

FRATEME
by
Benedetto Sicca

Characters:

Primo Piscopo

Secondo Piscopo

Seconda Piscopo

Mamma

Padre

Alfredo Esposito

Corinna Liguori

Antonio Marasca known as Frateme

ACT 1

First scene

30 May – Alfredo's studio

PRIMO – There are some days when, for no fucking reason, everyone seems to have ganged up on you and won't answer the phone. Rationally you know perfectly well they can't all be in it together. And yet it always happens just on those days when you're desperately casting around for a way out of the trap. When you feel that precisely that voice at the other end of the line could help you shake off the tension that grips you by the scruff of the neck, that chokes your voice and numbs your fingers.

So you go ahead and dial the fucking number, and at the other end ... pip pip pip pip pip! And you ring the next number. And again you get pippippippippip! So then you ring your grandma: with that quavering little voice of hers she could pacify even, who can I say?, a presidential candidate on election night – saying to yourself, for fuck's sake, she always answers. But no she doesn't, she's in the loo.

Obviously, Doctor, as long as the temptation to construe all these pippippippippips in a plot hypothesis can be resisted, then we're not going to have a diagnosis of psychotic disorder, are we? Because if that were the diagnosis, aren't I right Doc?, then Thank you ladies and gentlemen, les jeux sont faits, next please. But that's not how psychologists go about things. No, no, I know perfectly well it isn't a plot. But still ... somewhere down inside ... a little particle of hate is sown with respect to all those people who are avoiding you. I don't know where it gets deposited, but it just adds to that

tension you were trying to get rid of by making those calls. By means of one great, God almighty fuck, I mean.

ALFREDO – You are very intelligent, Primo. And you know it. All that's happened is, you didn't do well in an exam ... it's perfectly straightforward, a perfectly common occurrence ... You see: on one hand there are the people who assert themselves as the protagonists of their eponymous tragedy; yes, they lead their whole lives as the protagonists of "Alfred" , "Robert", "Maria", as if they were ... tragic heroes, that's right, bestriding the only existence there is, or the predestined existence of all possible existences. On the other hand, on the contrary, there are the people like you. Yes, like you. Who live bottled up, compressed, in the crowd, who forget to breathe or to cry. And then again there are gradations between the two. Yes indeed, there are normal people ... the ones who remember to breathe, who realise that the life they are leading is the only one possible, and that tomorrow it's going to be their biography, and in this biography they become, not protagonists perhaps, but at least actors and participants. That's the fact of the matter.

Within such a perception of one's biography, the perception of the immediate environment introduces itself, of the people who have been and are all around us, not as a casual phenomenon but as the causality of all the choices and consequences that these choices entail in life, yes indeed, the reactions we have to the actions of these people who surround us.

Well then, this perception is at the root of our ability to draw breath, to shed tears.

The place in which we were born, the place we have lived, the place where we choose to live, sometimes without giving it much thought, as in the case of your family, who found yourselves ... yes, just like that, without meaning to ... in a house that wasn't your house, bang in the middle of Forcella. Yes, you

found yourselves in a house that wasn't your house. It was the house of others, and you have never had the strength of character to get away from it. You've never had the nous to understand, to truly understand that in fact all that was required was simply to move house. That's the fact of the matter. That house and all the houses around – the whole of Forcella in fact – have sapped your spirit, little by little, day after day, negating your ability to enter into a dialogue with your fears, your dreams even.

PRIMO – Listen Doc, let's face it, there are just two problems here.

ALFREDO – And what would they be, Primo?

PRIMO – In terms of merit: you're mixing up chalk and cheese; and in terms of method: you're keen on me, Doc.

ALFREDO – Don't talk nonsense. And let go of my hand. If you haven't followed my explanation, we'll talk about it next time. Let go of my hand, I said. Yes, well, in any case, certainly you should say everything that goes through your mind. It all becomes material, incandescent material!, for our joint exploration, yes indeed. But now you must go, I'm sure it's time for the next patient. Go on, Primo, I said go.

PRIMO – So, perhaps next time we'll have a good screw, shall we?

ALFREDO – Go on, Primo, just go now.

Second scene

30 May – changing room

ANTONIO – Hey Secò!

SECONDO – What's up?

ANTONIO – Did you see that bloke?

SECONDO – Who?

ANTONIO – That mongoloid?

SECONDO – Oh yes, I saw him. And so?

ANTONIO – What d'you mean "And so", bro?!

SECONDO – Well alright, he's mongoloid! So what?

ANTONIO – I don't understand, so even mongoloids have to ride horses now?

SECONDO – Hey, Frateme, what the fuck are you saying?

ANTONIO – I'm only saying I don't understand why mongoloids have to go horse riding.

SECONDO – And why shouldn't they? Who says mongoloids can't ride horses?

ANTONIO – OK, all I'm saying is that it's dangerous for them. I haven't got anything against mongoloids!

SECONDO – Antò, you know what I think...

ANTONIO – What....?

SECONDO – That..., that mongoloid's got twice the brains you have! Ha ha ha!

ANTONIO – Ha ha ha!... Listen, what're you doing this evening Secò?

SECONDO – I don't know. I'm tired. And I've got to study.

ANTONIO – Always studying, bro? I don't get it, you wake up at five o'clock every morning to go to work. And in the evening you don't go out and have a bit of fun? Fact is, you're the mongoloid!

SECONDO – You're a pain in the arse with this mongoloid of yours! And you know what I think...? If you were really my brother, and you were mongoloid, I'd take you riding! Get it? This business of the mongoloid riding a horse, it's a good thing for the mongoloid, but also for his family. They've got to find something for him to do all day long, to keep their consciences quiet...

ANTONIO – You reckon?

SECONDO – Eh? That's what I think.

ANTONIO – And to me...it sounds like

SECONDO – A load of crap....Ha ha ha!

ANTONIO – Ha ha ha!

SECONDO – Listen ... what've you got on this weekend? D'you have to work with your dad or are you free?

ANTONIO – I'm not working with me dad ... but I've got something to do...

SECONDO – What?

ANTONIO - Something to do ... why?

SECONDO – Well alright! The fact is ... I wanted to go to the sea ... I wondered if you wanted to come too?

ANTONIO – To Ischia?

SECONDO – No, no... Procida..

ANTONIO – Procida? oh yes? And what's going on on Procida? Something special?

SECONDO – Man, you can have a great time on Procida. We'd take the ferry nice and early on Saturday morning ..., we'd smoke joints right through to Sunday ... we'd go for a swim and then on Sunday we come back to Naples.

ANTONIO – Yeah ... cool ... but ... where would we sleep? We don't know anyone at Procida ...

SECONDO – I know a place which is really special ..

ANTONIO – On Procida...?

SECONDO – Have you seen The Postman?

ANTONIO – Well actually I didn't see the postman this morning. But what's that got to do with it?

SECONDO – Ha ha ha ... idiot ... The Postman ...the film with Massimo Troisi....

ANTONIO – Ha ha ha, yes I saw it! Fantastic! Massimo's the greatest! But so what?

SECONDO – You remember that house Massimo lived in?

ANTONIO – Of course I do.

SECONDO – We can sleep there, just you and me! The house is deserted, but it's not in too bad a state! We'll take an air bed, a blanket cos it's a bit damp, and that's where we'll hole up all night, thinking of Massimo!

ANTONIO – Yeah ... really cool ... but what're you doing...?

SECONDO – This? ... This is my new chilli pepper cream for an immaculate six pack! You know, Antò, we do dirty work ... yes, dirty. At least once we're out of here I want to feel good!

ANTONIO – Come off it, horses aren't dirty ...

SECONDO – You're right, the horses aren't dirty because we clean 'em every morning ...

ANTONIO – Let me try that cream for perfect abdos ...

SECONDO – Well, Frateme, what about it? Shall we go to Procida or not?

ANTONIO –... It'd be great...me and you going off to play at being poufs in the moonlight ... Ha ha ha ... just great, oh my brother

SECONDO – What's poufs got to do with it? ...

ANTONIO – Ha ha ha ... just great, oh my brother

SECONDO – Ha ha ha ... let go of me ...

ANTONIO – ... Anyway, Secò, I told you ... I've got something to do ... still, to tell you the truth I'd have liked to ...

SECONDO – Well come then ... we'll have fun ...

ANTONIO - ... No, you see ... I really can't ...

SECONDO – But what have you got to do ...? ... Has something happened ...?
... Something with Elisa?

ANTONIO – No ... the fact is I've got to go with Doctor Imparato...

SECONDO – Oh ... again ...?

ANTONIO – Well you know I like him. And then, he likes me ...

