

Tell me who died.

PIETRO

Someone named Lamberto Genova. He was my folks' friend. He died suddenly the day before yesterday, from coronary thrombosis, while he was in the bathroom shaving his beard.

GIULIANA

Lamberto Genova? I knew him. I knew him very well. He died?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

In the bathroom! Lamberto Genova! I'm telling you, I knew him! I knew him extremely well! One time he even loaned me some money.

PIETRO

That's impossible. He was such a stingy man.

GIULIANA

But he loaned me some money. He was so in love with me.

PIETRO

Vittoria! See if you can find a hat! A soft, brown hat, all furry! The Mrs. says you might have put it in mothballs.

(Entering)

VITTORIA

Then it'll probably be in the four-seasons closet.

PIETRO

What's the four-seasons closet?

GIULIANA

It's the closet in the hallway. It has four compartments. Vittoria says that's what it's called.

VITTORIA

But you need a ladder. I have to go get it in the basement. The winter stuff is too high up, and I can't reach it just using a stool.

PIETRO

Is it possible that it's so hard to get your own hat back?

VITTORIA exits

GIULIANA

You know when's the last time I saw—

PIETRO

But you might not have ever seen it!

GIULIANA

Not the hat. I meant Lamberto Genova. You know when's the last time I saw Lamberto Genova?

PIETRO

When?

GIULIANA

A few days before I met you. It was January. I was wandering about in the rain and had an immense desire to die. I was walking on the bridge and planning to jump in the river, and thought that I would leave my raincoat on the railing of the bridge, with a letter in its pocket for my friend Elena, so that they'd give her the raincoat. In fact it's a nice little raincoat and it would've been such a shame if it had gotten lost.

VITTORIA re-enters

VITTORIA

Here's your hat.

Exits

PIETRO

Damn it, it stinks of mothballs.

He puts it on.

GIULIANA

So I see Lamberto Genova coming forward on the bridge, so small, with those big puffy cheeks, that smile of his...

PIETRO

No. Your Lamberto Genova is not the one I knew.

GIULIANA

Why, the one you knew wasn't small with two big puffy cheeks?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

Mine instead was small, with completely white hair, two big puffy cheeks... So, as I was telling you, that morning, I thought as soon as I saw him: "Damn it, I owe him some money," and I thought, "Let's hope he invites me to lunch," and then I thought, "I won't kill myself for now." In fact he took me out to lunch. You know where?

PIETRO

Where?

GIULIANA

At the Pigeon Grotto. And while I was eating I thought, "This guy is so in love with me, and maybe I'm going to marry him, so he can pay all my debts, and I can relax, stay warm, with this respectable, calm, old man, he'll be like a father to me." That's what I was thinking.

PIETRO

My Lamberto Genova had a wife and kids.

GIULIANA

Mine also had a wife and kids. But maybe he was willing to get divorced.

PIETRO

You can't get a divorce in Italy.

GIULIANA

He would've gone abroad. He was so in love with me. He used to say he had never felt such a strong attraction for a woman before.

PIETRO

And then?

GIULIANA

And then what?

PIETRO

And then? After the Pigeon Grotto?

GIULIANA

And then nothing. Then he brought me home with his car. I asked him if he could help me find a job, so he said that he would introduce me to a friend of his, a marquise who owned a big fashion house and was maybe looking for a *vendeuse*.

PIETRO

My Lamberto Genova was a doctor. He didn't have friends with big fashion houses, absolutely not, he was very busy and didn't have time to waste with girls. He was a very serious person, a very esteemed professional, he was my folks' friend, and well, he wasn't the one you're talking about. I have to go now because my mother is waiting for me. We have to go to this funeral.

GIULIANA

How fun, going to a funeral with your mother.

PIETRO

Why are you always so sarcastic when you talk about my mother?

GIULIANA

No, I was just saying what fun, going to a funeral in company of that fun mother of yours.

PIETRO

Can you leave my mother alone, please?

GIULIANA

Don't you want to know if in the end I went to my Lamberto Genova's friend for that job?

PIETRO

Tell me, but hurry up, because I'm late.

GIULIANA

I didn't go, because then I met you. But I was willing to marry anyone, when I met you, get it? Even Lamberto Genova, with his big puffy cheeks, and those owl eyes. Anyone. I was ready for anything.

PIETRO

You told me.

GIULIANA

Anything. I wanted to get out of that situation. Or drink, or drown.

PIETRO

Got it.

GIULIANA

So I married you. *Also* for the money. Get it?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

And you married me *also* out of pity. Is it true that you married me *also* out of pity?

PIETRO

True. *He exits*

GIULIANA

She screams after him. So that means our marriage isn't solid at all!

VITTORIA

Entering. What should I make for lunch?

GIULIANA

Eggplant parmesan.

VITTORIA

Again?

GIULIANA

Yes, again. Why?

VITTORIA

I've been here for three days, and we've made nothing but eggplant parmesan. Aren't you getting up?

GIULIANA

Not yet.

VITTORIA

Is your husband coming back late?

GIULIANA

I don't know. He went to a funeral.

VITTORIA

Someone died?

GIULIANA

Someone by the name of Lamberto Genova. I knew him as well, although maybe the one I knew wasn't called Lamberto, maybe his name was Adalberto, I can't quite recall... I don't remember names. Do you have a good memory?

VITTORIA

Yes, I do. I have an incredible memory. When I went to school, I'd learn everything right away, the rivers, the capitals, the wars, everything, just everything. The teacher would say: Let's hear Vittoria, the one who knows the capitals so well. I would've liked to keep studying. But I got to the fourth grade, then I had to go work in the country. We were nine siblings.

GIULIANA

Well I've never liked studying, and my mother wanted me to become a teacher, but I wanted to be an actress, or a ballerina. So when I was seventeen I ran away from home.

VITTORIA

You ran away? And you never went back?

GIULIANA

I go back from time to time, but rarely. I don't get along with my mother. As soon as we're together, we immediately start fighting. I disappointed her because I didn't become a teacher, or an actress, or a ballerina.

VITTORIA

But now that you got married, your mother must be happy.

GIULIANA

I wrote to her that I was getting married. She responded saying be careful, because there's a lot of good-for-nothings out there. My mother's very pessimistic.

VITTORIA

But didn't you introduce her to the mister?

GIULIANA

Not yet. I sent her some money. But you know, I'm really afraid that my mother's not the one spending the money I sent her. I'm afraid she's put it into a savings account. For me. If I might need it someday. She's always had this mania of putting money into savings accounts as soon as she could put something aside.

VITTORIA

Your mother's right. There are a lot of good-for-nothings out there, it's true. I've been engaged three times, and all three times things went south for me because they weren't good men, and my mother wasn't very happy. If only you knew how much I listen to my mother. I'd jump through fire for my mother.

GIULIANA

Where do you live?

VITTORIA

My house is in Fara Sabina. One day I'll take you there with me. Do you like pork? This year we have such a nice pig, everyone's jealous. But now let me get back to work. If you keep me here chitchatting I'll fall behind.

GIULIANA

Can't you stay and chitchat a bit longer? The house is clean anyway, you cleaned it yesterday. You know, I've never had a maid before. You're the first one I've got. I find that having a maid in the house is very convenient.

VITTORIA

You've discovered America!

GIULIANA

Really, it's a huge convenience.

VITTORIA

Your mother's house didn't have a maid?

GIULIANA

Not in our wildest dreams.

VITTORIA

Well I can do any job well. I don't know how I do everything so well. In the homes where I've worked they've always cried when I left.

GIULIANA

My mother lives in Romagna, in a village called Pieve di Montesecco. That's where I was born. It's a small house, dark, humid, and my mother filled it completely with furniture, so much so that you can barely move in there. I would sleep with my mother in a huge bed, underneath a yellow quilt. My mother is a trouser maker.

VITTORIA

Your mother? A trouser maker?

GIULIANA

Yes.

VITTORIA

So you're almost like me! You're poor by birth!

GIULIANA

Except we didn't have a pig. We didn't even have a chicken or a rabbit. We had absolutely nothing. We were living in misery, and my mother every now and then would cross through the village and go and ask my father, who owned a drugstore, for a little bit of money. My father was with another woman, and had a bunch of kids with her. So he also didn't have a lot of money. My mother and him would fight, in the drugstore, and all his kids were there, scared, and that other woman, skinny, as tall as a tree, with a big head of black frizzy hair, would also start screaming at my mother, and she would shake these really long arms... My mother would leave totally infuriated, so small, crooked, with her umbrella stuffed under her arm, with her bag full of coffee and sugar, because my father would give her pasta, sugar, and coffee, but she also wanted a bit of money. She'd come back home still red with anger, and would start bustling around the house, so petite, wearing a little Japanese nightgown that my father had given her when they were still together... She would make these semolina and milk soups, because my father would always give her a lot of semolina, and then these concoctions, these apple and prune compotes, and she'd put everything she had cooked and was left over in many little saucepans and cups, on the windowsill. She always has a row of saucepans on the windowsill. And then she also has this fixation with old newspapers. She keeps all the newspapers, she has a bunch under the bed, under the tables, and she cuts out and sticks on the walls the pages and the photographs that she likes. At the head of the bed she has all these newspaper cutouts with the photos of Pierino Gamba, the orchestra conductor who's a young prodigy. I ran away at seventeen. My father gave me the money.

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then I ran away and I came here, to Rome, to my friend Elena, who was a clerk at a stationary store. I ran away because I wanted to become an actress, or a ballerina. And then because I didn't want to see those saucepans and newspapers anymore. And my mother, when she saw that I had run away, rushed to my father to tell him that he needed to chase after me. And my father told her no way, and that maybe I would make it big, and would really become a famous actress, and I would support all of them, him, my mother, that other woman he had, and their children. And my mother went home, and she must've found comfort in thinking that maybe I'd become like Pierino Gamba, or like Greta Garbo.

VITTORIA

And meanwhile what about you?

GIULIANA

And meanwhile I was here, and at first I felt happy, because I wasn't in Pieve di Montesecco anymore, but instead I was in Rome, in the room that Elena had at the Campo dei Fiori. I didn't know how to become an actress, but I thought it'd be enough for me to walk down the street before someone would stop me and say: You're just who I need for my film! So in the beginning I wasn't doing anything. I would wander around the streets and wait, spending the money that my father had given me. Then I also joined the stationary store. Then one day I spilled a big

bottle of ink on one of the clients. I didn't do it on purpose, it was really heavy and it slipped from my hands. The owner of the shop got so angry! She fired me immediately.

VITTORIA

I bet!

GIULIANA

It wasn't my fault, I was standing on a ladder, the lady was right there under me, the big bottle wasn't sealed properly and all the ink poured out on the lady's dress. We tried to get rid of the stains with milk, but it was pointless. This lady was so angry, everybody was so angry! They fired me. I was unemployed for a while, then someone who owned a record store hired me, someone called Paoluccio. He was really in love with me.

VITTORIA

And you?

GIULIANA

I wasn't. I met a person at the record store. He was someone who would always come to listen to the records. He had a long, black moustache, and a pale face, with dark eyes that were so sad. He never laughed.

VITTORIA

Ever?

GIULIANA

Never. He wore a big black sweater, with suede hems. A beautiful sweater. I think that the first thing I fell in love with was that sweater.

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then I fell in love with him. His name was Manolo. And Elena would say to me: No, no, don't fall in love with that guy! I don't like him! He's so dark, so dark he looks like the Dark Knight! And I would say: Who's the Dark Knight? And she would say: I don't know.

VITTORIA

And so?

GIULIANA

So this Manolo was always sitting on a couch in the record store, and would listen to music and smoke his pipe, and looked around with his black eyes, so sad, so terribly sad. And then one time he took me to his house. He had an apartment in Via Giulia. He lived alone, with a cat.

VITTORIA

Black?

GIULIANA

White. A white cat, as big as a sheep, with an endlessly long tail. We didn't sleep together that time. He made me tea. And then he stayed there with his cat on his lap, petting it, and looking at me with that sad face of his... and I was sitting on the carpet, and I loved him, and was consumed by melancholy. And he told me that he could never love again because he always thought about his wife who had left him. His wife's name was Topazia.

VITTORIA

And why did she leave him?

GIULIANA

Because she was a restless woman, complicated, who'd immediately get tired of men, and as soon as she had one, she instantly wanted another one. That's what he told me. And he said that every now and then this Topazia would reappear, tired, spent, desperate, make two fried eggs, draw herself a bath, and then disappear again. She'd run away with her car. She was obsessed with cars. She always switched them. And she'd speed in her car like a madwoman, and he was always scared that she could kill herself.

VITTORIA

What strange people!

GIULIANA

He on the other hand, couldn't even look at cars. He was very rich, extremely rich, because his folks owned some land. But he didn't like money, and he liked to live like a pauper, in that small apartment, that he maintained on his own. He wrote. He was a writer. He had published two novels and a poetry book. The poetry book was called: *The Useless Salamander*. The novels, one was called: *Spring with the Sailor*. The other was: *Take Me Away, Jesus*.

VITTORIA

Take me away, Jesus?

GIULIANA

I tried to read them. But I couldn't understand a word. I even gave them to Elena, and she also couldn't understand anything. And she'd always tell me: No, no, I don't like that guy! Elena's nose is very long and big, and when there's something that she doesn't like, her nose becomes even longer, and bigger, and it crinkles all up. Crinkling up, it doesn't get shorter, it becomes even longer, and even bigger, it's so strange. She'd say: No, no, I don't like him! I don't like that guy! He doesn't even have sex, maybe he can't, maybe he's not a man! You're in serious trouble! Take me away, Jesus!

VITTORIA

And you?

GIULIANA

Because at first we really didn't even have sex. We kept going like this for a bit. I would go visit him in the evening, I'd sit on the carpet, he'd pet his cat, listen to records, drink tea. And he'd say what a pity that he couldn't love me. And I would feel myself getting consumed by melancholy.

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then he told me to move in with him. And Elena was desperate. But I couldn't even dream of saying no. So I went to stay with him, and then finally, we slept together. And in the mornings he'd tell me not to get up because getting up was useless and so I stopped going to the store, and I lost my job.

VITTORIA

And would he tell you that he loved you now?

GIULIANA

Nope. He'd always say that he didn't love me. He'd always talk to me about his wife Topazia. How smart she was, how pretty, and how she had style. I, on the other hand, had no style. I would feel unhappy. I had never been unhappy in my life, it was my first time. When I was with my mother, in Pieve di Montesecco, I wasn't unhappy. I was fed up, but not unhappy. Now instead I was extremely unhappy. And I had lost all my friends, I barely ever saw Elena, and when I did, she wouldn't be nice to me, she'd tell me I was ruining my life, and I also didn't see Paoluccio anymore, the one from the record store. I would stay in bed all day, or sit on the carpet, petting the cat and thinking... I had learned to think. I had become a different person.

VITTORIA

And meanwhile what about him?

GIULIANA

And meanwhile he would stay in front of the typewriter, typing every now and then a word. Then he'd put on a record. These sad songs... Sometimes we'd get lunch sent up to us from the trattoria, but sometimes he'd cook. He'd clean up around the house. His cleaning was as good as a woman's.

VITTORIA

Did he iron as well?

GIULIANA

He ironed, sewed buttons, absolutely everything. He learned while living by himself. Sometimes I would think: "who knows if he'll marry me?" But it was a confused, and foggy thought, and I didn't dare bring it up, I'd instantly put it away, swallow it, like you swallow a mouthful of food you've just stolen. In order to marry me, he would've had to get a divorce. Abroad.

VITTORIA

Did he and Topazia have any kids?

GIULIANA

No. Just imagine me asking him to marry me. It wasn't even on the table. I'm telling you, he didn't love me. He thought I had no style. And I would pine away and get consumed like a candle by the sorrow of not having any style, I had become ugly, skinny, pale. And I always dreamt about bats and snakes. And I would ask him in the morning: Why do I always dream about bats and snakes?

VITTORIA

And what about him?

GIULIANA

Nothing. He would shrug. He didn't care about me. He never approved of anything I said. He found that what I said was always trivial.

VITTORIA

But why did you stay with him if he was treating you this way?

GIULIANA

Because I couldn't separate myself from him. I couldn't move. I was bewitched. And I mean, he didn't mistreat me, sometimes he was good to me, he was just indifferent, so indifferent... I had been with him for over three months, and I realized that I was pregnant.

VITTORIA

Oh! And so?

GIULIANA

And so I told him, and he told me that I was wrong, that it wasn't possible. He said it with such conviction that I started thinking that it was impossible as well and that I must've made a mistake. And one morning I woke up, and he was gone. I looked for him everywhere, and he wasn't there. And I found a letter on the kitchen table. He said that he was going to stay with his folks for a little bit. Didn't leave an address. He said not to wait for him, because he didn't know when he'd come back. He said feel free to stay in the apartment for a bit longer, if I wanted to, but only until September, because afterwards he was going to sublet it to some Americans. I knew nothing about these Americans. He had never mentioned them to me before.

VITTORIA

So what did you do?

GIULIANA

He left me some money in the dresser. Not a lot. 30,000 liras.

VITTORIA

Very little.

GIULIANA

Yup. I started crying, and I cried I don't know how long, it must've been two or three days, without eating and without sleeping. Every now and then I'd go to the bathroom and wash my face with cold water. Then I'd go back to bed, and start crying again. Now I was sure that I was pregnant, because every time I lit a cigarette I'd get so nauseous! I didn't have anyone to cry with, I had to cry by myself. Elena was away on vacation, because it was summer and it was the end of July. I tried calling Paoluccio, the one from the record store, and he wouldn't answer. I didn't have anyone else aside from the cat. Manolo didn't take the cat. So I'd spend hours petting his tail and crying, and he'd meow... He was a very affectionate cat. It looked like he wanted to comfort me when he'd meow.

VITTORIA

And so?

GIULIANA

So nothing, at some point I stopped crying, and I went out to buy some food for the cat and for myself. A few more days went by and I was walking a lot, and roaming around the streets under the sun because I was hoping that if I walked and got tired, I'd lose the baby. But the days kept going and I still had it. And one day I was coming back with a grocery bag full of peaches, because I didn't feel like eating anything else, just peaches. And I see a girl in the courtyard washing a car with a sponge. The car was really dirty, and so was the girl, who was wearing white shorts that were all dirty, and a sweaty T-shirt. And the girl looks at me and I look at her, and then nothing, I went up to the house, and after a bit I hear the key turning, and I see the filthy girl standing in front of me. And I ask her: Excuse me, who are you? And the girl says: Is Manolo Pierfederici not here? And I say: No, why? Who are you? And the girl says: I'm his wife. And I say: Topazia! And I'm struck dumb.

VITTORIA

It was Topazia!

GIULIANA

Yes! If only you knew how much I'd thought about this Topazia, how much I had tried to picture her! And she looked like this! A filthy girl, with thick legs, blue eyes, blonde hair scattered around her neck, a very sweaty striped T-shirt. She asked: do you mind if I take a bath?

VITTORIA

And?

GIULIANA

So I told her: Don't you want two fried eggs as well? And she started laughing and said: Why not? But first I'll take a bath. And so she did, and afterward she came out in Manolo's bathrobe, and she sat next to me on the carpet in the living room. And so I told her everything. I wouldn't have said anything to the other Topazia, the one I had imagined, so pretty, scornful, and arrogant. But this one, this average girl, I felt like telling her everything, like I'm doing now with you. And

I asked her: But why did you leave him? And she said: I left him? Like hell I did! *He* dumped *me*. You get it? That's how she spoke. She had no style.

VITTORIA

No style?

GIULIANA

Not at all. And she told me: He left me shortly after we were married. He said that he couldn't love me. At first I was desperate, but then I gave up and I found myself a job. I'm a photographer. I drive around and take pictures for a weekly publication. Sometimes I end up here. I rest a bit, take a bath, and if he's here we chat, because we stayed friends. I don't hold a grudge. He's a man who doesn't like women that much. That's what she said, and I felt relieved, liberated, light, because in all those months this terrible anguish had been growing inside of me, and I thought that he didn't love me because I was stupid, trivial, vulgar, and because I didn't have style. I told Topazia, and she started laughing, and said: He'd tell you too that you didn't have any style? He always told me as well. So I laughed so much! We both did!

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then we made ourselves fried eggs, we ate all the peaches, and went to sleep. And before falling asleep Topazia told me: tomorrow we'll think about what you can do with the baby. If you want to keep it, I'll help you raise it, because I have a tilted uterus anyway, and I can't have kids. And while falling asleep I was thinking: "Yes, I'm going to keep this baby! I'll work! Topazia will help me find a job! I'll also be a photographer!" But when I wake up in the morning I start crying and say: No, Topazia, no! I don't feel like having this baby! I'm homeless, I don't have a job, I don't have any money, I don't have anything! And she said: very well. And took me to a Hungarian doctor, a friend of hers, and that's where I got an abortion.

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then I stayed in bed for a few days, and Topazia took care of me. And when I felt good, I went around the city with her, and I'd wait for her in the car while she had her appointments. Topazia was very active, she'd do a bunch of things. In her spare time she'd take Russian, solfège, and canoeing lessons, I can't tell you how many things she did. She also went swimming in the pool. When I would go to the pool with her, I'd only get in up to my waist, because I don't know how to swim, and I'm scared. Then I'd wait for her, in the sun, on a lounge chair. I'd have so much fun with her! She made me feel so happy! I had never had a girlfriend, aside from Elena. Those moments when I was by myself on the lounge chair by the pool, while Topazia was swimming, I'd think about something and meanwhile say to myself: "I need to remember this thing that I just thought about, because in a little bit Topazia is coming and I'm going to tell her." And then here would come Topazia, with her hair all soaked, because she'd always swim without a swim

cap, in her faded blue bikini, and her thick legs. Aside from her legs, she had a nice body. But she didn't have any style.

VITTORIA

But what does not having style mean?

GIULIANA

It means not having style. Being simple, being up for anything. In any case, I felt good with Topazia and had fun with her, more than with anybody else. To me, everything seemed easy with her. She wouldn't make a big deal of things. She was someone that knew how to not make a big deal of things. And then instead Elena came back, and I told her everything and she started crying. Elena doesn't know how to not make a big deal of things. She cries a lot, she's someone who cries, and has that long, long nose that gets even longer when she cries, all wet and blotchy, and she was getting on my nerves with all that crying. She would say: I knew it, I knew it! I knew that it would end like this! And what will you do with a baby? And I would say: But I got an abortion! She'd say: Yeah okay, you got an abortion, but the next time it happens what will you do? What will you do? Take me away, Jesus! And I wouldn't have fun with Elena. And I would tell her. I would tell her: I don't have fun with you anymore! I only have fun with Topazia! And she was really jealous of Topazia. And would say: You got mean! You also got mean! Then Topazia left. She had to go to America for her weekly publication. So I went to stay with Elena again. I wanted to take Manolo's cat with me, but Elena didn't want to, because she'd say that she didn't want anything that belonged to Manolo in her house, not even the cat, so I gave it to the custodian. And then a really bad period started because Topazia was gone, I didn't have a job, and Elena with her long nose would cry on me, and tell me that maybe it'd be better if I went back to Pieve di Montesecco, otherwise I'd fall into another ugly mess with some kind of pervert, and I would wander the streets, and wait for something to happen to me. Topazia had left me some money, and also a letter for a friend of hers who was an antique dealer, but he didn't hire me because he already had a saleswoman, and so did Paopluccio at his record store. And meanwhile, little by little I was falling out of love with Manolo, but falling out of love is so awful, all men seem stupid, you have no idea where the ones you can fall in love with went hiding. And so then one day I ran into a friend of Topazia's, a photographer, and he took me to a party. It was a party at a house in Via Magutta, a house full of stairs and little steps, with slanted ceilings. There were a bunch of people, all sitting on those little steps, and there was *cotechino* and lentils to eat, and red wine, and dancing. And I was a bit lost, because a part from that photographer, I didn't know anyone. But after I drank a bit of wine, I didn't feel lost anymore, and became cheerful. And there, at that party I met Pietro. He was sitting on the first step and chatting with a girl with orange slacks, that I later found out was his cousin. And in the end I was completely drunk, I couldn't find the photographer anymore, and was dancing by myself with my shoes in my hands. And my head was spinning, and I fell right next to those orange slacks. And I said: Remember, you don't wear high heels with slacks! And remember that getting pants made out of that color was a really bad idea! You have no style! And that girl was laughing, and laughing... I fainted.

VITTORIA

You fainted?

GIULIANA

Not fainted, I just didn't understand anything anymore, it was the wine. And I found myself on a bed, in the room of the owners, a very nice painter, and his wife. And Pietro was holding my head, and making me drink some coffee. I asked him right away if I had puked. I would've felt bad if I had puked in front of those nice people. They told me I hadn't. The girl with the orange slacks was fanning me with a newspaper. And then Pietro took me home. I wasn't drunk anymore, and I was a bit embarrassed, and sad. He came up with me.

VITTORIA

Up to Elena's?

GIULIANA

Yes, but Elena wasn't there during those days, because she was visiting a relative who had just been operated on her stomach. Pietro stayed there. I told him everything. Then in the morning he went to take a bath at his house, at his mother's, because our hot water heater was broken. And I was thinking: "He's not coming back." Instead after a few hours he came back, with a grocery bag full of things to eat. And we lived together for ten days, until Elena got back. And in those ten days, every now and then I'd ask him: Do you think I have style? And he would say: No. Even he thought I didn't have style. But with him, I didn't care. I would tell him everything that went through my mind. I never shut up. And every now and then he'd say: You never stop talking for a minute. My head feels like it's going to explode!

VITTORIA

It's true, mine also feels like it's going to explode.

GIULIANA

And then, when Elena was about to get back, I told him: it's too bad you won't be able to stay here anymore, that Elena is so annoying, but at the end of the day, it is her house. And he said: Yeah, too bad. And I told him: Marry me. Because if you don't marry me, who's going to?

VITTORIA

And what did he say?

GIULIANA

He said: It's true. And he married me.

VITTORIA

Well, you really got incredibly lucky! After everything you went through, you got really lucky!

GIULIANA

I still don't know if I can call it luck.

VITTORIA

Wasn't it luck? Marrying a young, rich, handsome lawyer, while you were poor, and didn't know how to keep going?

GIULIANA

It's true, I didn't know. I was full of debts. Had no job. And I'm also not very motivated to work. I told Pietro: Yes, I'll marry you, but I'm afraid I don't love you! With you it's different than with Manolo! With Manolo I was like bewitched! And he said: Oh well. And when Elena got home I told her: You know, I found someone who's going to marry me. And she said: Someone who's going to marry you? Oh here we go again, another mess, oh poor me! Take me away, Jesus! She couldn't believe that there was someone who was going to marry me. And when Pietro came over, she darted her little eyes and her nose toward him, as if she wanted to sting him. Then she said: Well who knows, maybe this one isn't Take me away Jesus! This one seems like a decent person! And I would say: But I don't feel bewitched! And she would say: Go to hell!

VITTORIA

I mean she was right.

GIULIANA

Maybe so.

VITTORIA

Oh god it's so late, I need to start cooking. In a little bit your husband will be back, and lunch isn't ready.

GIULIANA

Tell him it's my fault, I made you chitchat for a little bit.

VITTORIA

Made me chitchat? But I didn't even open my mouth! You were the one talking the whole time. You talk so much! Do you always talk this much?

GIULIANA

Always.

VITTORIA

But don't you get thirsty talking so much?

GIULIANA

Yes. Can you bring me a glass of milk?

VITTORIA

You want milk now? But it's 12 o'clock!

GIULIANA

I love milk.

(VITTORIA comes back with a glass of milk. Then exists. Enters PIETRO).

PIETRO

(Picking up something from the floor) What's this? My pajamas? How's it possible that Vittoria still hasn't cleaned the room?

GIULIANA

How could she? Don't you see that I'm still in bed?

PIETRO

And don't you think you should get up?

GIULIANA

I chitchatted a bit with Vittoria. I told her about my life. She kept listening, didn't miss a syllable. You instead never listen to me when I talk. This morning you left while I was still talking. And yet I was telling you something important.

PIETRO

Oh yeah? What were you telling me?

GIULIANA

I was telling you that I don't see a good reason for us to be living together.

PIETRO

This is what you were telling me?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO

We don't have a good reason for living together? You think?

GIULIANA

I do. I find that you're very careless. By marrying me, you proved to be very careless.

PIETRO

I'm not careless at all. I'm someone who always knows what he's doing.

GIULIANA

You have a very high opinion of yourself!

PIETRO

Maybe.

GIULIANA

Me, I never know what I'm doing. I take one blow after another. But how can you say that you always know what you're doing? You haven't done anything up until now. Nothing important I mean. Getting married was the first important thing you did in your life.

PIETRO

Before I met you, I had been on the brink of getting married at least eighteen times. I always pulled back. Because I'd find out something about those women that gave me goose bumps. I'd discover a stinger in the depths of their souls. They were wasps. When I found you, someone who isn't a wasp, I married you.

GIULIANA

There's something offensive about your way of telling me that I'm not a wasp. Are you saying I'm a little kind, harmless domesticated animal? A butterfly?

PIETRO

I said that you're not a wasp. I didn't say you're a butterfly. You're always ready to paint yourself as something precious.

GIULIANA

I don't find butterflies precious. I find them irritating. I almost prefer wasps. I'm offended that you think I don't have stingers. It's true, but I'm offended.

PIETRO

The truth offends you? You should never be offended by the truth. If you're offended by the truth, it means that you still haven't become an adult. It means that you still haven't learned to accept yourself. But now I suggest that you get up, wash up, get dressed, and come eat. The soup's probably been ready for a while.

GIULIANA

There's no soup. And I don't know if I'm going to wash up. When I'm melancholic I don't feel like washing up. You made me melancholic.

PIETRO

I made you melancholic?

GIULIANA

You came back so judgmental from that funeral.

PIETRO

I'm not judgmental.

GIULIANA

You're judgmental, confident, scornful, and very unpleasant. You talk about me as if you know me like the back of your hand.

PIETRO

I do know you like the back of my hand.

GIULIANA

We met not even a month ago and you know me like the back of your hand? We don't even really know why we got married! We do nothing but ask ourselves why, day and night!

PIETRO

You do. I don't. I don't ask myself anything. You're the one who's confused. I'm not. I see clearly. I see far and wide.

GIULIANA

Just look at how highly you think of yourself! An astounding confidence! "I see far and wide!" I'm telling you we're deep in the fog! We're in it up to our ears! We can't see past our noses!

PIETRO

Should I start the water?

GIULIANA

Huh?

PIETRO

For your bath, should I start the water? If you wash yourself, maybe you'll clear your mind. Bathing is good for you. It detoxifies. Clears your mind.

GIULIANA

Don't tell me you're a germophobe. Tell me right away, because I hate germophobes.

PIETRO

Of course I'm a germophobe. You didn't know?

GIULIANA

I don't think I'll wash myself. I'm too melancholic. I'm afraid that you're too unpleasant! Just the kind of man I can't stand! *(She goes to the bathroom. You can hear the water running in the bathtub. Comes back)*. You know, I find that marriage is a diabolical institution! I mean having to live together, always, for the rest of your life! Why did I marry you? What did I do? Where was my head when I said yes?

PIETRO

Did you decide to take a bath?

GIULIANA

Didn't you say I have to take a bath?

PIETRO

It wasn't an order. It was a suggestion.

GIULIANA

Yeah right. God forbid you start giving me orders.

PIETRO

So you find me unpleasant?

GIULIANA

Yes. I'm afraid I do. You're so calm, so quiet, so judgmental! "I know you like the back of my hand!" "I see far and wide!" And what if you didn't know me at all? If you screwed up? If all of a sudden you found out that I'm full of hidden venom? Huh? What would you do?

PIETRO

I'd leave. Obviously.

GIULIANA

Obviously! (*She goes to the bathroom and comes back*). It's not obvious at all. Now that you married me, you take me, you take me as I am! Even if I'm completely different from what you thought, you have to keep me anyways, for the rest of your life! Didn't I tell you that marriage is a diabolical institution?

PIETRO

Be careful. You're stepping on my pajamas.

GIULIANA

I'm stepping on them because I want to step on them! Because I can't stand you!

VITTORIA

(*Entering*). She still isn't dressed? I brought the soup to the table!

GIULIANA

Soup? I thought we said no soup.

VITTORIA

I made a bit of hot soup. I made it for myself, because I was cold, and when I'm cold I like a bit of soup. While I was at it, I made it for you as well. But now, if you don't eat it's going to get cold. To me it doesn't matter, because I already had two nice bowls, filled to the brim, and I feel good.

PIETRO

Come and eat. You'll take a bath later.

GIULIANA

Oh sure! If I take a bath after eating, I'll die. Do you want me to die? (*She goes to the bathroom*).

ACT II

PIETRO

I invited my mother and sister for lunch tomorrow.

GIULIANA

But didn't your mother say she would never set foot in this house?

PIETRO

She did. But I convinced her to come tomorrow for lunch. After the funeral of Lamberto Genova, I took her home and convinced her. She let herself be convinced.

GIULIANA

Are you happy?

PIETRO

I am happy, because I was fed up of being at war with my mother. I'd rather be at peace, if possible.

GIULIANA

Are you a mama's boy?

PIETRO

I'm not a mama's boy. We, on the other hand, can't go to my mother's house for the moment because Aunt Filippa is there, and she's furious with me. Aunt Filippa is Catholic. Even more Catholic than my mother. She wanted me to have a catholic wedding, and invite a lot of cardinals. Instead they told her that I was getting married to a girl that I had met at a party, and that at this party she was dancing drunk, with her sandals in her hands, and with all her hair in her face. My cousin told her, and Aunt Filippa almost had a stroke.

GIULIANA

Your cousin? The one with the orange slacks?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

I think you have too many relatives.

PIETRO

So Aunt Filippa didn't even want to see your picture. My mother did, she looked at it for a moment.

GIULIANA

Which picture? The one where I'm in a raincoat?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

It's not a nice picture. I look like I just got out of jail. And what did your mother say about my picture?

PIETRO

Nothing. She sighed. She said you were pretty.

GIULIANA

While sighing?

PIETRO

While sighing.

GIULIANA

Just pretty?

PIETRO

Why, what do you think you are? Gorgeous? Ravishing?

GIULIANA

Yes. Ravishing.

PIETRO

But I don't feel ravished.

GIULIANA

You don't feel ravished?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

And yet, I ravished you!

PIETRO

You won't like my mother, and she won't like you. She won't like anything about this house. She'll disapprove of everything. She won't even like Vittoria.

GIULIANA

Why wouldn't she even like Vittoria?

PIETRO

She has other kinds of maids. Old women, quiet, loyal, with slippers, and flat feet.

GIULIANA

If that's the case even Vittoria has flat feet.

PIETRO

I'm telling you, she won't like anything about this house. Nothing.

GIULIANA

And so if she won't like me, and I won't like her, and she won't like anything about this house, why are you making her come here?

PIETRO

Because she's my mother.

GIULIANA

Good reason. You don't see me bringing my mother over. You know what my mother is like? My mother hoards every old newspaper, she has a ton under her bed, under the closets, and then she makes these soups, and cooked prune and apple concoctions, and she puts all these saucepans on the windowsill. And in the evening she locks herself in the kitchen, locks herself, you know, every night, and until two in the morning she stays there locked and you don't know what she's doing, and if she's making more soup, or washing her feet, no one knows, we've never known. And if someone gets close to the door and tells her to go to sleep, she gets furious, and starts screaming, and shouting, and doesn't open. Do you understand?

PIETRO

Yes. Okay. I know. This is your mother. But my mother isn't like that. My mother is a pretty normal woman.

GIULIANA

Why, are you saying that my mother isn't a normal woman? Are you saying she's crazy?

PIETRO

I don't know. I've never met her. From the way you describe her, I think she must be a little crazy.

GIULIANA

And do you think it's nice that you still haven't met my mother?

PIETRO

Do you want us to go visit your mother? Let's go. I'm a little busy in these next few days. But as soon as I'm free, let's go visit your mother, since you said she doesn't go anywhere.

GIULIANA

Visit my mother? And see the newspapers and saucepans?

PIETRO

Yes, why not?

GIULIANA

My mother isn't crazy, the poor woman. She's just a poor wretch.

PIETRO

There. Exactly. And so is my mother, you see, she's a poor old woman, and she's also a wretch.

GIULIANA

Why, what happened to your mother?

PIETRO

My mother, poor woman, when she was young she was beautiful, elegant, and she suffered a lot when she started aging. A kind of neurosis came over her. Then, during the war, and the bombings, her house crumbled. Then she lost some money, not a lot, but she got scared, and believed she was poor, and very often in the morning she wakes up and cries, wallows, because she's afraid she's poor. And so my sister has to go there and comfort her. Then a few years ago my father died, and she suffered a lot from it. And my sister still hasn't gotten married, and she even worries about that. And now I got married to you, a girl she knows almost nothing about, but that she imagines as some sort of tigress.

GIULIANA

All these things aren't real misfortunes. She aged like everybody does. Your father died when he was already old. They're not real misfortunes if one thinks about the unfortunate life my mother had.

PIETRO

They might not be real misfortunes, but she suffers from them as if they were. In any case, this isn't about establishing which one of us has the most unfortunate mother.

GIULIANA

Does your mother think I married you for money?

PIETRO

She thinks you married me for money. She thinks you're some sort of tigress. She thinks you've had a bunch of lovers. She thinks about everything, she wakes up in the morning and cries. So I told her to come over for lunch, so at least she'll see your face, and she won't like you, but she'll be scared of a person instead of being scared of a shadow.