SECONDO – Yes, I'd noticed, Frateme ... And does Elisa know?

ANTONIO – Know what?

SECONDO – That you go with Doctor Imparato ..

ANTONIO – Of course she knows ... And one of these days I'll take her too ...
actually the doc's asked me to ... but I'm not sure she'd like it in the boat ...

SECONDO – Might not like it ... or perhaps the doctor might be seized by a raptus ...

ANTONIO – What the fuck are you saying? ...

SECONDO – Perhaps he's grown tired of watching you fuck his bitch ... so
he'll ask you to show him how you fuck your girl ...

ANTONIO – Secò ... let's just say I didn't hear that ... and in any case, who I
fuck, and who watches me while I fuck, is my fucking business, isn't it? ...
and you know what?

SECONDO – What?

ANTONIO – Now I realise what you meant with that crap about mongoloids
... now I've got it ... that story that they take them riding more for their own
good than for the mongoloids ... that's exactly the way you are ...

SECONDO - I know, Frateme, I know.

ANTONIO – So everything's OK.

SECONDO – Everything's OK.

ANTONIO – Jesus, magic pair of shoes you've got yourself ...

SECONDO – Yep, there you are ... GUCCI...

ANTONIO – Actually, on Sunday evening ... I'm free ...

SECONDO – We'll see ...

ANTONIO – Alright ... let me know ... Oh, and if you change your mind about this evening ... if you get fed up studying ... call me ...

SECONDO – Alright.

Third scene

30 May – Corinna's divan

CORINNA – "So what is your name?.... Seconda! Tell me: What is your name?" [Translator's note: the phrases in inverted commas are spoken in English in the original]

SECONDA – But Ma'am! You've just said it yourself!

CORINNA – Listen, Seconda: first of all I'm not Madam but Miss! And then, just tell me what I'm supposed to do with you. If you don't want to have a lesson, you only need to say so. You'll save that poor father of yours a fortune, and that's the end of it.

SECONDA – But what's that got to do with it, Ma'am?....Alright, alright, Miss, I want to have lessons ... but I'm no good ...

CORINNA – Well at least if you refuse to speak English, try to speak proper Italian.

SECONDA – Why should I? What's wrong with Neapolitan?

CORINNA – There's nothing wrong with it. It's just useless!

SECONDA – Really?

CORINNA – "Yes. It's true". Anyway you're a good girl, and it's not true that you're no good at English. You're just a bit slower than other girls. "So, what is your name, pretty girl?"

SECONDA – Listen: now you're pissing me off! YOU HAVE PISSED ME OFF! You, that holy sinner of a father of mine, English, Italian and uncle Tom Copley and all! ... Enough! Aaargh ! ... Hey, why are you crying?

CORINNA – I'm doing my utmost for you. But you don't change... you never change ...

SECONDA – Miss ... no one really changes ... nobody ... come here ... really, Miss, you mustn't cry ... I beg you ... alright, don't worry ... now I'll start to speak English ... Miss Oh Miss

CORINNA – What are you doing? Stop it. What are you doing?

They kiss

CORINNA – Why did you do it?

SECONDA – And you ... why did you let me do it?

CORINNA – What do you mean? I'm just a poor old woman.

SECONDA – And I'm fat, and a bit retarded too.

CORINNA – Don't talk nonsense. Why did you do it?

SECONDA – ----

CORINNA – Alright. You go now. Inspector Derrick's about to start.

SECONDA – What? Derrick's about to start? I kiss you and you think of Derrick?

CORINNA – You did not kiss me. You go now. "So what do you want to do with your English lessons?"

SECONDA – Ha ha ha! Neapolitan is useless ... hmmm ... why? So English is useful? OK, then. See you tomorrow. All the best, Miss!

CORINNA – What d'you mean tomorrow? Tomorrow's Saturday ... and anyway you don't do lessons on two consecutive days ... there's no time for it to sink in ... it wouldn't be right ...

SECONDA – Well alright then, Miss ... we'll have a special lesson! See you tomorrow ... (she goes out singing: "Ma co' 'sti modi 'oi Briggida, tazz' 'e caffè parit'...")

CORINNA – "Seconda! Stop there! Seconda!" ... See you tomorrow.

Fourth scene

30 May – the Piscopos' flat

MAMMA – Hey ... you're back already?

PRIMO – Yep. And where are you going?

MAMMA – My sister's ...

PRIMO – Bye. See you later. Watch out because they're setting light to everything in that shit hole of an alleyway ...

MAMMA – HEY!

PRIMO – What's up?

MAMMA – What d'you mean, What's up? How did it go?

PRIMO – What?

MAMMA – The exam!

PRIMO – The exam? Badly, thanks all the same!

MAMMA – But why? Was the prof a shit?

PRIMO – No Ma, ... I refused the mark he gave me ...

MAMMA – You refused? Why? What mark did he give you?

PRIMO – 25.

MAMMA – You refused 25? Are you mad?

PRIMO – The problem wasn't the 25. The problem was that he didn't accept my reasoning. I mean, not that he didn't accept my reasoning, but that I could reason.

MAMMA – Listen, Mummy's own darling, you've got to get your degree, and be quick about it ... you're not going to be the President of the Republic ... so why don't you stop coming out with your reasoning, and just let these screwed up old profs have their reasoning? And then, even if you do get into an argument and they still give you 25, then take 25 for crying out loud! You take it and bring it right here to me, next time!

PRIMO – You can't understand ...

MAMMA – Of course I can't! Because I'm stupid, a cretin, an ignorant cess pit, aren't I ...? Whereas you understand everything ...

PRIMO – He didn't accept my theory on the "multiplicity of textual organizations"..

MAMMA – And what might that be? ...

PRIMO – It derives from a simple observation of reality ... or rather of the "texts" which exist in reality. It divides up all the texts in a series of groups of signs which dialogue among themselves. Each text is like a country. And the traveller, that is the reader, which means us ... me, in this case ... is like a traveller who goes from one country to another taking with him everything he has seen on his previous journeys. And he observes all the characteristics of the country he is visiting precisely thanks to what he has learned previously, about the people and habits and customs ... but then we get to the question: If I read "The Adolescent" before or after I read "The Name of the Rose", will I be reading the same book?

MAMMA – Are you asking me?

PRIMO – Yes...

MAMMA – Of course! If you read "The Adolescent", it's always "The Adolescent" ...

PRIMO – No, you're wrong! Because "The Adolescent" read after "The Name of the Rose" will enable me to understand something more and something different ... all the more so because Eco must certainly have read it too, we might add. And so everything gets even more complex, because the perception of my memory as I am reading must also confront the fact that whoever wrote the text, before they wrote it, read what I am going to read before I read that text. So there are only two ways about it: either this

creates a hyper mega level of communication; or it causes one hell of a short-circuit.

MAMMA – Listen, Mummy's boy ... you've got an unbeatable brain ... but you've got to pass these goddam exams ... all this mental wanking you've got into ... what good is it to your Mum?...

PRIMO – It's no good to anyone! But if wanking is no good to anyone, then nor is an exam in semiotics!

MAMMA – I told you you'd be better off doing law... but never mind, listen ... from what you say, when someone is just starting to read, he won't be able to understand what he's reading ... I mean, let's say that someone is reading his very first book ... how can he understand it if he's never been on a journey ... as you say?

PRIMO – Holy Mary! It's uncanny! That's exactly what the prof said to me ... Ma, I'm terrified ...

MAMMA – Well obviously you haven't taken after me ... Ha ha ...

PRIMO – I certainly didn't take after that cesspit of a husband of yours ...

MAMMA – Primmo!

PRIMO – Hey, Ma, it's not my fault if my father is an asshole!

MAMMA – But you're not even able to pass some stupid exam ... anyway, what did you say to the prof?

PRIMO – He he ... this is the crux of my theory... as a matter of fact no one is in the condition of never having read anything ... meaning, more generically ... of never having had anything to do with a text ... and d'you know why?

MAMMA – No. Why?

PRIMO – Because we all, everyone one of us ... dream! Dreams are the matrix for the texts that enable us to decipher the other stories we read ... and as we read, or watch a film, or that crap with Maria de Filippi you watch, this also has an impact on our dreams ... and our dreams take their place in

the system of the plurality of textual organization! That's what I told the prof! And do you know what he replied? Bravo, you've got your head screwed on alright, but if you want 30, first you must know how others reason, and then you can come to an exam and develop your own line of reasoning ... So then I tried to tell him that even though I didn't remember that ... piece of crap Gilles Deleuze thought up when he had an in-growing toenail, in actual fact I had devoured Gilles Deleuze... and I'd digested him too, if I'd managed to formulate my own reasoning...

MAMMA – Who the hell is this Gill Deli?

PRIMO – Never mind ... it doesn't matter ... but in my opinion I deserved 30 ... I'm the only one who elaborated an autonomous line of reasoning in the whole session ... and I should have got credit for it ...

MAMMA – Primo, but what do you care about getting credit ... You're the cleverest of the whole lot of them ... And you are even if the others don't realise, Mummy's own ...

PRIMO – But do you really think I'm better than everyone else?

MAMMA – But of course I do, Mummy's boy ...

PRIMO – And as usual you don't understand a toss ... and anyway what the fuck difference does it make to you if I get my degree or not, or if I take another two years ...

MAMMA – What can I say? ... I must have dreamed that that's the way things are ...

PRIMO – If you only knew what I dreamed ...

MAMMA – What did you dream?

PRIMO – ... He he ... That I was having such a screw that, after a fuck like that, you're ready for anything: a semiotics exam is nothing! The sort of fuck they give you a laurea honoris causa for, for accomplishment of universal beatitude ...

MAMMA – Who with?

PRIMO – He he ... you'd love to know, wouldn't you, eh?

MAMMA – OK, drop it ... just go and see your brother, he seems a bit strange this morning ...

PRIMO – Why, has he ever seemed normal? Ha ha ha ... Bye Ma, you know it terrifies me how beautiful you are! [smacking kiss] This evening I'm going out to celebrate failing the exam...

MAMMA – You didn't fail ... you refused because ...

PRIMO – Because I'm too, too, tooo intelligent, Mummy's boy, ha ha ha ...
Bye Ma, see you later.

Fifth scene

30 May – the Piscopos' flat

SECONDA - The fact is Miss Corinna smells of roses ... Yes! She smells fresh ... I was accustomed to that smell of manure Grandma had, as if her skin had been kept in a fridge for three weeks, with the electricity off ...

SECONDO – Grandma washed every day; and anyway, it's not right to speak badly of the dead, especially a grandparent!

SECONDA – What's that got to do with it? I'm not speaking badly of Grandma, for the love of God! All I'm saying is, I don't know why, but for me old skin was always associated with that smell of mustiness and cooking ... how can I explain? ... Every time I saw an old woman I was sure she'd smell like that, and since I really miss Grandma, I wouldn't go anywhere near them ... cos otherwise I was sure to start thinking of Grandma ...

SECONDO – But you decided to make an exception for Corinna...

SECONDA – Listen, let's get one thing straight, why do you suddenly start getting all judgmental? You of all people, who are more of a poufter than that brother of yours – and that's saying something! ... do you or don't you want to know what happened?

SECONDO – Yeah...I want to know! Tell me what happened ...

SECONDA – Well, while Corinna – I mean Miss Corinna – was doing the lesson – you know how I loathe English ... I was taking good care not to get too close so as not to smell that smell of stale fridge old people have, since I can't stomach it, but also because it makes me cry thinking of Grandma ... all of a sudden she starts crying ... so I go over to her, no ... as a matter of fact she suddenly lurched forward ... got closer ... like this ... came right up close ... and I already thought I was going to spew up ... but that day I focused on her false teeth, which were dazzling white ... just immaculate ...

and I got so focused I wasn't looking out for myself ... I mean, I didn't even realise, but I took in all her smell, her whole neck: and it wasn't like Grandma's, no! It was perfumed and fresh, it didn't make me think of potato cakes..

SECONDO – Why, what's wrong with potato cakes?

SECONDA – Aaaaggghhh! Listen twin, I can't take it any more! There's nothing wrong with potato cakes! ... But I'd like to see you fucking a fried potato cake.

SECONDO – Jesus Christ! you're a real sourpuss... What's up? Where are you going? Stay here, I was only joking ... come on, let me hear ... finish what you were saying ...

SECONDA – Alright, but you're not to interrupt me any more. Otherwise I'm going, and Goodnight Sailors, as Uncle Micky used to say.

SECONDO – Cross my heart.

SECONDA – Well, without even realising, I discovered she had this really pure smell ... and then all at once ... really, just like that, I tried comparing her skin to Grandma's, but without meaning to ... I just gave her a little kiss on the neck to see what she smelt of ... and then I shut my eyes and everything got mixed up ... and now I'm the one that's mixed up ... all I know is, I'd like to keep my forehead pressed against her neck the whole day long, and die in that position, it's the only position that means anything in my life ... like this ... just see if it isn't a lovely position ... fitting into one another, in silence, ready to die like Leonardo Di Caprio on the tomb of Juliette..

SECONDO – You smell lovely too, little sister ...

SECONDA – Only cos you haven't smelt Corinna..

SECONDO – Yes, but you're young ... and perhaps you're not even ...

SECONDA – But perhaps I’m not even what ...? What the fuck do you know about what I am, when you don’t even know what you are ...

SECONDO – ... In any case it’s just one great lunatic asylum here ...

SECONDA – You speak to your father ... I’ve got to have a pee ... (she goes out)

SECONDO – That’s right ... to my father ... your father ... the father of Primo..

Enter Primo

SECONDO – Ah, you’re here!

PRIMO – Yep!

SECONDO – How did semiotics go?

PRIMO – Badly.

SECONDO – Jesus, I’m sorry.

PRIMO – I’m not!

SECONDO – Fine! Listen to me a moment ... have you read Arthur’s Island?

PRIMO – Of course! Why?

SECONDO – Well, I mean, you know she wrote it without ever going to Procida?

PRIMO – No, I didn’t know, to tell the truth.

SECONDO – It’s terrifying, isn’t it? ... I reckon there’s some strange secret about Procida ...

PRIMO – Why? ... have you got to go to Procida?

SECONDO – I was supposed to ... but I’ve called it off for the time being ... (enter Seconda)...

SECONDA – Hi, how did it go, Primmo?

PRIMO – Badly, thank you. Well, why don’t all three of us go to Procida?

SECONDA – To Procida? Me? When? I've got to work.

PRIMO – When was it you wanted to go, Secò?

SECONDO – Forget it, I told you I'd changed my mind.

SECONDA – Yes, but when did you want to go?

SECONDO – This weekend ... but I can't ... I've got to study ... if not I'll fail too ... it'll be the downfall of the house of Piscopo...

PRIMO – They won't fail you, not you ... and anyway I refused ... you can come to Procida, can't you?

SECONDA – Me?... No ... I've got to work ... and then ...

SECONDO – And then?

SECONDA – My English lesson. Tomorrow I've got "inglìsh"!

PRIMO – Tomorrow's Saturday! You're getting to like English, aren't you!

SECONDA – Well, yes, there's nothing wrong with it ... yep.

PRIMO – Alright ... I'm happy ... and tell Miss Corinna that if she likes we're having dinner here ... and if she wants to come ...

SECONDO – We're having dinner?

PRIMO – That's right.

SECONDO – And who's organized it?

PRIMO – Me.

SECONDA – Since when?

PRIMO – Since now! Ha ha ha.

SECONDA – Don't play the fool! When is the dinner?

PRIMO – Let's say on the anniversary of Ivan.

SECONDO – Listen, Primmo, why can't you ever mind your own fucking business?

PRIMO – Because I'm a Piscopo and so are you.

SECONDO – But who asked you anything?

PRIMO – What's that got to do with it? ...

SECONDA – Alright then, when is this dinner?

SECONDO – Er ... on Sunday ... Sunday ... day after tomorrow ... But do you mean you're really going to ask Corinna?

SECONDA – That's what Primo said! He's the boss!

SECONDO – And you're really going to ask her?

PRIMO – Hey Secò ... what's the problem?

SECONDA – Hey! Really! Is it really all that extraordinary? She's always kind to me, and this'll be a good opportunity to repay her! I'm off to work. Bye!

SECONDO – Bye.

PRIMO – Bye.

(Seconda goes out)

PRIMO – Weeell! Mind how you go ...

SECONDO – Weeell!

PRIMO – It's obvious she's taken a liking to English ...

SECONDO – You reckon? [shrugs] In any case, when I see her happy ... it makes me happy ... that's fine ... anyway ... I don't know if this dinner is a good idea ...

PRIMO – But of course it is, come off it! ... Staying in all on your own, slitting your wrists watching some pathetic film ... no, wait a moment, perhaps since it's the most important day of the year, you should go out and try being a rent boy, to see another reality, like, and have a new experience ... Or do you want me to come and rescue you again like last year, and two years ago, and three years, and four years ago too for that matter, flat out on the pavement, face down in a pool of vomit, so that I needed a spoon to get you upright? I'd have thought a nice dinner party would be better, wouldn't it?