GIULIANA

Too bad.

PIETRO

Too bad what?

GIULIANA

Too bad I didn't have all those lovers your mother thinks I did.

PIETRO

You still have time.

GIULIANA

I still have time? I can still have some lovers despite being your wife?

PIETRO

In your dreams, while you're my wife. But divorce is always a possibility.

GIULIANA

You can't get a divorce in Italy.

PIETRO

Abroad.

GIULIANA

Oh right, abroad. (*Silence*). You just married me and you're already thinking about divorce?

PIETRO

I'm not thinking about divorce. I was just saying. In case you still want some lovers.

GIULIANA

Some things your mother thinks, are true. It's true that I married you for money. *Also* for money. I was ready to do anything. You know?

PIETRO

You mean to tell me you wouldn't have married me if I was poor?

GIULIANA

I don't know! Do you understand that I don't know! I still don't get it! I haven't had the time to figure it out! Why did we get married in such a rush? What was the rush?

PIETRO

You told me: Marry me, for the love of God! If you don't marry me, who's going to? Otherwise I'll end up jumping out the window. Isn't that what you told me?

GIULIANA

Yes, it is. But it was a figure of speech. There was no need to marry me in such a hurry. It's not like I was pregnant. Maybe your mother thought that you were marrying me because I was pregnant. Did you explain to your mother that I'm not pregnant?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

What was the rush? We got married as if the house was burning down. Why? Wouldn't it have been better if we had thought about it a little?

PIETRO

I did think about it. Maybe it was a thought that lasted a split-second, but it doesn't mean that thoughts need to last centuries. A lucid, flashing, thought of just a split-second can be enough.

GIULIANA

No, a split-second thought is not thinking about it. Real thoughts, good, and useful, are the ones that people carry with them for months and years.

PIETRO

Do you have a lot of these kinds of thoughts?

GIULIANA

Me? Never. Not one. I'm not capable of reflecting. But I think it'd be right to reflect, before doing everything, anything. And instead we didn't reflect one bit, and we got married like two dummies, me *also* for the money, and you *also* because you pitied me. And so our marriage is rotten, rotten at the roots! Maybe we made a terrible mistake! Maybe we'll be desperately unhappy together, even worse than what your mother thinks!

PIETRO

It's possible.

GIULIANA

And so? What are we going to do?

PIETRO

We'll get divorced.

GIULIANA

Abroad?

PIETRO

Abroad.

GIULIANA

Well, thank God you've got some money so at least we'll be able to go abroad and get divorced!

PIETRO

Thank God.

GIULIANA

So what should I make for lunch for your mother?

PIETRO

I don't know. A broth. Boiled chicken. My mother has a sensitive stomach. She suffers from a gastric ulcer.

GIULIANA

Is a broth okay for gastric ulcers? Is your mother very old?

PIETRO

Yes, she's old.

GIULIANA

How old is she more or less?

PIETRO

We don't know. No one knows. She faked the date of birth on her passport. She erased it with bleach and then rewrote it. It seems she took off about a decade.

GIULIANA

Who told you?

PIETRO

My sister.

GIULIANA

Your sister saw her while she was erasing it with the bleach?

PIETRO

No. Aunt Filippa told her.

GIULIANA

This Aunt Filippa is a real blabbermouth. Can't you kick her out?

PIETRO

No, because she's paralytic and moves around in a wheelchair.

GIULIANA

Maybe I'll also bleach the date of birth in my passport when I get old. But I don't have a passport, I've never had one, I only have an ID card from the post office. I need to get a passport, otherwise how will I go abroad when we want to get divorced?

PIETRO

True.

GIULIANA

Although maybe it'll be enough if you just go abroad, the day that we'll want a divorce. But I'll need a passport anyway, because I'll be traveling a lot when I get divorced. With Topazia. Will you pay for my alimony?

PIETRO

Of course.

GIULIANA

Thank you. I'll travel with Topazia, we'll visit a bunch of places, and we'll report and take photographs. We'll go to the desert, take pictures of lions and tigers, for that weekly publication of hers, that pays well. Maybe I'll earn so much that I'll turn down the alimony. I won't need it.

PIETRO

Thank you.

GIULIANA

You're welcome. It'll be wonderful.

PIETRO

Wonderful.

GIULIANA

And you? What will you do? Will you go back to living with your mother, your sister, and Aunt Filippa?

PIETRO

Maybe.

GIULIANA

I'm going to travel with Topazia instead. You know, I often wonder what Topazia would think of you. But I don't think she'd like you. She'd say you don't have style. She'd say your neck's too big, your nose's is too big, your ears are too long. Topazia is very particular.

PIETRO

But she married that idiot.

GIULIANA

Manolo? Why do you say it like that, "that idiot"? Why do you have to step on everything in my life? You don't know Manolo! You've never met him!

PIETRO

I read his books.

GIULIANA

You read *Take Me Away, Jesus*?

PIETRO

Yes. And I read *Spring with the Sailor*, and even *The Useless Salamander*.

GIULIANA

No! You didn't read *Spring with the Sailor*! You didn't even cut the pages!

PIETRO

Neither did you.

GIULIANA

I cut the first ones. Then I stopped because I couldn't understand anything. I couldn't understand because I'm the stupid one, not him. I must say though that salamanders are useless animals. What purpose do they serve? More useless than that!

PIETRO

There's no doubt.

GIULIANA

What are they? Aren't they the animals that can walk through fire and not get burnt? What's the use of walking through fire?

PIETRO

Well I think that Manolo of yours was stupid. A real idiot, a coward. Didn't he run away when he found out you were pregnant?

GIULIANA

Yes. But it wasn't cowardice. It was something else. He was afraid of life.

PIETRO

Being afraid of life is called cowardice. Getting a person in trouble, then splitting is called cowardice.

GIULIANA

But I won't allow you to step all over my business! (*Silence*). So, boiled chicken for your mother?

PIETRO

Boiled chicken.

GIULIANA

Vittoria! Damn it, she doesn't answer, she must be at the window chatting with the girl from upstairs.

PIETRO

What do you want to tell her?

GIULIANA

That tomorrow your mother's coming for lunch.

PIETRO

And my sister.

GIULIANA

And your sister. What's this sister of yours like?

PIETRO

My sister is a total ditz.

GIULIANA

Will she like me?

PIETRO

She'll like you a lot.

GIULIANA

Why a ditz? You think I'm the kind of girl that a ditz would like?

PIETRO

Not because she's a ditz. Because she's always happy about everything. She has an optimistic character.

GIULIANA

And your mother is a pessimist. She's someone who sees trouble everywhere. She's dramatic. My friend Elena is also like that, and my mother. She's also a pessimist. But I do well with optimists, with people who don't make a big deal of things. I felt so good with Topazia, because she didn't make a big deal of things.

PIETRO

And do you feel good with me?

GIULIANA

With you?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

I still don't know. I still haven't understood what you're like.

PIETRO

I understood what you're like as soon as I saw you.

GIULIANA

Right away? As soon as you saw me? At that party, on those steps?

PIETRO

Not as soon as I saw you come in. After a little bit.

GIULIANA

Maybe while I was dancing, drunk, and shoeless? You understood that I was just your kind of girl?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

How lovely.

PIETRO

And you want to know something?

GIULIANA

What?

PIETRO

I never pitied you. Ever. Not even for a second.

GIULIANA

Never?

PIETRO

Never.

GIULIANA

But how? That night, when I was crying, and telling you about my life, you didn't pity me?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

But how? I was alone, with no money, no job, I was full of debts, and I had even had an abortion, I had been abandoned, and you didn't pity me?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

You must be heartless!

PIETRO

Don't be silly. It's true, you were alone, without money, without a job, and you were desperate, but I didn't pity you. Looking at you, I never felt any pity. When looking at you, I always felt this great joy. And I didn't marry you because I pitied you. After all, if someone had to marry all the women he pitied, he'd be done for. He'd have to start a Harem.

GIULIANA

Right. That's true. And why did you marry me, if you didn't marry me out of pity?

PIETRO

I married you for fun. Don't you know that I married you for fun? Yeah you do. You know very well.

GIULIANA

You married me because you had fun with me, and you'd get bored with your mother, your sister, and Aunt Filippa?

PIETRO

I'd get bored to death.

GIULIANA

I bet, poor Pietro!

PIETRO

Now you're the one who pities me?

GIULIANA

But you didn't always have to stay with them? You'd go out, travel, did you have any girlfriends?

PIETRO

Of course. I'd travel, go out, had girlfriends.

GIULIANA

Boring girlfriends?

PIETRO

Girlfriends.

GIULIANA

And me? Why did I marry you?

PIETRO

For the money?

GIULIANA

Also for the money.

PIETRO

I think that one always gets married for only one reason. There's only one dominant reason, and it's the one that matters.

GIULIANA

That means I still haven't really understood my reason.

PIETRO

Didn't you tell me: Marry me, otherwise who's going to?

GIULIANA

Yes, and?

PIETRO

And so, wasn't that the reason? That you wanted to have a husband? However he was? Whoever he was?

GIULIANA

Whoever. Yes.

VITTORIA

(Entering) Did you call me?

GIULIANA

Not now. Before. Before I called you several times. Where were you?

VITTORIA

I was exchanging a few words with the girl from upstairs.

GIULIANA

You're a big chatterbox. Don't you get thirsty talking so much?

VITTORIA

I never get thirsty. I never drink. I don't sweat, therefore I don't drink. Not even in the summer.

GIULIANA

You don't sweat?

VITTORIA

I never sweat. When I'm at home, and I work on the farmland, hoeing the ground under the sun in July, everybody sweats, and I don't. I don't even get a drop of sweat on my skin.

GIULIANA

Weird.

PIETRO

Very weird.

GIULIANA

Maybe you're a salamander. A useless salamander.

VITTORIA

I'm a what?

GIULIANA

I wanted to tell you that his mother and sister are coming for lunch tomorrow. You'll make boiled chicken.

VITTORIA

And you need to tell me today? You could've told me tomorrow.

GIULIANA

Since you always say that you go and buy chickens in piazza Bologna, near your hairdresser, I'm telling you now, so you can buy it when you go to the hairdresser.

VITTORIA

Nowadays it's very hard to find free-range chickens. The chickens that they sell aren't free-range. They're the ones fattened up under the lamp. If you really want a free-range chicken, I can pop by my house, in Fara Sabina. I'll be here in the morning.

PIETRO

No. Let's not complicate things. The chicken from Piazza Bologna will be fine. Tomorrow set the table properly, with the tablecloth.

VITTORIA

With the tablecloth? Not with the placemats?

PIETRO

No. My mother can't stand placemats.

VITTORIA

We have the tablecloth. But we don't have the table pad to put underneath it.

PIETRO

Buy a table pad today as well, in Piazza Bologna.

GIULIANA

Don't tell me that your mother is going to stick her nose under the tablecloth to check if the table pad's there!

PIETRO

You don't know my mother. My mother can tell if the table pad's there just by touching it.

VITTORIA

I'll go out right away, so I can do everything. (*Exits*).

PIETRO

You think it's true that she never sweats?

GIULIANA

I don't know. To me it looks like she sweats like a horse.

PIETRO

She seems like a good girl. Did you gather information before hiring her?

GIULIANA

Yes. I called Mrs. Giacchetta.

PIETRO

And who's this Mrs. Giacchetta?

GIULIANA

She's Mrs. Giacchetta. The one she worked for before. She praises her everyday. Mrs. Giacchetta was great in the house. She washed, ironed, cooked, she did everything. She wouldn't even let Vittoria get her hands wet. I don't understand why she had a maid.

PIETRO

Are you sure that this Mrs. Giacchetta exists?

GIULIANA

She answered me on the phone!

PIETRO

You don't gather information over the phone, you go in person.

GIULIANA

You wanted me to go to Mrs. Giacchetta's place?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

You're so annoying! You're so, so annoying! Nothing works for you! Mrs. Giacchetta doesn't work for you! The placemats don't work for you! The chickens aren't free-range!

PIETRO

It's Vittoria that said they don't sell free-range chickens anymore! I don't give a damn about free-range chickens!

GIULIANA

What will we be able to talk about with your mother tomorrow? After we'll have talked a bit about Vittoria and the free-range chickens, what will we have left to talk about?

PIETRO

Oh, I really don't know!

GIULIANA

We can talk about Lamberto Genova?

PIETRO

Which one? Mine or yours?

GIULIANA

A bit of one, a bit of the other, no? (*Silence*). What if I also invite Elena?

PIETRO

Which one? Your Elena? Or my Elena?

GIULIANA

Why, which one is your Elena? We each also have an Elena?

PIETRO

My cousin Elena? Or your friend Elena?

GIULIANA

Your cousin Elena? The one with the orange slacks? Oh no, I can't stand her. No, I meant my friend Elena.

PIETRO

The stationer?

GIULIANA

Yes. Why, is there something wrong with working at a stationary store?

PIETRO

I didn't say there's something wrong. I said "the stationer" to specify her.

GIULIANA

So if you wanted to specify my mother you'd say "the trouser maker," because that's her job? Did you tell your mother that mine is a trouser maker?

PIETRO

I think I told her she's a seamstress.

GIULIANA

And why? Because being a seamstress is more proper than being a trouser maker? Is making trousers improper? Did you know that you're full of social prejudices?

PIETRO

Not at all. Isn't being a trouser maker or a seamstress the same thing?

GIULIANA

Exactly. Isn't it the same?

PIETRO

Exactly.

GIULIANA

Do you want me to tell you something?

PIETRO

What?

GIULIANA

You know that big bottle of ink that I spilled on a customer, when I was working at the stationary store?

PIETRO

Well?

GIULIANA

You know who the client was?

PIETRO

Who?

GIULIANA

I'm afraid it was your mother.

PIETRO

My mother?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO

You spilled a big bottle of ink on my mother's head?

GIULIANA

Not on her head. On her dress. On the whole dress. It's not like I did it on purpose.

PIETRO

But who says it was my mother?

GIULIANA

I'm afraid it was. It was your mother. I recognized her from the picture that you have on your desk. That client's face was imprinted in my mind because then I got fired. I was doing well in that stationary store. There wasn't that much work. They fired me because of your mother. But also because I was always late.

PIETRO

My mother has a very good memory for faces. If it's her, she'll recognize you right away.

GIULIANA

So should I make my Elena come to lunch tomorrow? This way she can also see if the woman from the big ink bottle incident was your mother.

PIETRO

No, there's no need to make your Elena come over. My mother doesn't like your Elena.

GIULIANA

What a cow! So who does your mother like?

PIETRO

Please don't insult my mother before she's even gotten here! You throw a big bottle of ink at her and then you insult her on top of that?

GIULIANA

My mother wouldn't like you at all. She barely likes anyone. My mother's very pessimistic. She's very skeptical of people. She'd stay there, in a corner near the window, watching over her saucepans, afraid, suspicious, bitter, in her Japanese nightgown, with that pony tail of hers tangled on top of her head with a black elastic, with her hands shaking, looking around with the eyes of a bunny getting chased... No. It's better if we don't go.

PIETRO

So we won't go. (*He laughs*).

GIULIANA

Why are you laughing? You're not laughing about my mother, are you?

PIETRO

No. I'm thinking about you spilling the ink on the lady, that maybe is my mother, and it makes me laugh.

GIULIANA

Why do we talk about mothers so much? We've been here for an hour, and we don't talk about anything but mothers. Are mothers so important?

PIETRO

They're pretty important.

GIULIANA

If I make you laugh, it means that you don't feel bewitched. It means that you also don't feel bewitched by me. The way I don't by you. When I loved Manolo, I didn't laugh, I never laughed. I didn't laugh, I didn't talk, I stopped breathing. I was still like a statue. I was disoriented. Bewitched. You know what I mean?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

Why, you've also been bewitched sometimes?

PIETRO

Sometimes. And I didn't like it. I never would've married a woman that bewitched me. I want to live with a woman that makes my life fun.

GIULIANA

What's so fun about me?

PIETRO

I have to step out. Where's my hat?

GIULIANA

You have another funeral?

PIETRO

No. It's raining. Raining buckets. I wear my hat when it's raining.

GIULIANA

Oh God, Vittoria is going to the hairdresser now and will get her perm wet! She'll come back so upset.

ACT III

GIULIANA

Pietro!

PIETRO

Here I am.

GIULIANA

Vittoria isn't back!

PIETRO

What do you mean she isn't back?

GIULIANA

She hasn't been back since yesterday. She didn't come back after the hairdresser. You were out for dinner. I drank a glass of milk and went to sleep. After you went out this morning, I rang the bell, and she didn't answer. I get up, I look for her all over the house and she isn't here.

PIETRO

Do we need to call the police station?

GIULIANA

No. The custodian says that she must've gone back to Mrs. Giacchetta. She liked staying with Mrs. Giacchetta so much. She almost had nothing to do. She liked it here too, but she found it was too much work.

PIETRO

What work? We're only two people and the house is small.

GIULIANA

Yes, but you change your button down twice a day. Vittoria didn't like ironing. There weren't any men's shirts at Mrs. Giacchetta's. She's a widow.

PIETRO

I'm sorry.

GIULIANA

You're sorry she's a widow?

PIETRO

I'm sorry for Vittoria. We should find another maid. Call an agency.

GIULIANA

You said agencies can't be trusted!

PIETRO

How did you cook? My mother and sister will be here soon.

GIULIANA

I had some stew in the house from yesterday. I heated it up.

PIETRO

My mother can't eat stew! I told you she has a gastric ulcer!

GIULIANA

Potatoes with stew aren't okay for gastric ulcers?

PIETRO

No. And there must've been very little!

GIULIANA

Nonsense. It's at least 2 pounds of meat. Then I called the custodian and begged her to lend me a table pad. Vittoria was supposed to buy the table pad in Piazza Bologna.

PIETRO

(Looking underneath the table cloth). This isn't a table pad, it's an oilcloth.

GIULIANA

Yes. The custodian used it to cover her baby's stroller. But it's clean. I made her clean it with a sponge.

PIETRO

First, what's first?

GIULIANA

What's first? You mean the first course?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

Nothing. There's a bit of eggplant parmesan, leftover from yesterday.

PIETRO

You can't offer my mother a lunch full of leftovers! Make some rice with butter!

GIULIANA

Make some rice with butter? Okay. I woke up late this morning, and kept hoping that Vittoria would come back. I'm really sad she's not coming back anymore. I felt good around her. I'd chitchat. I'd tell her all my stories. *(Exits)*.

PIETRO alone. Looks underneath the tablecloth again. Picks up the newspapers on the carpet. Fluffs the pillows. The bell rings. PIETRO goes to open. Enter PIETRO's mother and sister.

GINESTRA

Oh my goodness, look how cute this place is! What a beautiful house!

PIETRO's MOTHER

(Sighing) Too many stairs. I have heart problems and stairs aren't good for me. I had to stop three times to catch my breath. How did you end up getting a house without an elevator?

PIETRO

We liked this house. And plus we were in a rush so we didn't really pay attention to luxuries.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Pay attention to luxuries? You think checking that there's an elevator for when your mother, who has heart problems, comes to visit is a luxury?

PIETRO

Well since you said you would never come to our house!

PIETRO's MOTHER

And just like that you gave up on the idea of me coming, ever?

GINESTRA

You don't have heart problems mother. You have the healthiest heart. You did an electrocardiogram just a few days ago.

PIETRO's MOTHER

The electrocardiogram doesn't pick up certain heart problems. Even poor Lamberto Genova had done an electrocardiogram a few days before dying, and it didn't show anything. Poor Virginia told me.

PIETRO

Why are you calling her 'Poor Virginia'? She hasn't died as well, has she?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Poor Virginia! She hasn't died, but she's left alone. And in poor financial conditions as well. And her kids aren't comforting. One is in Persia. The other one got together with a skank. But thank goodness he hasn't married her.

PIETRO

There's been a minor inconvenience. Our maid Vittoria went to the hairdresser yesterday and didn't come back.

GIULIANA

(Entering) It's almost ready. The rice is almost cooked.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Hello, Miss.

GINESTRA

Hi.

GIULIANA

Hello.

GINESTRA

We were admiring your beautiful house!

PIETRO's MOTHER

I must've seen you somewhere before Miss. Where did I see you?

GIULIANA

You've seen me in a picture.

PIETRO's MOTHER

No. That picture didn't look like you. You must not be photogenic after all. No, I've seen your face somewhere. I'm very good at remembering faces. I never forget people's features. Where have I met you?

GIULIANA

Can I ask you not to call me Miss, since I married your son a week ago?

PIETRO's MOTHER

How did you get married? At the town hall?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

I'm a practicing Catholic. Only weddings in a church have value to me. To me, civil ceremonies don't hold value. In any case, I'll call you Mrs. if you want.

PIETRO

Wouldn't you like to call her by her name mother?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Her name is Giuliana?

PIETRO

Giuliana.

PIETRO's MOTHER

A pretentious name. Simply Giulia would've been a lot better. Why did they give you such a pretentious name?

GIULIANA

Isn't your daughter's name Ginestra? Is Ginestra not a pretentious name?

PIETRO's MOTHER

No. Ginestra is not a pretentious name. My husband really loved Leopardi. We called her Ginestra because of Leopardi. And plus also because when I was expecting her, I was in a place that was blooming with such beautiful Ginestre. In Rossignano. That year we were at a resort in Rossignano. Where are you from?

GIULIANA

I'm from Pieve di Montesecco.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And where's this Pieve di Montesecco?

GIULIANA

In Romagna.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Oh in Romagna? Rossignano is also in Romagna. Do you know Rossignano?

GIULIANA

No.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You don't know Rossignano? That's strange. They didn't take you to Rossignano's resort as a kid? Where did they take you?

GIULIANA

They didn't take me to resorts.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Oh, they didn't take you?

GIULIANA

No, my mother had other things on her mind.

PIETRO's MOTHER

What did she have on her mind?

GIULIANA

The fact that she didn't have money. My father and her are separated. My father left the house when I was little.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes. My son mentioned something. Your mother has been harshly tested by life?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

I've also been harshly tested by life. My children didn't comfort me. I lost my husband. My sister Filippa is stuck in a wheel chair. And now my son decided to give me yet another great torment. He got into a marriage I disapprove of. I don't have anything against you, Miss, or Mrs., or Giuliana, whatever you prefer. But I don't think you are right for my son, or that my son is right for you. Do you know why my son wanted it? Do you know why he wanted to marry you?

GIULIANA

No.

PIETRO's MOTHER

To give me grievance.

PIETRO

The rice must be overcooked by now. Let's go to the table!

(PIETRO and GINESTRA go in the kitchen to get the rice).

PIETRO's MOTHER

I like well-cooked rice. What was your maid's name?

GIULIANA

Vittoria.

PIETRO's MOTHER

She went to the hairdresser and didn't come back? That's how they are. Nowadays the help is always like this.

(GINESTRA and PIETRO come back from the kitchen with the rice).

GINESTRA

Mother, if only you saw the kitchen. They have such a tiny, tiny kitchen, it's so pretty!

(They sit at the table).

PIETRO's MOTHER

You need to check that she didn't take anything with her.

GIULIANA

Vittoria? Oh no, Vittoria didn't touch anything. She was so honest.

PIETRO's MOTHER

How long did you have her?

PIETRO

Four days.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And how can you talk about honesty after four days? *(She laughs)* You're naïve! You're very naïve! Life will teach you to be less naïve! Although you've also been harshly tested by life, haven't you?

GIULIANA

A little bit.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Did you get information about this Vittoria?

PIETRO

Yes. From Mrs. Giacchetta.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Giacchetta? The ones that have that electrical appliances store at the Tritone?

GIULIANA

I don't think that's them. Mrs. Giacchetta didn't have any electrical appliances in her house. She didn't even have a washing machine. She hand-washed all her sheets. She washed them, the Mrs., not Vittoria. She never let Vittoria get her hands wet.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And why did she leave Mrs. Giacchetta?

GIULIANA

She left because there was a dog. A huge dog, an English mastiff. Vittoria didn't like that dog. So she left.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Because of the dog?

GIULIANA

That dog grossed her out. He drooled. Got everything dirty.

PIETRO's MOTHER

All you have to do is train dogs and they don't make a mess.

(VITTORIA enters).

GIULIANA

Oh Vittoria! Finally you came back! I was afraid you weren't coming back anymore!

VITTORIA

Last night, when I left the hairdresser, it was raining a lot. I didn't want to mess up my perm, so I went up to Mrs. Giacchetta for a moment, who lives right next to the hairdresser, to wait for the rain to stop. Mrs. Giacchetta begged me to sleepover because she was scared and lonely. The husband had gone to Rieti. So I stayed for the night. Last night Mrs. Giacchetta made *panzarelle* with fresh ricotta cheese. I might've eaten too many because they were so good, and last night I felt sick, and threw up. So this morning Mrs. Giacchetta didn't let me get up. Meanwhile the husband came back, and he had brought four chickens, and I got them to give me two. They're free-range chickens. Mrs. Giacchetta cooked them, but she roasted them, because they're not the kind of chickens that you boil, they're the kind that are meant to be roasted. Good thing you still haven't had lunch. Mrs. Giacchetta brought me with her car in order to get here faster.

PIETRO

Wasn't Mrs. Giacchetta a widow?

GIULIANA

Right. I thought she was a widow.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And you're not firing her? She's out all night, and you're not firing her?

GIULIANA

No, the thought of firing her doesn't even cross my mind. I'm so happy she came back!

PIETRO's MOTHER

You're not reprimanding her? You're not saying anything? She doesn't come home because she doesn't want to get her perm wet, she thinks about her perm before her job, and you don't tell her anything? In what world do we live in?

GIULIANA

I'm not telling her anything. She brought me two chickens as a gift!

PIETRO's MOTHER

The usual bargains of the help.

(VITTORIA comes back with the roasted chickens).

VITTORIA

They're truly free-range!

GIULIANA

Didn't you say Mrs. Giacchetta was a widow?

VITTORIA

Yes, she's a widow. That guy who stays with her isn't her husband. He's married. Married with five kids. Even the dog is his.

PIETRO

And how come Mrs. Giacchetta was afraid to be alone? Wasn't that huge dog there?

VITTORIA

Oh no, the husband brought the dog with him to Rieti. Not the husband, I mean the one who stays with her.

PIETRO

Couldn't you call last night to say you weren't coming back?

VITTORIA

How could I have called? Mrs. Giacchetta doesn't have a phone.

PIETRO

She doesn't even have a phone!

GIULIANA

She doesn't have a phone? But I called her when I got your information!

VITTORIA

Yes. But she forgot to pay the bill, and now they blocked it.

(She exits).

PIETRO's MOTHER

What an overflow of immorality! Even amongst simple people! This girl is talking about this woman who lives with someone else's husband as if it were nothing.

GINESTRA

I must say this chicken is really good!

PIETRO

Definitely free-range.

PIETRO's MOTHER

It's not free-range.

PIETRO

It's not free-range?

PIETRO's MOTHER

No. It's a good chicken, cooked well, but it's not free-range.

(VITTORIA enters with fruit).

VITTORIA

The next time you come I'll make *panzerelle* with ricotta cheese.

PIETRO's MOTHER

I have an ulcer. I can't eat them.

VITTORIA

You have an ulcer? My mother had surgery two years ago because of an ulcer. After the surgery, she was on her deathbed. They had already anointed her with sacramental oil. The doctor told me: It's a perforated ulcer. She can't be saved. They had brought her to the general hospital. You could say she was already dead. And so you know what I did? I asked them to let me bring her home, and at home I boiled four pounds of chicory. That bitter water cleansed her guts, and she healed. A month later she felt good, and would eat everything. Now she even eats bell peppers.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Even bell peppers?

VITTORIA

She eats everything. You should see how sturdy she is! You should see how she works on the farmland! One day I want to bring her here. She likes coming to Rome. Each time she goes to the general hospital to say hi to the nuns that took care of her. You should see how much those nuns love her! Everybody loves my mother. She's a saint. I would jump through fire for my mother.
(She exits).

PIETRO

She's truly a salamander.

GIULIANA

A useless salamander.

PIETRO's MOTHER

What are you talking about? This Vittoria of yours doesn't seem like a bad girl after all. Maybe she's just a little scatterbrained. It's really hard to find good girls nowadays. They don't want to work in houses anymore, they'd rather go in a factory, so then they meet the communists in the factories, and when they're tired of working in the factory and they go work in homes, they have subversive ideas, and they do the chores unwillingly, in a chaotic way, with those ideas in their head. Virginia had such a hard time with the help this winter. She changed six different maids. Now she ended up with a fifteen-year-old girl, she couldn't find anything else. Nobody wants to stay at Virginia's. I don't know why.

GINESTRA

They say she gives them little to eat.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes, it's true, Virginia never kept a lot of food, not even for herself. She doesn't care, it's not important to her, she says it's money gone to waste. But the help wants to eat. So when poor Lamberto passed away, Virginia found herself alone. Alone in the house with that fifteen-year-old child. And yet she didn't lose her spirits. She's brave. Poor Lamberto fell ill in the bathroom while he was shaving his beard. He collapsed in his pajamas, with the shaving brush still in his hand. She carried him to the bed with her own arms. He took his last breath. Poor Virginia now finds herself in difficult financial conditions. She might have to sell her house. She says she wants to start working. She's going to offer cello lessons. Virginia's a great cello player. She has a marvelous touch. She's a brave and virtuous woman.

PIETRO

Too bad she's unbearable.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Why? You always have to talk bad about everybody. Virginia is brave and virtuous. I see her every day, I'm very close to her, because she's alone. Her kids aren't very comforting. No. She spends the nights alone, with that little maid, and she started teaching her cross-stitching. But now even that one says she wants to leave. She's scared. She's scared to walk through the hallway at night, when it's dark, because there was a dead person in the house.

PIETRO

Maybe she found another place, where she hopes to eat more.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes. It's possible. Even that's possible. Virginia is too economical when it comes to food. Poor Lamberto would sometimes complain to me. He'd complain about the cooking in his house. You know what Virginia buys at the butcher's? Lung. Something that you usually give to cats. She sautés it in the pan very slowly with some rosemary and sage. She says it's good.

GIULIANA

But if Virginia ate lung when she was rich, what will she eat now that she's poor?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Oh I don't know. I really don't know. She's already so skinny, poor Virginia. She's a skeleton.

PIETRO

She's the ugliest woman I know.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You're wrong. Virginia isn't ugly. She has beautiful hair. And plus she's very chic. She dresses well. She has a lot of style.

GIULIANA

She has a lot of style?

PIETRO's MOTHER

So much. Virginia has so much style.

GIULIANA

But does she spend a lot of money on clothes?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Not even a penny. She makes everything herself. She knits these beautiful dresses. She makes dresses, bags... even overcoats!

GIULIANA

Even the overcoats are knitted? With knitting needles?

PIETRO's MOTHER

They're all knitted. She made one for Ginestra. Right Ginestra? Virginia is very hardworking.

GINESTRA

But what she made for me stretched out a lot the first time I washed it, it had these very very long sleeves... I had to give it away.

PIETRO's MOTHER

No wonder, you washed it at home. I told you to have it washed at the drycleaners. If you want Giuliana, my child, I'll tell Virginia to make a little overcoat for you too. Or a knitted jacket, if you prefer. Knitting is a real distraction for Virginia.

GIULIANA

I think Virginia has other things on her mind at the moment rather than making me a coat!

PIETRO's MOTHER

No. She'll do it with great pleasure. It'll even seem like she's returning a favor because I helped her a lot during these rough few days. I sent my gardener to do some work. I always stayed close to her. No, knitting for her is a distraction. She's alone, in that empty, dimly lit house. I don't

know why she always keeps the blinds half shut. I'm also going to visit her today when I leave here. Lamberto Genova was a dear family friend of ours. To think he died this way, so suddenly from coronary thrombosis! God decided to give me this great grievance as well. I was still feeling shocked by the pain that my son had given me, getting married this way, so suddenly, rushed, without even quite explaining to me who he was marrying! And not in a church. At the mayor's. I know, he's an atheist, it's okay, but it's not a good enough reason for not getting married in a church! Everybody gets married in a church, even atheists. So poor Lamberto had come to see me, a few nights before he died. He found me in tears, and he comforted me. He told me: You were expecting comfort from your children? No. You were wrong. Children don't give any kind of comfort. And then he told me: Stay very close to Virginia when I'm no longer here. It's clear he must've had some sort of premonition. And then, as a doctor, maybe he knew he was sick. I told him: my dear Lamberto, with my heart in this state, and so many grievances, I'm going to go a lot sooner than you. So then we started talking about the afterlife. He wasn't religious. Unfortunately he wasn't religious. He was a materialist, maybe his studies brought him to materialism. And while leaving, he told me still: Be careful with your heart. It's a tired heart that has suffered. One shouldn't bother worrying about their children. Children follow their own path. I told him: But my dear Lamberto, for him to get into such an unreasonable, wretched marriage! The only male child! He left shaking his head. He never found any comfort in his children as well. It's not that I want to offend you, Miss, because I don't have anything against you. You need to understand me. I'm a mother; one day you'll also be a mother. Mothers grieve. Just think that no one has even explained to me who you are. They told me that you met at a party for painters. One of these painter parties. And at this party you didn't feel too well, is that right?

GIULIANA

I drank too much.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Wine? Liquor?

GIULIANA

Red wine.

PIETRO's MOTHER

It must've been bad wine. It wasn't genuine. When wine is genuine, it's not bad for you. Nowadays people throw parties with bad wine. They do it on purpose, so that the girls who aren't used to drinking get sick and the men take advantage. Next time you go to another party, don't drink. Drink only water. Did you know those painters well?

GIULIANA

No. I didn't know anyone. I stumbled there by chance, with a photographer who was a friend of my friend Topazia.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Did you know them well, Pietro?

PIETRO

I didn't know them at all. I also stumbled there by chance.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Did you drink as well?

PIETRO

I drank a little bit.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Why do you drink in houses of people you don't know? Who's this Topazia friend of yours? A very, very pretentious name.

GIULIANA

Topazia is a dear friend of mine, the dearest friend I have. Another friend of mine is called Elena, she's a really nice person, but I don't connect with her as well as I do with Topazia. She's too pessimistic. She sees trouble everywhere. I can't be with pessimistic people. I'm very easily influenced. The pessimism immediately latches onto me as well.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And my son? Does he seem like an optimist to you?

GIULIANA

He doesn't seem like that much of a pessimist. Otherwise maybe I wouldn't have married him.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You think he's an optimist? You're wrong. He's just superficial. Even my daughter Ginestra is a bit superficial. With their superficiality, these children of mine have given me worries and heartache. Why didn't you think before getting married, my child? Why such carelessness, you, who's been so harshly tested by life? You're not religious, am I right Miss?

GIULIANA

Based on the day. It depends on the day.

PIETRO's MOTHER

What horrible words I must hear. But I assumed as much. She's not religious. If she had been religious, she would've asked God to inspire her, and God would've removed her from my son. He would've guided her to a man more suited for her. And yet, the more I look at her, the more I feel like I've seen her before. Where could I have seen you? Where?

GIULIANA

Maybe in some store...

PIETRO's MOTHER

What kind of store? These girlfriends you were talking about, what kind of people are they? This friend Patrizia, or what did you say her name was?

GIULIANA

Not Patrizia. Topazia.

GINESTRA

It's not Topazia Valcipriana, is it?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Which, Valcipriana? Ah, the Valcipriana girl, it's true, her name is Topazia! The one who had that wretched marriage? With that Pierfederici? A writer?

PIETRO

Take Me Away, Jesus!

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes, he wrote a novel called *Jesus, Help* or something like that. But it doesn't talk about Jesus at all. They use these sorts of titles to tarnish his name. It's an unintelligible book, full of foul language. I didn't even finish cutting the pages. This Pierfederici was very handsome. Above all, he had a lot of style. The Valcipriana girl isn't ugly, but she has no style.

GIULIANA

You think she has no style?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Not even a little bit. So this Pierfederici married Valcipriana and left her right away, after fourteen days of marriage. He's sick, a neuropathic. Even the late Lamberto, who was treating him, used to say so. I think he also threw away some money. And this girl, she too went down the wrong path. She doesn't want to stay with her parents anymore. She's full of men. It seems she can't have kids, because she has a tilted uterus. You're her friend?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Oh, so that's where I saw you! I saw you getting ice cream at the Aragno Café with Valcipriana. With this Topazia. Valcipriana had these white shorts, all dirty, completely inappropriate, an ugly bandana around her neck, and she looked like a guy off the streets. You were wearing a yellow terrycloth dress. It wasn't a nice spectacle, my dear, I must tell you. Neither you nor the other one. Do you still have that terrycloth dress?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Don't wear it anymore. Give it as a present to Vittoria. It's a dress that doesn't look good on you. You don't look good in yellow. And yellow terrycloth on top of that! Yellow terrycloth is worn by the seaside but not in the city. Will your friend Topazia come visit you here? When she comes, let me know. Because this way I won't come that day. I'd rather not run into her. I don't like her. Cecilia Valcipriana, her mother, was at Lamberto Genova's funeral yesterday. She was miserable. A total wreck.

PIETRO

Why?

PIETRO's MOTHER

You're asking me why? From worrying about her daughter. And then also because of grief over Lamberto's death. They were very close friends. He was her doctor. She used to get psychoanalyzed.

GIULIANA

Lamberto Genova was a psychoanalyst?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes.

GIULIANA

Did he have an office around the Circonvallazione Clodia?

PIETRO's MOTHER

I don't know. He had two or three offices. I never went to the office. I never got psychoanalyzed, I don't need to. I have faith.