SECONDO – Alright, let's have this dinner, like you say ... but listen ... I mean ... the exam ... what happened...?

PRIMO – What can I say? ... In our lives each one of us composes his own autobiography; it may be a nondescript story or a story for everybody to hear, according to how you die: whether you die as a complete nonentity or as a celebrity.

SECONDO – And what does “dying as a celebrity” mean?

PRIMO – It means really counting for something. Becoming Primo, Number One, in name and in fact. It means making a big enough impact, both in public and in private. Gaining sufficient respect for your way of thinking. And what’s more, using this thinking to modify other people.

SECONDO – And are you so sure that dying as a celebrity really “counts for something”, as you say? [shrugs] If you say so ...! For me, quite honestly, I’d say all we can do is struggle to get those famous three or four minutes a year of real peace and quiet ... if we ever achieve them ... then that’s the moment we perhaps ... “count for something”...

PRIMO – Listen, why don’t we go to a disco tonight? They’ve opened a new place, it’s full of queers: who knows if we won’t get laid!

SECONDO – Primo!

PRIMO – What’s up? Are you ashamed?

SECONDO – No! What’s that got to do with it? We were talking about something else!

PRIMO – Exactly: that’s just why I want to go to a disco tonight. I want to have a good time! Get Frateme to come too!

SECONDO – No, not Frateme!

PRIMO – Why not? Ohhhh ... I see ... you want him all for yourself, do you?

SECONDO – Primo, stop talking bullshit! Frateme isn’t queer! And anyway we’re just friends, me and Frateme.

PRIMO - Ha ha ha, if Frateme isn’t queer I’m David Beckham! Ha ha ha!

SECONDO – Stop it.

PRIMO – Ha ha ha, sorry, sorry ... don't get worked up ... it's just that both of us know it's the truth ... in fact, come to think of it ... he knows too!

SECONDO – Listen, Primo: I couldn't give a fuck if Antonio is queer or isn't queer. He's my best friend. And he's also a jockey like me ... clear? ... It's one thing for us to be talking here, just the two of us ... but it's another thing that every morning at 5 am I have to go to work ... and I don't want anyone starting to see things differently ... is that perfectly clear?

PRIMO – Alright, I understand ... but Frateme is your best friend ... and he's also queer!

SECONDO – Stop it, Primo! I told you to stuff it! "Anderstend", stop it?

PRIMO – Alright, alright. Don't lose your rag ... Well, tonight are we going to dancing with all those queers or not? Secò! ... will you come or won't you?

SECONDO – I'll come, I'll come ... it'll be a laugh! The Piscopo brothers into the breach! I'll make a night of it: I'll go on to work at Agnano in the morning and then I'll sleep all day tomorrow afternoon! (Secondo exits)

PRIMO – And I'll make a night of it by fucking round the clock until tomorrow evening! Ha ha ha ha!

Sixth scene

31 May – Corinna's bed

In bed

SECONDA –....and so she said to me: (mincingly) "Too bad I like men so much ... really too bad ... that I could never become lesbian" ... Too bad, she said, see? ... so then I asked her: yes, but why Too bad? That's what I said, he he ... And she said "Aahh... you don't know how many problems that would solve for me ... cos all men are just impossible ..." ha ha ha ha ... So then I said: Well yes, I agree with you there! Ha ha ha ha ... But what's the connection between you liking men and not liking women? Ha ha ha ha ... And I said to her ... Just because someone likes plain chocolate, that doesn't mean automatically they don't like milk chocolate, does it? And you know what she did?

CORINNA – What did she do?

SECONDA – She just reached right out for my pussy! Ha ha ha ha

CORINNA – Ha ha ha ha

SECONDA – Miss ... I love you.

CORINNA – Don't talk nonsense ...

SECONDA – What d'you mean nonsense? ...

CORINNA – OK ... go right ahead and say it ... I love you too.

They kiss

CORINNA – "ma co stimmodi oi briggida tazz'a caffè parete..."

SECONDA – Ha ha ha ... no, no, Miss! Ma co' sti modi ... with one M ... Jesus and Mary, I've got to learn you everything.

CORINNA – Teach, Seconda, not learn ...

SECONDA – Yes, yes, alright, you're all very fine with your Italian, but in Neapolitan you're hopeless, he he!

CORINNA – It's not my fault ...

SECONDA – No, of course not ... what's fault got to do with it? ... For the love of God! ... come on now, repeat after me ... "ma co' sti modi 'oi Bbriggida, tazze caffè parit'..."

CORINNA "ma- co'- sti- modi-oi-Brigida..."

SECONDA – Briggida, with two Gs...

CORINNA – "Briggida....tazz'-e-café-parite...."

SECONDA – "sotto tenit' 'o zucchero e ngopp' amara sit'".... don't look at me like that, Miss ...

CORINNA – Like what...?

SECONDA – So sweetly ...

They kiss and make love

SECONDA – And what was it like for you, Miss, the first time?

CORINNA – ... When are you going to stop calling me Miss, eh?

SECONDA – Why? Would you prefer Missus?

CORINNA – Listen "honey girl"... just call me Corinna, won't you?

SECONDA – But what's that got to do with it? ... It's cos I'm fond of tradition ... but tell me ... I've told you how it was for me ... and for you?

CORINNA – What?

SECONDA – The first time, Miss! The first time!

CORINNA – Seconda ... I don't have anything to tell you ... you are my first time ... and you know very well ...

SECONDA – ... Miss, I told you I love you ... didn't I ..?

They make love again

CORINNA – You know, you really ought to say something to that saint of a father of yours ...

SECONDA – That's enough of that saint of a saint ...

CORINNA – ... I don't know ... Say that I'm teaching you for free ... I don't like the idea that you take money from him for the lessons ...

SECONDA – And what am I supposed to say to that asshole? Listen, pa, since I lick Miss's pussy, Miss won't let me pay for the English lessons any more? As a matter of fact, I could say that since I lick Miss's pussy, Miss doesn't actually have time to give me English lessons any more! And do you know what my dad would do then? He wouldn't let me come any more! No more! "Never and never!" And you don't want that, do you? You want me to keep coming to English lessons ... don't you?

CORINNA – Yes, Seconda, of course I do! But really, the language you use is too much!

SECONDA – I'm sorry, I'm sorry! ...Take it easy ... I didn't mean it ...

CORINNA – It's just ... it seems to me that if you take money from your father, it makes it all the more something I shouldn't be doing! And then really and truly I can't understand why you've got it in for your father so ... he's a simple man who earns his daily bread and has brought you all up as strong, beautiful children ...

SECONDA – Ha ha ha ha ... let's say strong! Ha ha ha ha!

CORINNA – And beautiful! At least ... for me, you're truly beautiful!

SECONDA – Miss, Miss ... your eyes are beautiful ... Please ... just leave my dad out of it ... How about this? From now on, every week, after I've come to see you, on my way home I go through that filthy little square where there's the underground station, and I'll give the 15 euros to that fleabag of a gypsy woman who's always lying near the pile of rubbish ... and I'll say to her: don't forget, love: this is a little present from Miss Corinna! Alright? Then you'll have done a good action, and so will I, and also that arsehole of a father of mine ...

CORINNA –... But ...

SECONDA – No, no ... Now you've just got to accept ... OK? ... But tell me something ... Have I ... no ... have I already told you I love you ...?

CORINNA – Yes ... you told me.

SECONDA – ...Well come on then, kiss me a bit more ...

As she's leaving

SECONDA – Oh, Miss ... in all this passion I forgot to tell you ... my brother Primo has organized a dinner – you can bet it'll be fish – ... and he said, if you want to come too ...

CORINNA – Me?

SECONDA – Yes, you! Why, what's the matter?

CORINNA – But ... what can I say? ...

SECONDA – You've got to say yes, that's all! Come on ... I've got to be off.

CORINNA – And when is this dinner? ...

SECONDA – Tomorrow ... Ivàn's anniversary...

CORINNA – Tomorrow! And who's Ivan?

SECONDA – Miss, we won't go into that ... he was a friend of Secondo who died ... well ... a friend ... not even a friend ... anyway I'm off ... I've got to hurry ... tomorrow ... you'll be there?

CORINNA – And your parents?

SECONDA – Oh, they're always happy when Primm cooks fish!

CORINNA - ... Well alright ... tomorrow ...

SECONDA – Fine! I'm happy! Bye Miss!

CORINNA – Bye ...

Seventh scene

1 June, early morning – the Piscopos' flat

MAMMA – Morning, Secò.

SECONDO – Morning, Ma.

MAMMA – How come you're up so early? Isn't it your day off?

SECONDO – I've got to go to the university ...

MAMMA – On Sunday? So early?

SECONDO – Yep. Is Dad asleep?

MAMMA – No.

SECONDO – Where's he been?

MAMMA – How should I know?

SECONDO – You mean he hasn't been back?

MAMMA – Nope. Listen ...

SECONDO – What's up?

MAMMA – Are you feeling alright? Did you sleep alright?

SECONDO – Yep.

MAMMA – You're looking a bit ... strange ...

SECONDO – No, no ... not at all ...

MAMMA – I'm making the cake for the dinner ...

SECONDO – What dinner?

MAMMA – The dinner this evening ...

SECONDO – Oh, the dinner.

MAMMA – I'm making tiramisu specially for you ... because I know you love tiramisu ...

SECONDO – Great, thanks ever so. I'm off.

MAMMA – Where are you going?

SECONDO – To university, I said!

MAMMA – Oh yes ... you told me ... and what exam are you preparing for now?

SECONDO – What exam? ... I'm preparing Latin literature ...

MAMMA – Is it nice?

SECONDO – Yes, very. Very sad.

MAMMA – Why?

SECONDO – [shrugs].

MAMMA – But is it of any use?

SECONDO – ... I think so ... Yes I really think so ...

MAMMA – Alright ... If you say so ... But are you alright?

SECONDO – Mum ... Yes ... I'm fine ... Bye ...

MAMMA – Bye ... and take an umbrella ... it's going to rain!

SECONDO – It's not going to rain. Bye.

MAMMA – Bye.

(Secondo goes out. Enter Primo)

PRIMO – Hi.

MAMMA – This is a fine time to come home!

PRIMO – Since when has it been any business of yours what time I come home? Is Secondo still asleep?

MAMMA – No, he's gone out ... See? ... I'm making tiramisu, specially for you ... because I know you like rum baba ... so I'm making tiramisu, Mummy's own darling ... Hey, what've you been doing all night?

PRIMO – Do you know where he's gone?

MAMMA – Who?

PRIMO – Secondo.

MAMMA – He said he was going to university ..

PRIMO – To university ? On Sunday? So early?

MAMMA – Yep ... I thought it was a bit strange too ... But how come you're back at this time?

PRIMO – Oooohhhh!.....You're really pissing me off! ... You want to know what I've been doing? I've been to an orgy, with people tossing me off all night and someone licking my arse, alright? Happy now? There's just chaos outside, the whole of Naples stinks of shit, that son of yours has taken leave of his senses, and here you are giving me shit about what I've been doing all night? And don't look at me like that! ... I haven't said anything bad ... It's not true I fucked last night, OK? ... I spent the whole night with the person I wanted to fuck, in his car, listening to him going on about that ignorant filthy cock-sucking bitch of his that he fucks, who he says is so kind to him, so beautiful, though in my opinion she's a cess pit, and as if that's not enough, he's queer but he won't admit it ...

MAMMA – For you they're all queer ...

PRIMO – Listen ... cool it ... now's not the time ... I'm going to bed ... and if Secondo comes in, you're to call me at once, OK? But don't say anything to him.

MAMMA – But what’s happened? ... Now you’ve got me worried ...

PRIMO – Mum ... you know what day it is today, don’t you?

MAMMA – Hang on ... the first of June ... so?

PRIMO – So? So! Take a look here!

MAMMA – And what am I supposed to do with the paper?

PRIMO – Read this, dear Mummy ...

MAMMA – “Ivan, beloved brother, time passes but you are always with me. You are present with all your love, and still today the strength and the equilibrium you gave me are the mainstay for everything I do. Never stop embracing me, and let the intensity of your look and the sweetness of your smile continue to light up my life for ever. With unchanging love, your own Jockey”.

PRIMO – Aah ... so you’ve got nothing to say ... see, now you hold your tongue ...

MAMMA – I could see he was a bit strange this morning ...

PRIMO – For the last five years he’s been up shit street on the 1st of June ... and now you realise? ... What are you doing Ma?

MAMMA – I’m counting the words ... how much do you think this announcement cost him ...?

PRIMO – You really are a cunt ...

MAMMA - ... Hey ... How dare you? ... you little jerk! So I’m a cunt, I never realise, I don’t understand ... but what do you know? Eh? As a matter of fact, it makes me mad to think that my son Secondo works his ass off every morning starting at 5 so that he can put 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63

64 65 66 67 ... sixty-seven words in the newspaper! You know how much that costs? For someone he only saw for a month or two in his whole life!

(Enter Seconda)

SECONDA – What's this din? You've gone and woken me up!

PRIMO – You don't understand ... you don't understand .. .

SECONDA – What's happened? Why the newspaper? Have they cleared up the rubbish?

MAMMA – What don't I understand? Listen, Primm', just clear off! Go and get some sleep, that's a better idea ... go on ... go on Get out!

PRIMO – Secondo's put in the announcement again this year ... he even calls him "brother of mine"..

SECONDA – So what? Are you jealous?

MAMMA – Yep. Perhaps that's it ... he's jealous...

PRIMO– Just stuff it, both of you ... I'm going to bed ... (he goes out)

SECONDA– Jesus.

MAMMA – Yep.

SECONDA – And now?

MAMMA – What?

SECONDA – Are we having the dinner tonight?

MAMMA – What's that go to do with it? Of course we are ... I'm preparing the tiramisù with chocolate drops because I know you love chocolate ...

SECONDA – Yes I love chocolate! ... as long as it's plain

MAMMA – And this is plain alright, mummy's own ... go back and get some more sleep you too, go on ...

SECONDA – Alright ... so we're having the dinner ...

MAMMA – We are, we are ...

SECONDA – And who's coming?

MAMMA – Us five ... Miss Corinna, Doctor Alfredo ... and Antonio...

SECONDA – Antonio?

MAMMA – Yes! Primo rang him ... but he said don't tell Secondo, cos he wants it to be a surprise ... [shrugs] ... who knows? ... perhaps he'll be pleased to have his friend along ... Well alright ... never mind ... off you go ... when you wake up you can give me a hand ...

SECONDA – Alright ... I'll be up in an hour's time ... (goes out)

(enter the father)

PADRE– What are you doing?

MAMMA – You're back ...

PADRE – I slept at Sarvatore's place ...

MAMMA – Of course ...

PADRE – What are you doing?

MAMMA – Making the tiramisù for Secondo ... he loves tiramisù ... you remember that Primo's organized a dinner this evening?

PADRE – Of course! Obviously I remember ...

MAMMA – That's alright then. Was Sarvatore OK?

PADRE – Fine, fine.

MAMMA – That's alright then.

PADRE – Alright ... I'm off to have a bit of a rest ...

MAMMA – Oh yes ... yes ... good idea ...

PADRE – Aren't you coming? ...

MAMMA – I'll just finish this cake and then I'll come and have a bit of a rest too ...

PADRE – Fine ... be quick!

MAMMA – Go on ... I'll be right with you ...

(the father goes out)

MAMMA – "Never stop embracing me, and let the intensity of your look and the sweetness of your smile continue to light up my life for ever. With unchanging love, your own Jockey"... But why?... why? ... why? ... why? ...

ACT 2

1 June, evening – the Piscopos' flat

PRIMO – You know what I mean? When my head will manage to produce thoughts without any complexes. Anchored here in the pit of my stomach, but without any hurry, that's what I'm aiming at. When my head will have found its "constant pulsation", without any ectopic beats. Perhaps I'll be dead, and the thought repulses me, but at least I won't realise ... anyway ... life really is a bitch.

MAMMA (off) – Primoooo!! Call your brother, see where he is, will you!

PRIMO – Call him yourself!

ALFREDO – But why do you behave like this?

PRIMO – Like what?

ALFREDO – To your parents. Why do you treat them like this?

PRIMO – And why don't you mind your own fucking business, since we're not in those 50 minutes when you're the one in charge.

ALFREDO – Well, as if I hadn't spoken. Even if ...

PRIMO – Even if ...?

ALFREDO – Nothing.

PRIMO – Ah no! You started, you've got to say it!

ALFREDO – In general ... I don't think that those so-called "50 minutes in which I'm in charge" exist any more, and in any case, when they did exist, it wasn't me who was in charge, that is to say my role was not to be in charge ...

PRIMO – Let's say that you weren't supposed to be in charge ... but when someone likes being in charge ... never mind his role ...

ALFREDO – That's true.

PRIMO – There you see, it's just as I say: we're not in those 50 minutes ... otherwise you'd never have said I was right!