GIULIANA

I knew this Lamberto Genova. I knew him very well. I got psychoanalyzed by him.

PIETRO

You got psychoanalyzed? I didn't know that. You never told me.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You married her and you didn't even know that she got psychoanalyzed? And from our poor Lamberto?

GIULIANA

Twice. I only went twice. Topazia didn't take me. That Hungarian doctor, whom Topazia knew, took me when she was already in America. He brought me because he said I had a strong inferiority complex. I identified with my shadow.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And what did Lamberto tell you to do?

GIULIANA

Nothing. He told me absolutely nothing. As soon as I arrived he made me lie down on the couch and I was supposed to speak. He was sitting in an armchair at his desk, and he would turn his back to me. I would talk... I like to talk, I really like to share my business. But it was 8,000 liras a sitting. And so the second time I told him: how's it possible I need to pay 8,000 liras a sitting just to talk? Talk to someone who turns his back to me? I'm full of debts, I don't have a job, I don't have a house, I don't have anything, and I come here to spend 8,000 liras a sitting?

GINESTRA

He'd charge 8,000 liras a sitting? And then his wife would give him lung to eat?

GIULIANA

I didn't give him that money. Actually I asked him to loan me some. But he said no. He said that he never loaned money to his patients because it went against the therapy. Good excuse, I told him. He'd laugh, he used to have a lot of fun with me. Those moments when he was turned toward me, when he'd stop psychoanalyzing, he'd laugh with me. But after the second time I didn't go anymore. It cost too much. If it had been free, I would've gone often, because I liked it, I'd rest while talking lying down on that couch, talking to those round, stooped, shoulders, and that neck all full of grey curls...

PIETRO's MOTHER

Curls?

PIETRO

It wasn't Lamberto Genova. Lamberto Genova was skinny, tall, straight, with a completely bald head.

PIETRO's MOTHER

He had a bare, smooth, bald, head, like a perfect pear. There wasn't a single hair on his head anymore. He had lost them all.

PIETRO

You don't remember the name? The name that was written on the door? This doctor of yours must've had a name.

GIULIANA

He had a name that I don't remember... I don't have a good memory when it comes to names.

GINESTRA

And have you stopped identifying with your shadow?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Ginestra, are you shedding your formalities so soon?

GINESTRA

Isn't she my brother's wife?

PIETRO's MOTHER

But it was only a civil marriage. And plus we know her so little! All that my son was able to tell me is that he married a woman who was harshly tested by life.

GIULIANA

No, I didn't stop identifying with my shadow... Maybe I'll never stop.

PIETRO's MOTHER

So you owed poor Lamberto 16,000 liras? I'll give them to Virginia. I'll give them right away. I'm going now.

PIETRO

But she didn't go to Lamberto Genova! She went to another one! One with curly hair!

PIETRO's MOTHER

It's true. How confusing! You didn't talk that much today and yet you confused me.

GIULIANA

Everybody says so. Everybody says that when I talk I confuse them. Even Vittoria always tells me.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Always! You've only had Vittoria for four days!

GIULIANA

And even Pietro says so.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Oh, Pietro, for him confusion is his paradise. He loves confusion, he's always loved it, since he was a boy. He loves confusion and chaos. To think that my poor husband was such a lover of order! He was so meticulous, careful, punctual! With schedules, attire, everything! Yesterday, at the funeral of poor Lamberto, I was embarrassed. Pietro had a horrific hat on his head. A hat that looked like it was picked out of a garbage can. Make him throw away that hat. He was there with that ugly hat tilted over his eyes, an ugly scarf tied to his neck. He looked like a thief.

PIETRO

No way I'm throwing it away. It's a great hat.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Do you know why he wears that hat?

GIULIANA

Why?

PIETRO's MOTHER

To humiliate me.

GINESTRA

It's not an ugly hat. It's a countryman's hat.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You, Ginestra, are always optimistic. You, since you say you like optimists, look at my daughter here who's a real optimist. Not an optimist, no, she's accommodating. Accommodating out of superficiality. She doesn't look for perfection. My kids don't look for perfection. I, instead, aspire to perfection. Either perfection, or nothing. Give me your measurements. Tell Vittoria to bring a measuring tape. I'm going to Virginia now, with the measurements. That way she can start the overcoat right away.

GIULIANA

Not only do I owe Virginia that money, those 16,000 liras, but I'm also forcing her to make me a whole overcoat?

PIETRO's MOTHER

What money? Didn't we say you went to another doctor?

GIULIANA

Oh right. That's true.

PIETRO

Vittoria! The measuring tape!

VITTORIA

(Entering) Did you call?

PIETRO

A measuring tape.

VITTORIA

We don't have a measuring tape. I was looking for it yesterday as well, to take the table measurements for the table pad I needed to buy. We don't have it.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You don't even have a measuring tape in the house?

VITTORIA

No. We're still a bit unstocked. I wasn't able to buy the table pad yesterday. Right, I need to clear the table and bring back the oilcloth to the custodian. She asked me for it.

PIETRO's MOTHER

I'll take your measurements another time. Meanwhile I'll buy the wool. I don't want poor Virginia to worry about expenses. She's not in very good financial conditions. She has to sell her house. Such a pity! A beautiful house on the Aventino. For you, you'll more or less need at least three kilos of wool for an overcoat.

GINESTRA

Three kilos of wool Mother? You're crazy. You'll just barely need two and a half kilos.

PIETRO's MOTHER

There's also the sleeves. You're always optimistic. I'm telling you, you'll need at least three kilos. What color do you want the overcoat?

GIULIANA

Maybe blue?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Blue? But what shade of blue? Baby blue? I'm afraid it would make you look pale. Teal-blue is better. Or maybe even an olive green. Let's go, Ginestra. Let's go to the Wool House.

PIETRO

Should I take you with the car?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Won't be necessary. I'm embarrassed to get into that car of yours. It's all beat up, all full of mud. It's inappropriate. *(She puts on her hat in front of the mirror).*

PIETRO

What a fancy hat!

GINESTRA

Mother went to buy herself a hat as soon as she found out you were getting married.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes. Because I thought you were getting married in the church. I couldn't imagine you'd do everything so rushed, to humiliate me one more time. Such haste, so secretive, like thieves.

PIETRO

Why, thieves don't get married in a church?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Like thieves. You did everything like thieves. To give me heartache. To seem shameless. For chaos. Love for chaos. Love for irregularity. Let's go, Ginestra. If it gets dark, we won't see the colors of the wool.

GINESTRA

Goodbye. Thank you.

PIETRO

Goodbye.

GIULIANA

Goodbye.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Goodbye.

PIETRO's MOTHER and GINESTRA exit. GIULIANA and PIETRO are alone.

GIULIANA

I'm afraid I won't be able to escape from poor Virginia's overcoat.

PIETRO

I'm afraid so.

GIULIANA

This mother of yours is a bit scatterbrained. You didn't tell me she was a bit scatterbrained. If she wasn't scatterbrained, she'd be unbearable.

PIETRO

Yes. If she wasn't scatterbrained, she'd be exhausting.

GIULIANA

Good thing instead she's scatterbrained. You didn't describe her accurately to me. Me, I'm sure I described my mother to you properly. Exactly how she is.

PIETRO

We'll go and see your mother as well. Mothers are important.

GIULIANA

You don't really know how to describe people. Maybe you're an idiot. Sometimes I worry I married an idiot.

PIETRO

Weren't you ready to marry anyone either way?

GIULIANA

Anyone, but not an idiot.

PIETRO

How come you didn't tell me you got psychoanalyzed?

GIULIANA

I didn't tell you? Who knows how many things I still haven't told you. There was no time. At the end of the day we know each other so little! We got married in such a hurry! Like thieves.

VITTORIA enters.

VITTORIA

What do I have to make for dinner tonight?

GIULIANA

Eggplant Parmesan.

PIETRO

Again? No, no, enough with eggplant Parmesan. Let's find something else.

GIULIANA

Would you prefer a bit of lung?

VITTORIA

I could make an omelet with onions.

PIETRO

Good idea.

VITTORIA

I returned the oilcloth to the custodian, but we need to buy this table pad if your mother comes over again. Because the custodian needs her oilcloth.

GIULIANA

Was there a table pad in Mrs. Giacchetta's house?

VITTORIA

No, because she always ate in the kitchen. Without a tablecloth, on the kitchen table. On the marble.

GIULIANA

On the marble? Mrs. Giacchetta doesn't even have a laminate kitchen? She's not very modern.

VITTORIA

It's not that she's not very modern. It's that she's struggling a little bit. If she wins a case against her poor husband's relatives, then she'll redo her entire house.

GIULIANA

But she has a car? Didn't she drive you here with her car?

VITTORIA

It's not hers. It's the company's. Mrs. Giacchetta works for a company that trades soaps. On top of the car there's a loudspeaker, and behind it a record that plays and makes soap propaganda. I'm a little embarrassed when I'm in that car, that moves around the streets yelling soaps. Mrs. Giacchetta says that at first even she was embarrassed, but not anymore. She got used to it. One day Mrs. Giacchetta will come here with all the soaps. If you'll want to buy some soap she'll give you a great discount. Do you need anything?

PIETRO

No thanks. We have soap.

VITTORIA

No, I mean do you need anything right now. I'm going over to the girl upstairs to ask if I can borrow some onions. We don't even have an onion in the house.

GIULIANA

Good.

VITTORIA exits.

PIETRO

This Vittoria is nice.

GIULIANA

Very.

PIETRO

You told her everything about yourself? Did you also tell her about the psychoanalyst?

GIULIANA

No, maybe I haven't told her about that yet. Your mother is so different from mine! We have very different mothers. With such different mothers, and everything so different, will we be able to live together?

PIETRO

I don't know. We'll see.

GIULIANA

Your mother doesn't think at all that I married you for money. Your mother doesn't think about anything. She's too oblivious to think.

PIETRO

Yup.

GIULIANA

If she'd think, she'd be unbearable. She'd think about unbearable things. But she doesn't think about anything, she only chases after frivolous things. At the end of the day, she doesn't care that much about how I popped up out of the blue.

PIETRO

Yes. It's true.

GIULIANA

But why are mothers so important? Did psychoanalysis find out that they're so important? According to psychoanalysis, are they the most important thing?

PIETRO

Yes. According to psychoanalysis, the origins of our behavior can be traced back to our relationships with our mothers.

GIULIANA

How weird! These mothers who stay crouched in the depths of our lives, in the roots of our lives, in the dark, so important, so defining! One forgets, while they're alive, or they don't care, actually they think they don't care, but not completely. That mother of yours, so scatterbrained and yet so defining! It doesn't seem at all that she could define anything, and yet she defined you!

PIETRO

She defined me.

GIULIANA

She wasn't the one from the inkbottle incident. It was someone else. Good thing I didn't spill the ink on your mother. Otherwise maybe she'd bring us bad luck. Since your mother is so important.

PIETRO

Spilling ink doesn't bring bad luck. Spilling salt on a Friday brings bad luck.

GIULIANA

Not only on Fridays, always.

PIETRO

Only on Fridays.

GIULIANA

Vittoria says always.

PIETRO

In a little bit poor Virginia will see three kilos of wool getting spilled on her, with the task of making you a teal overcoat.

GIULIANA

Not teal. Olive green.

PIETRO

Poor Virginia!

GIULIANA

We always talk such nonsense! We always jump from one subject to another!

PIETRO

Not from one subject to an-*other*. From one subject to an-*olive*.

GIULIANA

From one subject to an-*olive*. We never have a well-constructed conversation. After all we know each other so little! We should really try to understand what we're like. Otherwise what kind of a marriage is it? We got married in such a hurry! What was the rush?

PIETRO

Oh let's not start putting our marriage into question again! We got married and that's it.

GIULIANA

That's it? Like hell it is! Don't be so superficial. Why did I marry you? And what if I married you for money?

PIETRO

It is what it is.

GIULIANA

It is what it is? Like hell! It would be horrible.

PIETRO

Where's my hat?

GIULIANA

You have a funeral?

PIETRO

No. And it's not raining. But I want my hat. I need to go out and I want my hat. I've decided to always go around wearing a hat.

GIULIANA

Maybe because your mother said that she can't stand that hat?

PIETRO

Maybe.

GIULIANA

You see how important mothers are? Do you see how defining they are?

PIETRO

So? The hat?

GIULIANA

I'm afraid that Vittoria put it back in the mothballs.

PIETRO

Damn it! This mothball obsession! Tell her to take it out!

GIULIANA

Vittoria must still be with the girl from upstairs. When she goes, she never comes back. We could've eaten the omelet without the onions.

PIETRO

Okay, I'll go out without the hat.

GIULIANA

Where are you going?

PIETRO

To a client's. At the Quartiere Trionfale.

GIULIANA

At the Quartiere Trionfale? Maybe my psychoanalyst wasn't at the Circonvallazione Clodia. Maybe he was at the Quartiere Trionfale.

PIETRO

Bye. I'll be back soon.

GIULIANA

Bye. Are onions bad for ulcers?

PIETRO

Very bad. But you don't have an ulcer. My mother has it.

GIULIANA

Is it really true that she has it?

PIETRO

No one knows. She says so. No one's ever known if it's true. Lamberto Genova used to say no, he'd say that she was as healthy as a horse, and she didn't have anything. No one knows.

GIULIANA

Mothers are so mysterious!

PIETRO

Very mysterious!

GIULIANA

And so important!

PIETRO

Yes. So important!

GIULIANA

But at a certain point, it's also okay to tell them to take a hike, right? Maybe love them, but tell them to take a hike.

PIETRO

Of course. And what illnesses does your mother have?

GIULIANA

Oh my mother also has all sorts of illnesses. Rheumatisms, abdominal cramping, her liver, gallbladder, which I'm not sure what it's doing... she has everything. Mothers are also a pain in the neck!

PIETRO

A real pain in the neck.

GIULIANA

You know what I think?

PIETRO

What?

GIULIANA

I think that maybe I never actually met this Lamberto Genova.

I Married You for Fun: Adaptation

ACT I

PIETRO

My hat, where's my hat?

GIULIANA

You have a hat?

PIETRO

I had it. Now I can't find it anymore.

GIULIANA

I don't remember this hat.

PIETRO

Maybe you can't remember it. I haven't worn it in a long time. We've only known each other for a month.

GIULIANA

Don't say it like that, "known each other for a month," as if I weren't your wife.

PIETRO

You've been my wife for a week. During this week, and this whole past month I never wore my hat. I only wear it when it's pouring rain, or when I go to funerals. Today it's raining, and I have to go to a funeral. It's a soft, brown hat. A good hat.

GIULIANA

Maybe it's at your mother's house.

PIETRO

Maybe. You haven't seen it by any chance, in the middle of all my stuff? A hat?

GIULIANA

No. I had all your stuff put in mothballs. It's possible that your hat was there too. You're going to a funeral? Who died?

PIETRO

Someone. How many days have we had Vittoria?

GIULIANA

Since Wednesday. Three days.

PIETRO

And you made her place all our winter stuff in mothballs right away?

GIULIANA

Yours. I don't have winter stuff. I have a skirt, a sweater, and a raincoat.

PIETRO

You made her put all my stuff in mothballs? Right away?

GIULIANA

Right away.

PIETRO

Brilliant. Just brilliant. But now let's find a way to fish my hat out. I have to go to this funeral with my mother.

GIULIANA

Tell me who died.

PIETRO

Someone named Lamberto Genova. He was my folks' friend. He died suddenly the day before yesterday, from coronary thrombosis, while he was in the bathroom shaving his beard.

GIULIANA

Lamberto Genova? I knew him. I knew him very well. He died?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

In the bathroom! I'm telling you, I knew him extremely well! One time he even loaned me some money.

PIETRO

That's impossible. He was such a stingy man.

GIULIANA

But he loaned me some money. He was so in love with me.

PIETRO

Vittoria! See if you can find a hat! A soft, brown hat, all furry! The Mrs. says that maybe you put it in mothballs.

(Entering)

VITTORIA

Then it'll probably be in the Four Seasons closet. But you need a ladder. I have to go get it in the basement. The winter stuff is too high up, and I can't reach it just using a stool.

PIETRO

Is it possible that it's so hard to get your own hat back?

VITTORIA exits

GIULIANA

You know when's the last time I saw—

PIETRO

But you might not have ever seen it!

GIULIANA

Not the hat. I meant Lamberto Genova. You know when's the last time I saw Lamberto Genova?

PIETRO

When?

GIULIANA

A few days before I met you. It was January. I was wandering about in the rain and had an intense desire to die. I was walking on the bridge and planning to jump in the river, and thought that I would leave my raincoat on the railing of the bridge, with a letter in its pocket for my friend Elena, so that they'd give her the raincoat. In fact it's a nice little raincoat and it would've been such a shame if it had gotten lost.

VITTORIA re-enters

VITTORIA

Here's your hat.

Exits

PIETRO

Accidenti (Damn it), it stinks of mothballs.

PIETRO puts it on.

GIULIANA

So I see Lamberto Genova coming forward on the bridge, so small, with those big puffy cheeks, that smile of his...

PIETRO

No. Your Lamberto Genova is not the one I knew.

GIULIANA

Why, the one you knew wasn't small with two big, puffy cheeks?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

Mine instead was small, with completely white hair, two big puffy cheeks... So, as I was telling you, that morning, I thought as soon as I saw him: "Damn it, I owe him some money," and I thought, "Let's hope he invites me to lunch," and then I thought, "I won't kill myself for now." In fact he took me out to lunch. And while I was eating I thought, "This guy is so in love with

me, and maybe I'm going to marry him, so he can pay all my debts, and I can relax, stay warm, with this respectable, calm, old man, he'll be like a father to me." That's what I was thinking.

PIETRO

My Lamberto Genova had a wife and kids.

GIULIANA

Mine also had a wife and kids. But maybe he was willing to get divorced.

PIETRO

You can't get a divorce in Italy.

GIULIANA

He would've gone abroad. He was so in love with me. He used to say he had never felt such a strong attraction for a woman before.

PIETRO

My Lamberto Genova was very busy and didn't have time to waste with girls. He was a very serious and esteemed professional, he was my folks' friend, and well, he wasn't the one that you're talking about. We have to go to this funeral.

GIULIANA

How fun, going to a funeral with your mother.

PIETRO

Why are you always so sarcastic when you talk about my mother?

GIULIANA

No, I was just saying what fun, going to a funeral in company of that fun mother of yours.

PIETRO

Can you leave my mother alone, please?

GIULIANA

Don't you want to know if in the end I almost married my Lamberto Genova?

PIETRO

Tell me, but hurry up, because I'm late.

GIULIANA

I didn't go, because then I met you. But I was willing to marry anyone, when I met you, get it? Even Lamberto Genova, with his big puffy cheeks. Anyone. I was ready for anything.

PIETRO

You told me.

GIULIANA

Anything. I wanted to get out of that situation. Or drink, or drown.

PIETRO

Got it.

GIULIANA

So I married you. *Also* for the money. Get it?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

And you married me *also* out of pity. Is it true that you married me *also* out of pity?

PIETRO

True.

He exits.

GIULIANA

(She screams after him) So that means our marriage isn't solid at all! *Hai capito?* (Do you understand?)

VITTORIA enters.

VITTORIA

What should I make for lunch?

GIULIANA

Melanzane alla parmigiana (Eggplant parmesan).

VITTORIA

Again?

GIULIANA

Yes, again. Why?

VITTORIA

I've been here for three days, and we've made nothing but *melanzane alla parmigiana* (eggplant parmesan). Aren't you getting up?

GIULIANA

Not yet.

VITTORIA

Is your husband coming back late?

GIULIANA

I don't know. He went to a funeral.

VITTORIA

Someone died?

GIULIANA

Someone by the name of Lamberto Genova. I knew him as well, but maybe the one I knew wasn't called Lamberto, maybe his name was Adalberto, *non mi ricordo* (I can't quite recall)... I don't remember names. Do you have a good memory?

VITTORIA

Yes, I do. I have an incredible memory. When I went to school, I'd learn everything right away, the rivers, the capitals, the wars, everything, just everything. But I got to the fourth grade, then I had to go work in the country. We were nine siblings. Anyway, I can do any job well. I don't know how I do everything so well. In the homes where I've worked they've always cried when I left.

GIULIANA

Well I've never liked studying, and my mother wanted me to become a teacher, but I wanted to be an actress, or a ballerina. So when I was seventeen I ran away from home.

VITTORIA

You ran away? And you never went back?

GIULIANA

I go back from time to time, but rarely. I don't get along with my mother. As soon as we're together, we immediately start fighting. I disappointed her because I didn't become a teacher, nor an actress, or a ballerina.

VITTORIA

But now that you got married, your mother must be happy.

GIULIANA

I wrote to her that I was getting married. She responded saying be careful, because there's a lot of good-for-nothings out there. My mother's very pessimistic.

VITTORIA

But didn't you introduce her to the mister?

GIULIANA

Not yet.

VITTORIA

You're mother's right. There are a lot of good-for-nothings out there, it's true. I've been engaged three times, and all three times things went south for me because they weren't good men, and my mother wasn't very happy. If only you knew how much I listen to my mother. I'd jump through fire for my mother.

GIULIANA

Where do you live?

VITTORIA

My house is in Fara Sabina. One day I'll take you there with me. Do you like pork? This year we have such a nice pig, everyone's jealous. But now let me get back to work. If you keep me here chitchatting I fall behind.

GIULIANA

Can't you stay and chitchat a bit longer? The house is clean anyway, you cleaned it yesterday. You know, I've never had a maid before. You're the first one I've got. I find that having a maid in the house is very convenient.

VITTORIA

You've discovered America!

GIULIANA

Really, it's a huge convenience.

VITTORIA

Your mother's house didn't have a maid?

GIULIANA

Neanche per sogno (Not in our wildest dreams). My mother lives in Romagna, in a village called Pieve di Montesecco. That's where I was born. My mother is a trouser maker.

VITTORIA

Your mother? A trouser maker?

GIULIANA

Yes.

VITTORIA

So you're almost like me! You're poor by birth!

GIULIANA

Except we didn't have a pig. We didn't even have a chicken or a rabbit. We had absolutely nothing. We were living in misery, I ran away at seventeen. I came here, to *Roma* (Rome), to my friend Elena, who was a clerk at a stationary store. I ran away because I wanted to become an actress, or a ballerina. And meanwhile I was here, and at first I felt happy, because I wasn't in Pieve di Montesecco anymore, but instead I was in *Roma* (Rome). I didn't know how to become an actress, but I thought it'd be enough for me to walk down the street before someone would stop me and say: You're just who I'm looking for my film! So in the beginning I wasn't doing anything. Until I also joined the stationary store. Then one day I spilled a big bottle of ink on one of the clients. I didn't do it on purpose, it was really heavy and it slipped from my hands. We tried to get rid of the stains with milk, but it was pointless. The owner of the shop got so angry! She fired me immediately.

VITTORIA

I bet! And then?

GIULIANA

I met a person in a record store. He had a long, black moustache, and a pale face, with black sad eyes. He never laughed.

VITTORIA

Ever?

GIULIANA

Never. He wore a big black sweater, with suede hems. A beautiful sweater. I think that the first thing I fell in love with was that sweater.

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then I fell in love with him. His name was Manolo. And Elena would say to me: No, no, don't fall in love with that guy! *Non mi piace* (I don't like him)! He looks like the Dark Knight! And I would say: Who's the Dark Knight? And she would say: I don't know.

VITTORIA

And so?

GIULIANA

So then one time he took me to his house in via Giulia. He lived alone, with a white cat, as big as a sheep. He stayed there with his cat on his lap, petting it, and looking at me with that sad face of his... and I was sitting on the carpet, and I loved him, and was consumed by melancholy. And he told me that he could never love again. Because he always thought about his wife who had left him. His wife's name was Topazia.

VITTORIA

And why did she leave him?

GIULIANA

Because she was a restless woman, complicated, who'd immediately get tired of men, and as soon as she had one, she instantly wanted another one. That's what he told me. She'd run away with her car. She was obsessed with cars. She always switched them. And she'd speed like a madwoman, and he was always scared that she could kill herself.

VITTORIA

What strange people!

GIULIANA

He on the other hand, couldn't even look at cars. He was a writer. He had published two novels and a poetry book. The poetry book was called: *The Useless Salamander*. The novels, one was called: *Spring with the Sailor*. The other was: *Take Me Away, Jesus*.

VITTORIA

Take me away, Jesus?

GIULIANA

I tried to read them. But I couldn't understand a word. I even gave them to Elena, and she also couldn't understand anything. And she'd always tell me: No, no, I don't like that guy! Elena's nose is very long and big, and when there's something that she doesn't like, her nose becomes even longer, and bigger, and it crinkles all up. Crinkling up, it doesn't get shorter, it becomes even longer, and even bigger, it's so strange. She'd say: No, no, I don't like him! I don't like that guy! You're in serious trouble! Take me away, Jesus!

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then he told me to move in with him. And Elena was desperate. But I couldn't even dream of saying no.

VITTORIA

And would he tell you that he loved you now?

GIULIANA

Nope. He'd always say that he didn't love me. I would stay in bed all day, or sit on the carpet, petting the cat and thinking... I had learned to think. I had become a different person. Sometimes I would think: "who knows if he'll marry me?" But I'm telling you, he didn't love me. He thought I had no style. And I would pine away and get consumed like a candle by the sorrow of not having any style, I had become ugly, skinny, pale. And I always dreamt about bats and snakes. And I would ask him in the morning: Why do I always dream about bats and snakes?

VITTORIA

And what about him?

GIULIANA

Nothing. He would shrug. He didn't care about me. He never approved of anything I said. He found that what I said was always trivial.

VITTORIA

But why did you stay with him if he was treating you this way?

GIULIANA

Because I couldn't separate myself from him. I was bewitched. I had been with him for over three months, and I realized that I was pregnant.

VITTORIA

Oh! And so?

GIULIANA

And so I told him, and he told me that I was wrong, that it wasn't possible. He said it with such conviction that I started thinking that it was impossible as well and that I must've made a mistake. And one morning I woke up, and he was gone.

VITTORIA

So what did you do?

GIULIANA

I started crying, and I cried I don't know how long, it must've been two or three days, without eating and without sleeping. Now I was sure that I was pregnant, because every time I lit a cigarette I'd get so nauseous!

VITTORIA

And so?

GIULIANA

So nothing, at some point I stopped crying, and I went out to buy some food. A few more days went by and I was walking a lot, I was hoping that if I walked and got tired, I'd lose the baby. But the days kept going and I still had it. And one day I was coming back home. And I see a girl in the courtyard washing a car with a sponge. The car was really dirty, and so was the girl, and she looks at me and I look at her, and then nothing, I go up to the house, and after a bit I hear the key turning, and I see her in front of me. And I ask her: Excuse me, who are you? And the girl says: Is Manolo Pierfederici not here? And I say: No, why? Who are you? And the girl says: I'm his wife. And I say: Topazia!

VITTORIA

It was Topazia! So what did you do?

GIULIANA

And so I told her everything. I wouldn't have said anything to the other Topazia, the one I had imagined, so pretty, scornful, and arrogant. But this one, I felt like telling her everything, like I'm doing now with you. And I asked her: But why did you leave him? And she said: I left him? *Col cavolo che l'ho piantato* (Like hell I did)! *He dumped me*. You get it? That's how she spoke. She had no style.

VITTORIA

No style?

GIULIANA

Not at all. And she told me: He left me shortly after we were married. He said that he couldn't love me. At first I was desperate, but then I gave up and I found myself a job. I'm a photographer for a weekly publication. Sometimes I end up here. And if he's here we chat, because we stayed friends. He's a man who doesn't like women that much. And I felt relieved, liberated, light, because in all those months this terrible anguish had been growing inside of me, and I thought that he didn't love me because I was stupid, trivial, vulgar, and because I didn't have style. I told Topazia, and she started laughing, and said: He'd tell you too?

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then we went to sleep. And before falling asleep Topazia told me: tomorrow we'll think about what you can do with the baby. If you want to keep it, I'll help you raise it, because I have a tilted uterus anyway, and I can't have kids. And while falling asleep I was thinking: "Yes, I'm going to keep this baby! I'll work! Topazia will help me find a job! I'll also be a photographer!" But when I woke up in the morning I started crying and said: No, Topazia, no! I don't feel like having this baby! I'm homeless, I don't have a job, I don't have any money, I don't have anything! And she said: very well. And took me to a Hungarian doctor, a friend of hers, and that's where I got an abortion.

VITTORIA

And then?

GIULIANA

Then I stayed in bed for a few days, and Topazia took care of me. And when I felt good, I went around the city with her, and I'd wait for her in the car while she had her appointments. Topazia was very active. I'd have so much fun with her! She made me feel so happy! I had never had a girlfriend, aside from Elena. But she didn't have any style.

VITTORIA

But what does not having style mean?

GIULIANA

It means not having style. Being simple, *essere alla buona, essere come viene viene* (being up for anything). In any case, I felt good with Topazia. Then Topazia left. She had to go to America for her weekly publication. So I went to stay with Elena again. And then a really bad period started because Topazia was gone, I didn't have a job, and Elena with her long nose would cry on me, and tell me that maybe it'd be better if I went back to Pieve di Montesecco. And then one day I ran into a friend of Topazia's, a photographer, and he took me to a party. And I was a bit lost, because a part from that photographer, I didn't know anyone. But there, at that party I met Pietro. He was sitting in a corner and chatting with a girl with orange slacks, that I later found out was his cousin. And in the end I was completely drunk, I couldn't find the photographer anymore, and was dancing by myself with my shoes in my hands. And my head was spinning, and I fell right next to those orange slacks.

VITTORIA

You fainted?

GIULIANA

Not fainted, I just didn't understand anything anymore, it was the wine. And I found myself on a bed. And Pietro was holding my head, and making me drink some coffee. And then he took me home. I wasn't drunk anymore, and I was a bit embarrassed, and sad. He came up with me.

VITTORIA

Up to Elena's?

GIULIANA

Yes, but Elena wasn't there during those days, because she was visiting a relative. Pietro stayed there. I told him everything. Then in the morning he went to take a bath at his house, because our hot water heater was broken. And I was thinking: "He's not coming back." Instead after a few hours he came back, with a grocery bag full of things to eat. And we lived together for ten days, until Elena got back. And in those ten days, every now and then I'd ask him: Do you think I have style? And he would say: No. Even he thought I didn't have style. But with him, I didn't care. I would tell him everything that went through my mind. I never shut up. And every now and then he'd say: You never stop talking for a minute. My head feels like it's going to explode!

VITTORIA

(She motions to start talking but gets interrupted)

GIULIANA

And then, when Elena was about to get back, I told him: it's too bad you won't be able to stay here anymore, and he said: Yeah, too bad. And I told him: Marry me. Because if you don't marry me, who's going to?

VITTORIA

And what did he say?

GIULIANA

He said: It's true. And he married me.

VITTORIA

Well, you really got incredibly lucky! After everything you went through, *una bella fortuna* (you got really lucky)!

GIULIANA

I still don't know if I can call it luck.

VITTORIA

Wasn't it luck? Marrying a young, rich, handsome lawyer, while you were poor, and didn't know how to keep going?

GIULIANA

It's true, I didn't know.

VITTORIA

Oh Dio (Oh god) it's so late, I need to start cooking. In a little bit your husband will be back, and lunch isn't ready.

GIULIANA

Tell him it's my fault, I made you chitchat for a little bit.

VITTORIA

Made me chitchat? But I didn't even open my mouth! You were the one talking the whole time. You talk so much! Do you always talk this much?

GIULIANA

Always.

VITTORIA

But don't you get thirsty talking so much?

GIULIANA

Yes. Can you bring me a glass of milk?

VITTORIA

You want milk now? But it's 12 o'clock!

GIULIANA

I love milk.

(VITTORIA comes back with a glass of milk. Then exists. Enters PIETRO).

PIETRO

(Picking up something from the floor) What's this? My pajamas? How's it possible that Vittoria still hasn't cleaned the room?

GIULIANA

How could she? Don't you see that I'm still in bed?

PIETRO

And don't you think you should get up?

GIULIANA

I chitchatted a bit with Vittoria. I told her about my life. She kept listening, didn't miss a syllable. You instead never listen to me when I talk. This morning you left while I was still talking. And yet I was telling you something important.

PIETRO

Oh yeah? What were you telling me?

GIULIANA

I was telling you that I don't see a good reason for us to be living together.

PIETRO

This is what you were telling me?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO

We don't have a good reason for living together? You think?

GIULIANA

I do. I find that you're very laidback. By marrying me, you proved to be very laidback.

PIETRO

I'm not laidback at all. I'm someone who always knows what he's doing.

GIULIANA

You have a very high opinion of yourself!

PIETRO

Maybe.

GIULIANA

But how can you say that you always know what you're doing? You haven't done anything up until now. Nothing important I mean. Getting married was the first important thing you did in your life.

PIETRO

Before I met you, I had been on the brink of getting married at least eighteen times. I always pulled back because I'd find out something about those women that gave me goosebumps. I'd discover a stinger in the depths of their soul. They were wasps. When I found you, someone who isn't a wasp, I married you.

GIULIANA

There's something offensive about your way of telling me that I'm not a wasp. Are you saying I'm a little kind, harmless domesticated animal? A butterfly?

PIETRO

I said that you're not a wasp. I didn't say you're a butterfly. You always paint yourself as something precious.

GIULIANA

I don't find butterflies precious. I find them irritating. I almost prefer wasps. I'm offended that you think I don't have stingers. It's true, but I'm offended.

PIETRO

The truth offends you? You should never be offended by the truth. If you're offended by the truth, it means that you still haven't become an adult. That you still haven't learned to accept yourself. But now I suggest that you get up, wash up, get dressed, and come eat. The soup's probably ready...

GIULIANA

There's no soup. And I don't know if I'm going to wash up. When I'm melancholic I don't feel like washing up. *Mi hai fatto venire la malinconia* (You made me melancholic).

PIETRO

I made you melancholic?

GIULIANA

You came back so judgmental from that funeral.

PIETRO

I'm not judgmental.

GIULIANA

You're judgmental, confident, scornful, and very unpleasant. You talk about me as if you know me like the back of your hand.

PIETRO

I do know you like the back of my hand.

GIULIANA

We met not even a month ago and you know me like the back of your hand? We don't even really know why we got married! We do nothing but ask ourselves why, day and night!

PIETRO

You do. I don't. I don't ask myself anything. You're the one who's confused. I'm not. I see clearly. I see far and wide.

GIULIANA

Just look at how highly you think of yourself! An astounding confidence! "I see far and wide!" I'm telling you that we're deep in the fog! We can't see past our noses!

PIETRO

Should I start the water?

GIULIANA

Huh?

PIETRO

For your bath, should I start the water? If you wash yourself, maybe you'll clear your mind. Bathing is good for you. It detoxifies.

GIULIANA

Don't tell me you're a germophobe. Tell me right away, because I hate germophobes.

PIETRO

Of course I'm a germophobe. You didn't know?

GIULIANA

I don't think I'll wash myself. I'm too melancholic. I'm afraid that you're too unpleasant! Just the kind of man I can't stand! *(She goes to the bathroom. You can hear the water running in the bathtub. Coming back).* I find that marriage is an diabolical institution! Having to live together,

always, for the rest of your life! Why did I marry you? What did I do? Where was my head when I said yes?

PIETRO

Did you decide to take a bath?

GIULIANA

Didn't you say I have to take a bath?

PIETRO

It wasn't an order. It was a suggestion.

GIULIANA

Lo credo bene (Yeah right). God forbid you start giving me orders.

PIETRO

So you find me unpleasant?

GIULIANA

Yes. I'm afraid I do. You're so calm, so quiet, so judgmental! "I know you like the back of my hand!" "I see far and wide!" And what if you didn't know me at all? If you screwed up? If all of a sudden you found out that I'm full of hidden venom? Huh? What would you do?

PIETRO

I'd leave. Obviously.

GIULIANA

Obviously! (*She goes to the bathroom and comes back*). It's not obvious at all. Now that you married me, you take me, you take me as I am! Even if I'm completely different from what you thought, you have to keep me anyways, for the rest of your life! Didn't I tell you that marriage is an diabolical institution?

PIETRO

Be careful. You're stepping on my pajamas.

GIULIANA

I'm stepping on them because I want to step on them! Because I can't stand you!

VITTORIA

(*Entering*). She still isn't dressed? I brought the soup to the table!

GIULIANA

Soup? I thought we said no soup.

VITTORIA

I made a bit of hot soup. I made it for myself, because I was cold, and when I'm cold I like a bit of soup. While I was at it, I made it for you as well. But now, if you don't eat it's going to get

cold. To me it doesn't matter, because I already had two nice bowls, filled to the brim, and I feel good.

PIETRO

Come and eat. You'll take a bath later.

GIULIANA

Oh sure! If I take a bath after eating, I'll die. Do you want me to die? *(She goes to the bathroom).*

ACT II

PIETRO

I invited my mother and sister for lunch tomorrow.

GIULIANA

But didn't your mother say she would never set foot in this house?

PIETRO

She did. But after the funeral of Lamberto Genova I took her home, and convinced her.

GIULIANA

Are you happy?

PIETRO

I am happy, because I was fed up of being at war with my mother. I'd rather be at peace, if possible.

GIULIANA

Se mammone, tu (Are you a mama's boy)?