ALFREDO – Exactly.

PRIMO – And so?

ALFREDO – And so what?

PRIMO – You said: in general bla bla bla, etc., etc., but you haven't told me what you meant in particular?

ALFREDO – Yes I understand, but if I tell you, I'll be saying what you didn't want me to say at the beginning ... and now you want me to say it? ... Is that right ...? Alright then, I'll tell you: I think your treatment of your parents is extreme – and this is typical of all children with their parents – but in your case it's too extreme. Yes, I mean ... it's quite normal that your perception of their effect on you is totally lacking in objectivity: but I'm not referring to this when I talk of being too extreme, I'm talking about all the beauty you harbour within yourself, that's right. Only when you confront them, you reveal a harshness that is not just harsh, it's grotesque! You really should try and go a bit easier ... free up a bit ... there's no doubt about it.

MAMMA (off)– Primm! See who's at the door! Answer, will you?

PRIMO – No, you answer! In the first place we've got to distinguish between Mum and Dad. As you know perfectly well, I won't even look at my father. With my mother it's different. You're right, Alfrè: free up a bit, I've got to free up a bit. But I can't choose to break down the prison bars I've got inside my head.

MAMMA (off) – Primm!

PRIMO – What the fuck do you want? If she would just let up a bit, just take one step back ...

ALFREDO – What d'you mean, one step back?

PRIMO – Yes. If she would only stop playing her role, stop thinking she can make up for my shortcomings, then I think I'd be able to break out of the cage. I think I'd manage to transform all the acid inside me into infinite tenderness. Sometimes I think that, when she'll be old and gaga, we'll be able to turn the tables and return to that balanced relationship we had when I was young. And it drives me mad when I think of everything we're missing while we're waiting to get back to that situation ... hang on, my mobile ... Hey, Antò, how's it going? You're on your way? No, he's not here yet ... Eh ... I know, his mobile's been off all day ... he must have let the battery go flat ... Yes, yes, he's coming ... Alright ... OK, OK ... we're expecting you ... Bye, Frateme, bye ...

ALFREDO – Who was that?

PRIMO – Antonio, the bloke my brother's fallen for.

ALFREDO – Oh ... and does Antonio reciprocate?

PRIMO – He's playing hard to get, Alfrè ... like you ... but sooner or later Antonio will give in ... and so will you!

MAMMA (off) – Primm! What shall I do about these mussels? Shall I see to it or will you?

PRIMO – You're pissing me off! I'm talking! I'll see to it. Believe me, Alfrè ... she really is a hard case ... I mean it's not just my fault if I treat her badly ... and as if this weren't enough, she also makes me feel guilty because she's the one who does everything and says everything, and all for me! Why doesn't she just stop doing it? Who asked her to do anything? If I didn't love her as much as I do ...

ALFREDO – What would you do?

PRIMO – I'd do sod all ... There you see! Now you're laughing at me ...

ALFREDO – Because you really are so, so kind hearted, with all your foam rubber prickles ...

PRIMO – Jesus! You’re telling me that I may thrust my tongue into your mouth?

ALFREDO – What? ... nothing could be further from my thoughts ...

PRIMO – And why not?

ALFREDO – Why not ...? ... Because ... becauuuse ... because ... it’s not possible.

PRIMO – it’s not possible ... hmmm ... i-t i-s n-o-t p-o-s-s-i-b-l-e- ... snotpossiblesnotpossible ... hmmm ... ahhhh it’s not possible

ALFREDO– Stop it ...

PRIMO – No, you stop it. I’m somebody who, when he’s hungry, he eats, and when he’s thirsty, he drinks. But I’m beginning to think that you will only eat if it’s meal time ...

ALFREDO – Stop talking bullshit ...

PRIMO – Oh no, you’re the one who talks bullshit!

Enter Seconda with Corinna

SECONDA – Hi Primo.

PRIMO – Hi. Nice to meet you, Miss Corinna, I’m Primo. This is Alfredo ... he’s supposed to be my shrink, but this evening he’s officially here as a friend, he he.

CORINNA – How d’you do.

ALFREDO – How d’you do.

SECONDA – Where’s Secondo?

PRIMO – He’s not here yet ...

SECONDA – But he is coming?

PRIMO – Come in, come in ... Miss Corinna, please take a seat ...

CORINNA – Thank you, Primo.

SECONDA – And what'll we do if he doesn't come?

PRIMO – He'll come, he'll come ... and if he's late ... we'll start without him ...

MAMMA (entering)– Primm'! Have you spoken to your brother?

PRIMO – His phone's switched off, Ma!

MAMMA – So what are we going to do?

PRIMO – What are we going to do?... We'll wait for Antonio and then we'll start ...

SECONDA – What? We've organized a dinner specially for Secondo and then we don't wait for him?

PRIMO – He'll turn up ... Who was that on the interphone?

MAMMA – Dad.

PRIMO – Oh, where's he?

MAMMA – He's in bed cos he's not feeling well ...

PRIMO – Ah, he's not feeling well ... I understand ... You see, Alfrè?

MAMMA – Miss Corinna, I'm sorry, I didn't say hello ...

CORINNA – Not at all, Mrs Piscopo, think nothing of it ...

MAMMA – You've met Doctor Alfredo? Doctor Alfredo is a very special person ... since Primm's been going to him he's completely changed ...

PRIMO – For Christ's sake! ...

ALFREDO – ... Yes, we've been introduced ...

SECONDA – The interphone!

MAMMA – That'll be Antonio! Someone'll have to go down, Dad said the interphone is broken.

SECONDA – I'll go! (goes out)

PRIMO – Fine! I'll go into the kitchen and finish the preparations ... then we'll eat! Will you give me a hand, Ma?

MAMMA – Coming ... please excuse me ... (they go out)

ALFREDO – Of course, of course ...

ALFREDO – So you're Seconda's English teacher?

CORINNA – Yes I am.

ALFREDO – They're good children ...

CORINNA – Yes ... very sweet ...

ALFREDO – Yes .. hmm ... er hmm ... of course ... hmhhh ... it's not really hot, it it? ... for June, I mean ...

CORINNA – No, no ... fortunately ... otherwise with all the stuff that's accumulated in the streets ... what a stench there'd be ... in this neighbourhood above all ... I really don't know how people dare do their shopping ... with bags of rubbish that have been lying there for weeks near the fruit and veg stalls ...

ALFREDO – Yes indeed, in this district it's really terrible ... terrible ... and yet even the bosses have children ... it really is a mystery how they can care so little about their health ...

CORINNA – You're right ... Obviously they'll send them to America for treatment, since they can afford to ...

ALFREDO – Ha ha ... I'm afraid you're perfectly right ... in any case let's hope at least they can see off this emergency ... if not, in a month's time there'll be a full-blown cholera epidemic ...

CORINNA – It's years the emergency is supposed to be over ... but it always comes back ... and you realise it was never over ... the emergency will never come to an end in Naples ... emergency is adrenaline to Neapolitans...

ALFREDO – You think so ...?

CORINNA – Yes. Neapolitans don't believe in ever putting a full stop; they simply don't want to have everything in order. They're afraid of calling things

by their name. And I'm from a Neapolitan family, you know. I went on hoping against hope, until finally I too gave up all hope ...

There's an old lady, she's very kind really, who comes to keep me company every now and then ... she brings me something nice to eat ... you know how it is, it's not nice to be all on your own ... I mean, it's freedom when you're young ... but when you're old ... solitude is a torturer who goes to sleep when you do and wakes up as soon as you open your eyes ... Anyway, this old dear said something which got me thinking ... I was going on about everything that's bad about Naples and she said to me: "Well Miss ... the crib scene is lovely ... it's the figures in the scene who are bad"... and I think she's right ...

ALFREDO – ... Well yes ... I think so too ... but the tragedy is that the people who should be doing something to put an end to the emergency are actually perfectly happy with the crib scene ... so there really is no way out ...

CORINNA – Well at least it doesn't rain in Naples ... in London it even rained in June ...

ALFREDO – "Well! You lived in London?"

CORINNA – "Oh yes, of course"... four years ... although it was a long time ago ...

(enter Seconda and Antonio)

SECONDA – Miss Corinna, let me introduce Antonio, also known as Frateme. He's a good friend of Secondo.

ANTONIO – Marasca Antonio.

CORINNA – How d'you do.

SECONDA – And this is Alfredo ... Primo's ... friend ...

ANTONIO – And I'm still Marasca Antonio ... he he ...

ALFREDO – Nice to meet you ... So you're a jockey too?

ANTONIO – Yes, me too ... Why, does it show?