PIETRO

I'm not a mama's boy. Instead we can't go to my mother's house for the moment because Aunt Filippa is there, and she's furious with me. Aunt Filippa is Catholic. Even more Catholic than my mother. She wanted me to have a catholic wedding, and invite a lot of cardinals. Instead they told her that I was getting married to a girl that I had met at a party, and that at this party she was dancing drunk, with her sandals in her hands, and with all her hair in her face. My cousin told her. And Aunt Filippa almost had a stroke.

GIULIANA

Your cousin? The one with the orange slacks?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

I think you have too many relatives.

PIETRO

Therefore Aunt Filippa didn't even want to see your picture. My mother did, for a moment she looked at it.

GIULIANA

Which picture? The one where I'm in a raincoat?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

It's not a nice picture. I look like I just got out of jail. And what did your mother say about my picture?

PIETRO

Nothing. She sighed. She said you were pretty.

GIULIANA

While sighing?

PIETRO

While sighing.

GIULIANA

Just pretty?

PIETRO

Why, what do you think you are? Gorgeous? Ravishing?

GIULIANA

Yes. Ravishing.

PIETRO

But I don't feel ravished.

GIULIANA

You don't feel ravished?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

And yet, I ravished you!

PIETRO

You won't like my mother. And she won't like you. She won't like anything about this house. She'll disapprove of everything.

GIULIANA

And so if she won't like me, and I won't like her, and she won't like anything about this house, why are you making her come here?

PIETRO

Because she's my mother.

GIULIANA

Good reason. You don't see me bringing my mother over. You know what my mother is like? My mother hoards every old newspaper, she has a ton under her bed, under the closets, and then she makes these soups, and cooked prune and apple concoctions, and she puts all these saucepans on the windowsill. And in the evening she locks herself in the kitchen—

PIETRO

Yes. Okay. I know. This is your mother. But my mother isn't like that. My mother is a pretty normal woman.

GIULIANA

Why, are you saying that my mother isn't a normal woman? Are you saying she's crazy?

PIETRO

I don't know, I've never met her. From the way you describe her, I think she must be a little crazy.

GIULIANA

And do you think it's nice that you still haven't met my mother?

PIETRO

Do you want us to go visit your mother? Let's go. I'm a little busy in these next few days. But as soon as I'm free, let's go visit your mother.

GIULIANA

Visit my mother?

PIETRO

Yes, why not?

GIULIANA

My mother isn't crazy, the poor woman. She's just a poor wretch.

PIETRO

There. Exactly. And so is my mother, you see, she's a poor old woman, and she's also a wretch.

GIULIANA

Why, what happened to your mother?

PIETRO

My mother, poor woman, when she was young she was beautiful, elegant, and she suffered a lot when she started aging. Then she lost some money, not a lot, but she got scared, and believed she was poor.

GIULIANA

All these things aren't real misfortunes. She aged like everybody does. Your father died when he was already old. They're not real misfortunes if one thinks about the life my mother had.

PIETRO

They might not be real misfortunes, but she suffers from them as if they were. In any case, this isn't about establishing which one of us has the most unfortunate mother.

GIULIANA

Does your mother think I married you for money?

PIETRO

She thinks you married me for money. She thinks you're some kind of tiger. She thinks you've had a bunch of lovers. She thinks about everything, she wakes up in the morning and cries. So I told her to come over for lunch, so at least she'll see your face, and she won't like you, but she'll be scared of a person instead of being scared of a shadow.

GIULIANA

Too bad.

PIETRO

Too bad what?

GIULIANA

Too bad I didn't have all those lovers your mother thinks I did.

PIETRO

You still have time.

GIULIANA

I still have time? I can still have some lovers despite being your wife?

PIETRO

In your dreams, while you're my wife. But divorce is always a possibility.

GIULIANA

You can't get a divorce in Italy.

PIETRO

Abroad.

GIULIANA

Oh right, abroad. (*Silence*). You just married me and you're already thinking about divorce?

PIETRO

I'm not thinking about divorce. I was just saying. In case you still want some lovers.

GIULIANA

Some things that your mother thinks, are true. It's true that I married you for money. *Also* for money. I was ready to do anything. You know?

PIETRO

You mean to tell me you wouldn't have married me if I was poor?

GIULIANA

I don't know! Do you understand that I don't know! I haven't had the time to figure it out! Why did we get married in such a rush?

PIETRO

You told me: Marry me, for the love of God! If you don't marry me, who's going to? Otherwise I'll end up jumping out the window. Isn't that what you told me?

GIULIANA

Yes, it is. But it was a figure of speech. There was no need to marry me in such a hurry. It's not like I was pregnant. Did you explain to your mother that I'm not pregnant?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

We got married as if the house was burning down. Why? Maybe we made a terrible mistake! Maybe we'll be desperately unhappy together, even worse than what your mother thinks!

PIETRO

It's possible.

GIULIANA

And so? What are we going to do?

PIETRO

We'll get divorced.

GIULIANA

Abroad?

PIETRO

Abroad.

GIULIANA

Well thank God you've got some money so at least we'll be able to go abroad and get divorced!

PIETRO

Thank God.

GIULIANA

So what should I make for lunch for your mother?

PIETRO

I don't know. A broth. Boiled chicken. My mother has a sensitive stomach. She suffers from a gastric ulcer.

GIULIANA

So, boiled chicken for your mother?

PIETRO

Boiled chicken.

GIULIANA

Vittoria! *Accidenti* (Damn it), she doesn't answer, she must be at the window chatting with the girl from upstairs.

PIETRO

What do you want to tell her?

GIULIANA

That tomorrow your mother's coming for lunch.

PIETRO

And my sister.

GIULIANA

And your sister. What's this sister of yours like?

PIETRO

My sister is a total ditz.

GIULIANA

Will she like me?

PIETRO

She'll like you a lot.

GIULIANA

Why a ditz? You think I'm the kind of girl that a ditz would like?

PIETRO

Not because she's a ditz. Because she's always happy about everything. She has an optimistic character.

GIULIANA

And your mother instead is a pessimist. She's someone who sees trouble everywhere. My friend Elena is also like that, and my mother. But I do well with optimists, with people that don't make a big deal of things. I felt so good with Topazia, because she didn't make a big deal of things.

PIETRO

And do you feel good with me?

GIULIANA

I still don't know. I still haven't understood what you're like.

PIETRO

I understood what you're like as soon as I saw you.

GIULIANA

Right away? As soon as you saw me? At that party?

PIETRO

Not as soon as I saw you come in. After a little bit.

GIULIANA

Maybe while I was dancing, drunk, and shoeless? You understood that I was just your kind of girl?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

Che bello (How lovely).

PIETRO

And you want to know something?

GIULIANA

What?

PIETRO

I never pitied you. Ever. Not even for a second.

GIULIANA

Never?

PIETRO

Never.

GIULIANA

But how? That night, when I was crying, and telling you about my life, you didn't pity me?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

Ma come (But how)? I was alone, with no money, no job, I was full of debts, and I had even had an abortion, I had been abandoned, and you didn't pity me?

PIETRO

No.

GIULIANA

You must be heartless!

PIETRO

Don't be silly. It's true, you were alone, without money, without a job, and you were desperate, but I didn't pity you. Looking at you, I never felt any pity. When looking at you, I always felt this great joy. And I didn't marry you because I pitied you.

GIULIANA

And why did you marry me, if you didn't marry me out of pity?

PIETRO

Ti ho sposato per allegria (I married you for fun). Don't you know that I married you for fun? Yeah you do. You know very well.

GIULIANA

You married me because you had fun with me, and instead you'd get bored with your mother, your sister, and Aunt Filippa?

PIETRO

I'd get bored to death.

GIULIANA

I bet, *povero* (poor) Pietro!

PIETRO

Now you're the one who pities me?

GIULIANA

And me? Why did I marry you?

PIETRO

For the money?

GIULIANA

Also for the money.

PIETRO

I think that one always gets married for only one reason. There's only one dominant reason, and it's the one that matters.

GIULIANA

That means I still haven't really understood my reason.

PIETRO

Didn't you tell me: Marry me, otherwise who's going to?

GIULIANA

Yes, and?

PIETRO

And so, wasn't that the reason? That you wanted to have a husband? However he was? Whoever he was?

GIULIANA

Whoever. Yes.

VITTORIA

(Entering) Did you call me?

GIULIANA

Not now. Before. Before I called you several times. Where were you?

VITTORIA

I was exchanging a few words with the girl from upstairs.

GIULIANA

You're a big chatterbox. Don't you get thirsty talking so much?

VITTORIA

I never get thirsty. I never drink. I don't sweat, therefore I don't drink. Not even in the summer.

GIULIANA

You don't sweat?

VITTORIA

I never sweat. When I'm at home, and I work on the farmland, hoeing the ground under the sun in July, everybody sweats, and I don't. I don't even get a drop of sweat on my skin.

GIULIANA

Weird.

PIETRO

Very weird.

GIULIANA

I wanted to tell you that his mother and sister are coming for lunch tomorrow. You'll make boiled chicken.

VITTORIA

And you need to tell me today? You could've told me tomorrow.

GIULIANA

Since you always say that you go and buy chickens in piazza Bologna, near your hairdresser, I'm telling you now, so you can buy it when you go to the hairdresser.

VITTORIA

Nowadays it's very hard to find free-range chickens. The chickens that they sell aren't free-range. They're the ones fattened up under the lamp. If you really want a free-range chicken, I can pop by my house, in Fara Sabina. I'll be here in the morning.

PIETRO

No. Let's not complicate things. The chicken from Piazza Bologna will be fine. Tomorrow set the table properly, with the tablecloth.

VITTORIA

With the tablecloth? Not with the placemats?

PIETRO

No. My mother can't stand placemats.

VITTORIA

I'll go out right away, so I can do everything. (*Exits*).

PIETRO

You think it's true that she never sweats?

GIULIANA

I don't know. To me it looks like she sweats like a horse.

PIETRO

She seems like a good girl. Did you gather information before hiring her?

GIULIANA

Yes. I called Mrs. Giacchetta.

PIETRO

You don't gather information over the phone, you go in person.

GIULIANA

You're so annoying! Nothing works for you! Mrs. Giacchetta doesn't work for you! The placemats don't work for you! The chickens aren't free-range!

PIETRO

It's Vittoria that said they don't sell free-range chickens anymore! I don't give a damn about free-range chickens!

GIULIANA

What will we be able to talk about with your mother tomorrow? After we'll have talked a bit about Vittoria and the free-range chickens, what will we have left to talk about?

PIETRO

Oh, I really don't know!

GIULIANA

We can talk about Lamberto Genova?

PIETRO

Which one? Mine or yours?

GIULIANA

A bit of one, a bit of the other, no? (*Silence*). What if I also invite Elena?

PIETRO

Which one? Your Elena? Or my Elena?

GIULIANA

Why, which one is your Elena? We each also have an Elena?

PIETRO

My cousin Elena? Or your friend Elena?

GIULIANA

Your cousin Elena? The one with the orange slacks? Oh no, I can't stand her. No, I meant my friend Elena.

PIETRO

The stationer?

GIULIANA

Yes. Why, is there something wrong with working at a stationary store?

PIETRO

I didn't say there's something wrong. I said "the stationer" to specify her.

GIULIANA

So if you wanted to specify my mother you'd say "the trouser maker," because that's her job? Did you tell your mother that mine is a trouser maker?

PIETRO

I think I told her she's a seamstress.

GIULIANA

And why? Because being a seamstress is more proper than being a trouser maker? Is making trousers improper? Did you know that you're full of social prejudices?

PIETRO

Not at all. Isn't being a trouser maker or a seamstress the same thing?

GIULIANA

Exactly. Isn't it the same?

PIETRO

Exactly.

GIULIANA

Do you want me to tell you something?

PIETRO

What?

GIULIANA

You know that big bottle of ink that I spilled on a customer, when I was in the stationary store?

PIETRO

Well?

GIULIANA

You know who that client was?

PIETRO

Who?

GIULIANA

I'm afraid it was your mother.

PIETRO

My mother?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO

You spilled a big bottle of ink on my mother's head?

GIULIANA

Not on her head. On her dress. On the whole dress. It's not like I did it on purpose.

PIETRO

But who says it was my mother?

GIULIANA

I'm afraid it was. I recognized her from the picture that you have on your desk. That client's face remained ingrained in my head because then I got fired.

PIETRO

My mother has a very good memory for faces. If it's her, she'll recognize you right away.

GIULIANA

So should I make my Elena come to lunch tomorrow? This way she can also see if the woman from the big ink bottle incident was your mother.

PIETRO

No, there's no need to make your Elena come over. My mother doesn't like your Elena.

GIULIANA

E allora chi é che va bene, con questa maiala di tua madre (What a cow! So who does your mother like)?

PIETRO

Please don't insult my mother before she's even gotten here! You throw a big bottle of ink at her and then you insult her on top of that?

GIULIANA

My mother wouldn't like you at all. She'd stay there, in a corner near the window, looking around with the eyes of a bunny getting chased... No. It's better if we don't go.

PIETRO

So we won't go. *(He laughs)*.

GIULIANA

Perché ridi (Why are you laughing)? You're not laughing about my mother, are you?

PIETRO

No. I'm thinking about you spilling the ink on the lady, that maybe is my mother, and it makes me laugh.

GIULIANA

Why do we talk about mothers so much? We've been here for an hour, and we don't talk about anything but mothers. Are mothers so important?

PIETRO

They're pretty important.

GIULIANA

If I make you laugh, it means that you don't feel bewitched. It means that you also don't feel bewitched by me. The way I don't by you. When I loved Manolo, I didn't laugh, I never laughed. I didn't laugh, I didn't talk, I stopped breathing. I was still like a statue. I was disoriented. Bewitched. You know what I mean?

PIETRO

Yes.

GIULIANA

Why, you've also been bewitched sometimes?

PIETRO

Sometimes. And I didn't like it. I never would've married a woman that bewitched me. I want to live with a woman that makes my life fun.

GIULIANA

What's so fun about me?

PIETRO

I have to step out. Where's my hat?

GIULIANA

You have another funeral?

PIETRO

No. It's raining buckets. I wear my hat when it's raining.

GIULIANA

Oh God, Vittoria is going to the hairdresser now and will get her perm wet! She'll come back so upset.

ACT III

GIULIANA

Pietro!

PIETRO

Here I am.

GIULIANA

Vittoria isn't back!

PIETRO

What do you mean she isn't back?

GIULIANA

She hasn't been back since yesterday. She didn't come back after the hairdresser.

PIETRO

Do we need to call the police station?

GIULIANA

No. She must've gone back to Mrs. Giacchetta. She liked staying with Mrs. Giacchetta so much. She almost had nothing to do. She liked it here too, but she found it was too much work.

PIETRO

What work? We're only two people, the house is small?

GIULIANA

Yes, but you change your button down twice a day. Vittoria didn't like ironing. There weren't any men's shirts at Mrs. Giacchetta's. She's a widow.

PIETRO

I'm sorry.

GIULIANA

You're sorry she's a widow?

PIETRO

I'm sorry for Vittoria. We should find another maid. Call an agency.

GIULIANA

You said agencies can't be trusted!

PIETRO

How did you cook? My mother and sister will be here soon.

GIULIANA

I had some stew in the house from yesterday. I heated it up.

PIETRO

My mother can't eat stew! I told you she has a gastric ulcer!

GIULIANA

Potatoes with stew aren't okay for gastric ulcers?

PIETRO

No. And there must've been very little!

GIULIANA

Nonsense. It's at least 2 pounds of meat.

PIETRO

First, what's first?

GIULIANA

What's first? You mean the first dish?

PIETRO

Yes?

GIULIANA

Nothing. There's a bit of *melanzane alla parmigiana* (eggplant parmesan), leftover from yesterday.

PIETRO

You can't offer my mother a lunch full of leftovers! Make some rice with butter!

GIULIANA

Make some *riso al burro* (rice with butter)? Okay. I woke up late this morning, and then kept hoping that Vittoria would come back. I'm really sad that she's not coming back anymore. I felt good around her. I'd chitchat. I'd tell her all my stories. (*Exits*).

PIETRO alone. Looks underneath the tablecloth again. Picks up the newspapers on the carpet. Fluffs the pillows. The bell rings. PIETRO goes to open. Enter PIETRO's mother and sister.

GINESTRA

Oh my goodness, look how cute this place is! *Una bellissima casa* (What a beautiful house)!

PIETRO's MOTHER

(*Sighing*) Too many stairs. I have heart problems and stairs aren't good for me. I had to stop three times to catch my breath. How did you end up getting a house without an elevator?

PIETRO

We liked this house. And plus we were in a rush. So we didn't really pay attention to luxuries.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Pay attention to luxuries? You think checking that there's an elevator for when your mother, who has heart problems, comes to visit is a luxury?

PIETRO

You said you were never going to visit!

PIETRO's MOTHER

And just like that you gave up on the idea of me coming, ever?

GINESTRA

You don't have heart problems mother. You have the healthiest heart. You did an electrocardiogram just a few days ago.

PIETRO's MOTHER

The electrocardiogram doesn't pick up certain heart problems. Even poor Lamberto Genova had done an electrocardiogram a few days before dying, and it didn't show anything. Poor Virginia told me. And now she's left alone. And in poor financial conditions as well. And her kids aren't comforting. One is in Persia. The other got together with a skank. But thank goodness he hasn't married her.

PIETRO

There's been a minor inconvenience. Our maid Vittoria went to the hairdresser yesterday and didn't come back.

GIULIANA

(Entering) It's almost ready. The rice is almost cooked.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Hello, Miss.

GINESTRA

Hi.

GIULIANA

Hello.

GINESTRA

We were admiring your beautiful house!

PIETRO's MOTHER

I must've seen you somewhere before Miss. Where did I see you?

GIULIANA

You've seen me in a picture.

PIETRO's MOTHER

No. That picture didn't look like you. You must not be photogenic after all. No, I've seen your face somewhere. I'm very good at remembering faces. I never forget people's features. Where have I met you?

GIULIANA

Can I ask you not to call me Miss, since I've married your son a week ago?

PIETRO's MOTHER

How did you get married? At the town hall?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

I'm a practicing Catholic. Only weddings in a church have value to me. To me, civil ceremonies don't hold value. In any case, I'll call you Mrs. if you want.

PIETRO

Wouldn't you like to call her by her name mother?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Her name is Giuliana?

PIETRO

Giuliana.

PIETRO's MOTHER

A pretentious name. Simply Giulia would've been a lot better. Why did they give you such a pretentious name?

GIULIANA

Isn't your daughter called Ginestra? Is Ginestra not a pretentious name?

PIETRO's MOTHER

No. Ginestra is not a pretentious name. My husband really loved Leopardi. We called her Ginestra because of Leopardi. And plus also because when I was expecting her, I was in a place that was blooming with such beautiful Ginestre. In Rossignano. That year we were at a resort in Rossignano. Where are you from?

GIULIANA

I'm from Pieve di Montesecco.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And where's this Pieve di Montesecco?