ALFREDO – Well, let's say that your height is something of a clue ... he he ... and then jockeys always stick together with other jockeys, don't they?

ANTONIO – Yes, yes ... quite right! He he he.

(Enter Primo and Mum)

PRIMO – It's ready!

ANTONIO – Hi Primm!

PRIMO – I've made spaghetti with mussels that will leave you gasping! So much the worse for you, Pa! C'mon, c'mon! Let's hear it for the mussels!

ANTONIO – Go for it! Good evening, Mrs Piscopo.

MAMMA – Evening Antò...

SECONDA (aside) – What's up, Ma?

MAMMA – Nothing, nothing ...

PRIMO – Come along, Miss Corinna, pass your plate and I'll serve you!

SECONDA (aside) – Have you had a row?

MAMMA – Nothing's happened ... everything's alright ...

PRIMO – Is that alright for you, Miss Corinna?

CORINNA – That's fine, fine ... too much, really ...

PRIMO – Now then, Miss ... Nobody's ever had any regrets concerning Primo Piscopo's spaghetti with mussels! Alfrè, pass me your plate!

ALFREDO – Without mussels for me please, Primo..

PRIMO – What do you mean no mussels?! What did I make it for then?...

ALFREDO – Well, you see ... alright, just a couple ... go on, then ...

ANTONIO – Primm, you're always cock of the roost in the Piscopo family!

SECONDO (coming in) – Hey! Didn't you wait for me?

PRIMO – Hooray, he's back! The prodigal son has come home! I told you he'd be here!

SECONDO – Sorry I’m late! The street near the station was completely blocked, they set light to the rubbish bins ...

ALFREDO – ... They don’t even wait till night time to set them alight ...

SECONDO – Frateme! ... what are you doing here?

ANTONIO – Primm invited me. How are things? Didn’t you go to Procida?

MAMMA – Procida?

SECONDO – No, no ... I was busy ...

SECONDA – Everything OK, Secò? You look ...

SECONDO – Yes, yes, all OK ...

PRIMO – Just in time for just the best spaghetti and mussels of your life, little brother!

ALFREDO – Secondo, how are you?

SECONDO – Fine, Doctor, thank you.

SECONDO – And isn’t Dad coming?

MAMMA – Dad’s in bed! He doesn’t feel well! So we’re all here! Bon appetit!

Miss Corinna, can I give you a drop of wine?

CORINNA – Wine? ... No thank you ... I’ll have some water ...

SECONDA – Come on, Miss, a drop of wine in honour of Primo’s spaghetti! To celebrate!

CORINNA – No, no, really, Seconda ... I mustn’t ...

SECONDA – But why not? What does it do to you?

CORINNA – It’s on account of my panic attacks ...

ALFREDO – Do you suffer from panic attacks?

ANTONIO – What are “panic attacks”?

CORINNA – As a matter of fact I haven’t had one for twenty years ... but once you’ve had one you don’t want any more ... and then the doctor said to me that it didn’t help ... along with a whole series of other things ... so to be on the safe side I haven’t touched alcohol since, if you see what I mean ...

ANTONIO – But what are they?

CORINNA – Eh ... what are they? They're something horrible, Antonio ... but perhaps the Doctor can give us a full dress lecture on panic attacks ...

SECONDA – What can he do?

PRIMO – Give us a lesson, a lesson ... Alfrè, let's hear this lesson, come on!

ALFREDO – No Miss Corinna ... please allow me to be off duty this evening ... you tell us ...

CORINNA – Alright, but please correct me if I make a mistake ... Let's say that you start from people's obsessions and compulsions ... when someone gets obsessed in a rather pathological way, gets a bit of a fixation, let's say, about something ... that's an obsession ... such as, what might it be? ... Somebody takes it into their head that the front door always has to be locked, alright? ... Well, that can become an obsession ... And if that person can't stop himself continually going to check that the front door is locked, I mean, even if he'd just checked a couple of minutes before but he has to get up and go and see how many times he turned the key in the lock ... Then that's what is called a compulsion ... is that right, Doctor?

ALFREDO – Let's say you're on the right lines, yes, he he.

SECONDA – I know all about compulsions ...

CORINNA – No you do not, Seconda!

SECONDA – What do you mean I don't? I do!

CORINNA – Don't talk nonsense! You have no idea what a compulsion is, thank God ... Anyway, and I'll conclude because I think I've been quite tedious enough as it is ...

SECONDO – You haven't been at all tedious ...

CORINNA – Well, anyway ... when you get to the point of being afraid ... of being terrorised ... by the fact that you can no longer verify your obsession,

or satisfy your compulsion, you get into a sort of state of paralysis ... which is called a panic attack ... and it's something truly horrible ...

SECONDO – And can you have one if you get obsessed with somebody? I mean if you are afraid you won't be able to see somebody any more?

CORINNA – Doctor ... I don't know what to say to that ...

ALFREDO – Secondo ... technically speaking it doesn't really work like that ... but in any case ... panic attacks are something serious and not that frequent ... and nobody here suffers from them, fortunately ... not even Miss Corinna, who hasn't touched alcohol in twenty years ...

SECONDO – Well, alright ... sometimes it seems to me we live on a railway line where the rails are as narrow as narrow, and mental illnesses are just next to us on a line running right alongside ... and it would only take the slightest puff of wind to change lines, and whether the puff affects you or the next person ... it all seems such a matter of chance ...

ALFREDO – Well, Secondo ... what can I say? ... This remark of yours denotes a certain civic conscience, undoubtedly ... but I can assure you it takes much more than a breeze to derail someone ... fortunately, even if our psyche is fragile, we're well and truly protected against storms ...

MAMMA – Doctor, you've just said something really wonderful ...

PRIMO – Yes, yes, something really wonderful, pass your plate and I'll give you some more pasta...

ALFREDO – No, no, that's enough for me, thank you ...

PRIMO – Didn't you like it?

ALFREDO – I liked it very much indeed, Primo ... But I want to keep just a little room for the next course ...

MAMMA – I'll go and fetch the calamari from the oven, then ...

(aside)

ANTONIO – Secò, another drop of wine?

SECONDO – Thanks!... here's to you! ...

ANTONIO – And you ...

SECONDO – What did you do, then? ... Did you go out in the boat with Doctor Imparato?

ANTONIO – Tell you the truth ... no I didn't, Secò ... actually I rang you about Procida ... but you had your phone switched off ... so I went to the "outlet" with Elisa and Elisa's sister and her bloke, who turns out to be that idiot Pascualino Senarcia ... you remember him?

SECONDO – Of course I do! OK ... in any case we'll go to Procida some other time ...

PRIMO – Hey, what's up? Are you two confessing one another?

MAMMA – Nobody minds if I don't change the plates, do they?

ALFREDO – No problem at all ...

PRIMO – You know what I saw this morning on the bus?

ANTONIO – What did you see?

PRIMO – It was full to bursting ... all Chinese, they were, and I can't stand Chinese, even if they don't stink, he he, in fact Chinese don't stink ... but they turn up all over the place, and then, at bottom, the Chinese don't want to integrate ... in fact in my opinion it's them who are totally racist about us, that's why I can't stand them ... anyway, there was this girl you see, a real stunner, she wasn't Chinese ... to tell the truth she didn't seem Neapolitan either ... anyway ... she was all dressed up in bright mauve, with her jeans and her little mauve top hugging her figure ... she was all made up and her shoes were mauve too ...

ANTONIO – You didn't miss a thing, did you eh? ... dirty old man you!

PRIMO – That's enough from you! He he ... anyway, she was standing there in all her finery in the bus ... holding on to the pole, and suddenly I see there was another hand on top of her hand, caressing her, you see?, and the other hand even had a wedding ring on ... but they weren't speaking to each other ... No sir! They were just standing one in front of the other, and he was caressing her hand ... he was a bit of a smarmy type, he was, he he ... anyway suddenly, he moves a bit and gets up closer to her ... and begins to let her feel the goods ...

ANTONIO – Jesus! He was a real groper!

SECONDA – Primo! We've got Miss Corinna here!

PRIMO – Well yes, excuse me, Miss ... but you're a woman of the world, aren't you?

CORINNA – Think nothing of it, Primo..

PRIMO – Well yes, anyway ... he let her feel it ... and I was thinking ... now she's going to turn round and give him a slap ... or perhaps it's the husband and they're up to something

MAMMA – ... Secondo, will you have a couple more calamari?...

PRIMO - ... Hey Ma ...

MAMMA – You leave me alone ...

SECONDO – No thanks, Ma ...

MAMMA – But you haven't eaten anything ...