GIULIANA

In Romagna.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes. My son mentioned something. He also said your mother has been harshly tested by life?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

I've also been harshly tested by life. My children didn't comfort me. I lost my husband. And now my son decided to give me yet another great torment. He got into a marriage I disapprove of. I don't have anything against you, Miss, or Mrs., or Giuliana, whatever you prefer. But I don't think you are right for my son, nor that my son is right for you. Do you know why he wanted to marry you?

GIULIANA

No?

PIETRO's MOTHER

To give me grievance.

PIETRO

The rice must be overcooked by now. Let's go to the table!

(PIETRO and GINESTRA go in the kitchen to get the rice).

PIETRO's MOTHER

I like well-cooked rice. What was your maid's name?

GIULIANA

Vittoria.

PIETRO's MOTHER

She went to the hairdresser and didn't come back? That's how they are. Nowadays the help is always like this.

(GINESTRA and PIETRO come back from the kitchen with the rice).

GINESTRA

Mother, if only you saw the kitchen. They have such a tiny, tiny kitchen, *così bella* (it's so pretty)!

(They sit at the table).

PIETRO's MOTHER

You need to check that she didn't take something with her.

GIULIANA

Vittoria? Oh no, Vittoria didn't touch anything. She was so honest.

PIETRO's MOTHER

How long did you have her?

PIETRO

Four days.

PIETRO's MOTHER

How can you talk about honesty after four days? *(She laughs)* You're very naïve! Life will teach you to be less naïve! Did you get information about this Vittoria?

(VITTORIA enters).

GIULIANA

Oh Vittoria! Finally you came back! I was afraid you weren't coming back anymore!

VITTORIA

Last night, when I left the hairdresser, it was raining a lot. I didn't want to mess up my perm. So I went up to Mrs. Giacchetta for a moment, who lives right next to the hairdresser. I lost track of time and fell asleep. Good thing you still haven't had lunch. I have the free-range chicken, Mrs. Giacchetta cooked it, but she roasted it, because it's not the kind of chicken that you boil, it's the kind that's meant to be roasted.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You're not firing her? She's out all night, and you're not firing her?

GIULIANA

No, the thought of firing her doesn't even cross my mind. I'm so happy she came back!

PIETRO's MOTHER

You're not reprimanding her? You're not saying anything? She doesn't come home because she doesn't want to get her perm wet, she thinks about her perm before her job, and you don't tell her anything? In what world do we live in?

GIULIANA

I'm not telling her anything. She brought me a chicken as a gift!

PIETRO's MOTHER

The usual bargains of the help.

(VITTORIA comes back with the roasted chickens).

VITTORIA

It's truly free-range!

PIETRO

Definitely free-range.

PIETRO's MOTHER

It's not free-range.

PIETRO

It's not free-range?

PIETRO's MOTHER

No. It's a good chicken, cooked well, but it's not free-range.

(VITTORIA enters with fruit).

VITTORIA

The next time you come I'll make *panzerelle con la ricotta* (panzarelle with ricotta cheese).

PIETRO's MOTHER

I have an ulcer. I can't eat them.

VITTORIA

You have an ulcer? My mother had surgery two years ago because of an ulcer. After the surgery, she was on her deathbed. They had already anointed her with sacramental oil. The doctor told me: It's a perforated ulcer. She can't be saved. And so you know what I did? I asked them to let me bring her home, and at home I boiled four pounds of chicory. That bitter water cleansed her guts, and she healed. A month later she felt good, and would eat everything. Now she even eats bell peppers.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Even bell peppers?

VITTORIA

She eats everything. You should see how sturdy she is! You should see how she works on the farmland! She's a saint. I would jump into a fire for my mother. *(She exits).*

PIETRO's MOTHER

This Vittoria of yours doesn't seem too bad after all. Maybe she's just a little scatterbrained. It's really hard to find good girls nowadays. Virginia had such a hard time with the help this winter. She changed six different maids. Now she ended up with a fifteen-year-old girl, she couldn't find anything else. Nobody wants to stay at Virginia's. I don't know why.

GINESTRA

They say she gives them little to eat.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes, it's true, Virginia never kept a lot of food. When poor Lamberto passed away, Virginia found herself alone, alone in the house with that fifteen-year-old child. Poor Lamberto fell ill in the bathroom while he was shaving his beard. She carried him to the bed with her own arms. He had his last breath. Poor Virginia now finds herself in difficult financial conditions. She might have to sell her house. She says she wants to start working. She's going to offer cello lessons. Virginia's a great cello player. She has a marvelous touch.

PIETRO

Too bad she's unbearable.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You're wrong. Virginia is brave and virtuous. And plus she's very chic. She dresses well. She has a lot of style.

GIULIANA

She has a lot of style?

PIETRO's MOTHER

So much. Virginia has so much style. She makes everything herself. She knits these beautiful dresses. She makes dresses, bags... even overcoats! She made one for Ginestra. Right Ginestra? Virginia is very hard-working.

GINESTRA

But what she made for me stretched out a lot the first time I washed it, it had these really really long sleeves... I had to give it away.

PIETRO's MOTHER

No wonder, you washed it at home. I told you to have it washed at the drycleaners. If you want Giuliana, my child, I'll tell Virginia to make a little overcoat for you too. Or a knitted jacket, if you prefer. Knitting is a real distraction for Virginia.

GIULIANA

I think Virginia has other things on her mind at the moment rather than making me a coat!

PIETRO's MOTHER

No, knitting for her is a distraction now that she's alone in the house. I'm going to visit her today when I leave here. Lamberto Genova was a dear family friend of ours. God decided to give me

this great grievance as well. I was still feeling shocked by the pain that my son had given me, getting married this way, so suddenly, without even quite explaining to me who he was marrying! And not in a church. At the mayor's. I know, he's an atheist, it's okay, but it's not a good enough reason for not getting married in a church! Everybody gets married in a church, even atheists. It's not that I want to offend you, Miss, because I don't have anything against you. You need to understand me, I'm a mother, one day you'll also be a mother. Mothers grieve. Just think that no one has even explained to me who you are. They told me that you met at a party for painters. One of these painter parties. And at this party you didn't feel too well, is that right?

GIULIANA

I drank too much.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Wine? Liquor?

GIULIANA

Vino Rosso (Red wine).

PIETRO's MOTHER

It must've been bad wine. It wasn't genuine. When wine is genuine, it's not bad for you. Nowadays people throw parties with bad wine. They do it on purpose, so that the girls who aren't used to drinking get sick and the men take advantage. Next time you go to another party, don't drink. Drink only water. Did you know those painters well?

GIULIANA

No. I didn't know anyone. I stumbled there by chance, with a photographer that was a friend of my friend, Topazia.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Did you know them well, Pietro?

PIETRO

I didn't know them at all. I also stumbled there by chance.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Did you drink as well?

PIETRO

I drank a little bit.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Why do you drink in houses of people you don't know? Who's this Topazia friend of yours? A very, very pretentious name.

GIULIANA

Topazia is a dear friend of mine, the dearest friend I have. Another friend of mine is called Elena, she's a really nice person, but she's too pessimistic. She sees trouble everywhere. I can't be with pessimistic people. I'm very easily influenced.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You're not religious, am I right Miss?

GIULIANA

It depends on the day.

PIETRO's MOTHER

What horrible words I must hear. But I assumed as much. If she had been religious, she would've asked God to inspire her, and God would've removed her from my son. He would've guided her to a man more suited for her. And yet, the more I look at her, the more I feel like I've seen her before. Where have I seen you?

GIULIANA

Maybe in some store...

PIETRO's MOTHER

What kind of store? These girlfriends you were talking about, what kind of people are they? This friend Patrizia, or what did you say her name was?

GIULIANA

Not Patrizia. Topazia.

GINESTRA

It's not Topazia Valcipriana, is it?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Which, Valcipriana? Ah, the Valcipriana girl, it's true, her name is Topazia! The one who had that wretched marriage? With that Pierfederici? A writer?

PIETRO

Take Me Away, Jesus!

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes, he wrote a novel called *Jesus, Help* or something like that. But it doesn't talk about Jesus at all. They use these sort of titles to tarnish his name. It's an unintelligible book, full of foul language. I didn't even finish cutting the pages. This Pierfederici was very handsome. Above all, he had a lot of style. The Valcipriana girl isn't ugly, but she has no style. You're her friend?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Oh, so that's where I saw you! I saw you getting ice cream at the Aragno Café with this Topazia. You had a yellow terrycloth dress. It wasn't a nice spectacle, my dear, I must tell you. Do you still have it?

GIULIANA

Yes.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Don't wear it anymore. Give it as a present to Vittoria. It's a dress that doesn't look good on you. You don't look good in yellow. Will your friend Topazia come visit you here? When she comes, let me know. Because this way I won't come that day. I'd rather not run into her. I don't like her. Cecilia Valcipriana, her mother, was at Lamberto Genova's funeral yesterday. She was destroyed. A total wreck.

PIETRO

Why?

PIETRO's MOTHER

From worrying about her daughter. And then also because of grief over Lamberto's death. They were very close friends. He was her doctor. She used to get psychoanalyzed.

GIULIANA

Lamberto Genova was a psychoanalyst?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes.

GIULIANA

I knew this Lamberto Genova. I knew him very well. I got psychoanalyzed by him. I only went two times. I had a strong inferiority complex. I identified with my shadow.

PIETRO's MOTHER

And what did Lamberto tell you to do?

GIULIANA

Nothing. He told me absolutely nothing. He would turn his back to me. I would talk... I like to talk, I really like to share my business. But it was eight thousand liras a sitting. And so the second time I told him: how is it possible I need to pay eight thousand liras a sitting just to talk to someone who turns his back to me?

GINESTRA

He'd charge eight thousand liras per sitting?

GIULIANA

I didn't give him that money. Actually I asked him to loan me some. But he said no. If it had been free, I would've gone often, because I liked it, I'd rest while talking lying down on that couch, talking to those round, stooped shoulders, and that neck all full of grey curls...

PIETRO's MOTHER

Curls?

PIETRO

It wasn't Lamberto Genova. Lamberto Genova was skinny, tall, straight, with a completely bald head.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Like a perfect pear. There wasn't a single hair on his head anymore.

PIETRO

You don't remember the name? The name that was written on the door? This doctor of yours must've had a name.

GIULIANA

He had a name, that I don't remember... I don't have a good memory when it comes to names.

GINESTRA

And do you stop identifying with your shadow now?

GIULIANA

No, I didn't stop... Maybe I'll never stop.

PIETRO's MOTHER

So you owed poor Lamberto sixteen thousand liras? I'll give them to Virginia. I'll give them right away. I'm going now.

PIETRO

But she didn't go to Lamberto Genova! She went to another one! One with curly hair!

PIETRO's MOTHER

It's true. *Che confusione* (How confusing)! You didn't talk much today and yet you confused me.

GIULIANA

Everybody says so. Everybody says that when I talk I confuse them. Even Pietro says so.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Oh, Pietro, for him confusion is his paradise. He loves confusion, he's always loved it, since he was a boy. Yesterday, at the funeral of poor Lamberto, I was embarrassed. Pietro had a horrific hat on his head. A hat that looked like it was picked out of a garbage can. Make him throw away that hat. He was there with that ugly hat tilted over his eyes, an ugly scarf tied to his neck. He looked like a thief.

PIETRO

No way I'm throwing it away. It's a great hat.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Do you know why he wears that hat?

GIULIANA

Why?

PIETRO's MOTHER

To humiliate me.

GINESTRA

It's not an ugly hat. It's a countryman's hat.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You, Ginestra, are always optimistic. You, since you say you like optimists, look at my daughter here who's a real optimist. Not optimist, no, she's accommodating. Accommodating out of superficiality. She doesn't look for perfection. My kids don't look for perfection. I, instead, aspire to perfection. Either perfection, or nothing. Give me your measurements. Tell Vittoria to bring measuring tape. I'm going to Virginia now, with the measurements. Like this she can start the overcoat right away.

GIULIANA

Not only do I owe Virginia money, but I'm also forcing her to make me a whole overcoat?

PIETRO's MOTHER

What money? Didn't we say you went to another doctor?

GIULIANA

Oh right. That's true.

PIETRO

Vittoria! The measuring tape!

VITTORIA

(Entering) Hanno chiamato (Did you call)?

PIETRO

A measuring tape.

VITTORIA

We don't have measuring tape.

PIETRO's MOTHER

You don't even have measuring tape in your house?

VITTORIA

No. We're still a bit unstocked.

PIETRO's MOTHER

I'll take your measurements another time. Meanwhile I'll buy the wool. You'll need at least three kilos of wool for an overcoat. What color do you want the overcoat?

GIULIANA

Maybe blue?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Blue? But what shade of blue? Baby blue? I'm afraid it would make you look pale. Teal-blue is better. Or maybe even an olive green. Let's go, Ginestra. Let's go to the Wool House.

PIETRO

Should I take you with the car?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Won't be necessary. I'm embarrassed to get into that car of yours. It's all beat up, all full of mud. It's inappropriate. *(She puts on her hat in front of the mirror).*

PIETRO

What a fancy hat!

GINESTRA

Mother went to buy herself a hat as soon as she found out you were getting married.

PIETRO's MOTHER

Yes. Because I thought you were getting married in the church. I couldn't imagine you'd do everything so rushed, to humiliate me one more time. Such haste, so secretive, like thieves.

PIETRO

Why, thieves don't get married in a church?

PIETRO's MOTHER

Like thieves. You did everything like thieves. To give me heartache. To seem shameless. For chaos. Love for chaos. Love for irregularity. Let's go, Ginestra. If it gets dark, we won't see the colors of the wool.

GINESTRA

Arrivederci. Grazie (Goodbye. Thank you).

PIETRO

Arrivederci (Goodbye).

GIULIANA

Arrivederci (Goodbye).

PIETRO's MOTHER

Arrivederci (Goodbye).

PIETRO's MOTHER and GINESTRA exit. GIULIANA and PIETRO are alone.

GIULIANA

I'm afraid I won't be able to escape from poor Virginia's overcoat.

PIETRO

I'm afraid so.

GIULIANA

This mother of yours is a bit scatterbrained. You didn't tell me she was a bit scatterbrained. If she wasn't, she'd be unbearable.

PIETRO

Yes. If she wasn't scatterbrained, she'd be exhausting.

GIULIANA

Good thing instead she's scatterbrained. You didn't describe her accurately. Me, I'm sure I described my mother to you exactly how she is.

PIETRO

We'll go and see your mother as well. Mothers are important.

GIULIANA

You don't really know how to describe people. Maybe you're an idiot. Sometimes I worry I married an idiot.

PIETRO

Weren't you ready to marry anyone either way?

GIULIANA

Anyone, but not an idiot.

VITTORIA enters.

VITTORIA

What do I have to make for dinner tonight?

GIULIANA

Melanzane alla parmigiana (Eggplant Parmesan).

PIETRO

Again? No, no, enough with *melanzane alla parmigiana* (eggplant Parmesan). Let's find something else.

VITTORIA

I could make an omelet with onions.

PIETRO

Good idea.

VITTORIA

I'm going over to the girl upstairs to ask if I can borrow some onions. We don't even have an onion in the house.

VITTORIA exits.

PIETRO

This Vittoria is nice.

GIULIANA

Very. (*Silence*) Your mother is so different from mine! We have very different mothers. With such different mothers, and everything so different, will we be able to live together?

PIETRO

I don't know. We'll see.

GIULIANA

Your mother doesn't think at all that I married you for money. Your mother doesn't think about anything. She's too oblivious to think.

PIETRO

Yup.

GIULIANA

If she'd think, she'd be unbearable. She'd think about unbearable things. Instead she doesn't think about anything. At the end of the day, she doesn't care that much about how I popped out of the blue.

PIETRO

Yeah. It's true.

GIULIANA

But why are mothers so important?

PIETRO

According to psychoanalysis, the origins of our behavior can be traced to our relationships with our mothers.

GIULIANA

How weird! These mothers that stay crouched in the depths of our lives, in the roots of our lives, in the dark, so important, so defining! One forgets, while they're alive, or they don't care, actually they think they don't care, but not completely. That mother of yours, so scatterbrained and yet so defining! It doesn't seem at all that she could define anything, and instead she defined you!

PIETRO

She defined me.

GIULIANA

She wasn't the one from the ink bottle incident. It was someone else. Good thing I didn't spill the ink on your mother. Otherwise maybe she'd bring us bad luck. Since your mother is so important.

PIETRO

Spilling ink doesn't bring bad luck. Spilling salt on a Friday brings bad luck.

GIULIANA

Not only on Fridays, always.

PIETRO

Only on Fridays.

GIULIANA

Vittoria says always. We should really try to understand what we're like. Otherwise what kind of a marriage is it? We married in such a hurry! What was the rush?

PIETRO

Oh let's not start putting our marriage into question again! We got married and that's it.

GIULIANA

Basta un corno (Like hell it is). Don't be so superficial. Why did I marry you? And what if I married you for money?

PIETRO

Pazienza (It is what it is).

GIULIANA

Pazienza un corno (Like hell)! It would be horrible.

PIETRO

Where's my hat?

GIULIANA

You have a funeral?

PIETRO

No. And it's not raining. But I want my hat. I need to go out and I want my hat. I've decided to always go around wearing a hat.

GIULIANA

Maybe because your mother said that she can't stand that hat?

PIETRO

Maybe.

GIULIANA

You see how important mothers are? Do you see how defining they are?

PIETRO

So? The hat?

GIULIANA

I'm afraid that Vittoria put it back in the mothballs.

PIETRO

Accidenti (Damn it)! This mothball obsession! Tell her to take it out!

GIULIANA

Vittoria must still be with the girl upstairs. When she goes, she never comes back. We could've eaten the omelet without the onions.

PIETRO

Okay, I'll go out without the hat.

GIULIANA

Where are you going?

PIETRO

To a client's. At the Quartiere Trionfale. I'll be back soon.

GIULIANA

Bye. Are onions bad for ulcers?

PIETRO

Very bad. But you don't have an ulcer. My mother has it.

GIULIANA

Is it really true that she has it?

PIETRO

She says so. No one's ever known if it's true. Lamberto Genova used to say no, he'd say that she was as healthy as a horse, and she didn't have anything. No one knows.

GIULIANA

Mothers are so mysterious!

PIETRO

Very mysterious!

GIULIANA

And so important!

PIETRO

Yes. So important!

GIULIANA

But at a certain point, it's also okay to tell them to take a hike? Maybe love them, *peró mandarle un poco a farsi benedire* (but tell them to take a hike). Right?

PIETRO

Of course. And what illnesses does your mother have?

GIULIANA

Oh my mother also has all sorts of illnesses. Rheumatisms, abdominal cramping, her liver, gallbladder, she has everything. Mothers are also a pain in the neck!

PIETRO

A real pain in the neck.

GIULIANA

You know what I think?

PIETRO

What?

GIULIANA

I think that maybe I never actually met this Lamberto Genova.

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