PRIMO - ... Hey Ma ...

ANTONIO – He he! And then?

PRIMO – And then she got off the bus ... just like that, as if nothing'd happened, the dirty bitch, without saying a word ... and the pig went on being a pig with someone else ...

ANTONIO – Nooo! What a slut! Ha ha ha.

SECONDA – All you men can think about is judging how much of a slut women are ... who knows, perhaps she was just frightened of reacting ... What could she do? ... And then, suppose she liked having him rubbing up against her. Why should that make her a slut, for Christ's sake...?

ANTONIO – Oh yes! And what are we supposed to call her, then? Saint Rita on the bus! Ha ha ha Saint Rita on the bus! The Patron Saint of sluts! Ha ha ha.

SECONDA – So, Frateme, you're in it too! You don't know the first thing about that girl! You don't know what she had on her mind! That's what's the matter with men ... first they want everything, and then there they are, judging how much of a bitch you are ... except their wives of course ... aren't I right?

ANTONIO – Alright, Secò, I was just joking ... don't get worked up ... Secò, you say something to her ...

SECONDO – What? Oh yes ... Seconda ... don't take any notice ... just forget it ... and look, Miss Corinna has finished ... take her plate away ...

PRIMO – Of course ... he's "Mr. Don't take any notice" ... the specialist in removing things ...

MAMMA – Primm! You help your sister clear the table, go on ... I'll go and get the tiramisu ...

PRIMO – OK, clear away ... clear right away ...

(Primo, Seconda, Mamma go out briefly)

CORINNA – Dear Secondo, I wanted to say how sorry I was about Ivan ...

SECONDO – Eh? ... What? ... I ...

ANTONIO – Who's Ivan?

CORINNA – Oh, sorry ... perhaps I've said something I shouldn't have ...

(and come back in)

MAMMA – Here's my children's favourite cake ...

SECONDO – No, please don't worry ... thank you all the same ...

ANTONIO – But who the hell is Ivàn?

ALFREDO – Mrs Piscopo's tiramisu! Word's got around even up in Vomero about what a triumph it is!

MAMMA – Secò, pass round the plates so I can serve out.

ANTONIO – Hey Secò! Who the hell is Ivàn?

PRIMO – Ivan is a horse they were going to give to Secondo...

ANTONIO – That's a lousy name for a horse!

PRIMO – It was some rich people in Sorrento who were going away for a year and asked Secondo if he'd look after their house and the horse ... but then it all fell through ... because they didn't go after all ...

ANTONIO – Jesus. But why didn't you tell me ... if you were feeling bad about it? ...

SECONDO – No ... what's that got to do with it? ... I wasn't sure ... then you know, at work ... I wasn't even sure whether to accept or not ... it meant leaving the job for a year ... moving to Sorrento...

ANTONIO – OK ... but I still don't understand why you didn't say anything to me ...

SECONDA – Doc, a little limoncello?

ALFREDO – Well, why not ...

Silence

ALFREDO – What was that saying? ... when everyone falls silent at table ... an angel has passed over ... I don't remember if that's exactly how it was ... but I like to think so ... he he

PRIMO – You're right, Alfrè ... even if that's not exactly right ... who cares ... it's passed over, that's the main thing ...

CORINNA – Seconda ... please give me a drop of limoncello too, but only a drop, mind ...

SECONDA – With pleasure, Miss ...

ANTONIO – ... I knew an Ivàn! That's right! He was a kid who used to come to the race course a few years ago ... in my opinion ... to tell the truth ... I thought he was a bit of a poufter, tell the truth ... still, he wasn't a bad sort ... he was good looking alright ... things ended badly for him ... eh ... he had a really bad fall ... the horse got mad ... obviously he realised he was queer! He he ... he threw him off ... you see, horses can't stand queers! He he ... Still I was sorry all the same! I'll never forget his Mum's face ... Yep ... it was a bad fall alright ... you know he was stinking rich, that kid ... Well there you are, every so often a misfortune has to happen to them too ... I reckon ... he was supposed to be having an affair with another jockey, also a poufter ... but I could never work out who that was ... I mean ... you'd think you'd realise, wouldn't you? ... if you take a shower every day with a homo ... sooner or later ... he won't be able to resist ... he'll invent something ... he'll make a pass at you ... he he ... No, I think you'd realise, don't you? Secò! Do you remember Ivàn? What's up, Secò? What's going on? Secò!

(Secondo leaves)

ANTONIO – Well he really is in a bad way! He must be drunk ... but what did I say, I don't get it ... Cor, he really is in a bad way ... Alright, excuse me ...

I'm off ... Well, I think the evening's over, isn't it? ... Jesus, he's in a bad way ... Thanks for everything, Mrs Piscopo ... Primm, I'm off ... the fish was great ... I've had a great time! ... say goodbye to your brother for me ... he really is in a bad way ...

PRIMO – Antò.

ANTONIO – What's up?

PRIMO – If you say my brother's in a bad way one more time, so help me God, I'll take that shit face of yours, I'll stuff it down the bog and I'll send you back to where you belong, with all the other turds like you!

ANTONIO – Hey, Primo, have you gone off your head? Is something wrong? It's better if I get out of here ...

MAMMA – Be quiet, Primm' ...

PRIMO – No, no, you're not going anywhere ... you're going to say sorry ...

ANTONIO – And what'll you do if I don't?

PRIMO – What'll I do if you don't?

ANTONIO – Yep. What'll you do?

PRIMO – I'll kill you! Say sorry, you shit face!

SECONDA – Leave him alone, Primm!

MAMMA – Leave him alone! For the love of God! Do something, Doctor!

PRIMO – Say sorry!

ALFREDO – Let go of him, Primo!

PRIMO – After he's said sorry!

ANTONIO – But sorry for what?

PRIMO – Hey shitface! Sorry for what? Sorry for what? Shitface! Bogface! Arsehole! Motherfucker! It was Secondo who was going out with Ivàn! Now do you understand who the poufter jockey was? Is it clear or isn't it? Secondo is queer! I'm queer! At home here everyone's queer! Everyone, got it? From first to last! One big happy family, all inside out, that's right, isn't it

Mum? One extraordinary freak of nature. That's the way it is, isn't it Alfrè? What have you got to do with it? What's that cesspit of a husband of yours got to do with it? So now do you understand why you have to say sorry to my brother, and to me and also to my sister! Yes, yes, my sister too! Three out of three, Antò! A real masterpiece, only it's all up the spout! But you're not queer, are you? Even if you go and play the rent boy on millionaires' yachts ... No, you're not, right? ... You're perfectly normal, aren't you? "Very regular"! Is that how you say it, Miss? What's the word? "Straight"! Yes, "straight", that's it! There you are, Antò! In here ... nobody is "straight"!

SECONDA – Miss ... Miss ... What's wrong, Miss? ... Doc ... Miss Corinna is feeling ill, Doc, do something ... Miss! ... Corinnaaa! Corinna ... what's wrong? ... Corinna! Papà! Help! Help! Help! Papà! Help!

Everyone falls silent; Seconda, sobbing, sings ever so faintly:

"Ma cu' sti mmodi `oi Brigida, tazz'e caffè parit', sott' tenit' `o zucchero e `ngopp amara site, ma `i tant' cagg' ggirà, e tant' cagg' avutà, co `ddoce sott'a tazza fin'e mmocca madd'arrivà"

[But with these airs, oh Brigida, you're just like a cup of coffee,
All the sugar down at the bottom, and on the surface you're so bitter,
But I'm going to stir you up so, and turn you round and round,
Till all that sweetness down inside reaches these lips of mine.]

ACT THREE

1 June, three years later – the Piscopos' flat

PRIMO – Ma.

MAMMA – Yep.

PRIMO – There's one thing I've never understood ...

MAMMA – Holy Mary ... what's that?

PRIMO – Why didn't you ever leave Dad?

MAMMA – Primm!

PRIMO – What's wrong?

MAMMA – What sort of a question is that?

PRIMO – Why?

MAMMA – Because it's a crap sort of question, Mummy's own ...

PRIMO – I don't know about crap ... more son of a bitch, I'd say ... ha ha ha

MAMMA – Ha ha ha.

PRIMO - ... No, I mean it ... why didn't you?

MAMMA – Do you know why you're called Primm?

PRIMO – Because you didn't have much imagination, either of you ...

MAMMA – No, no, Mummy's boy. You're called Primo because, when you were born, your father picked you up and said: "I'm an ignorant bloke ... but I know one thing ... I've never felt like this before ... before now! Never! This little creature we're calling him Primm!" That's what he said ... and then when the twins were born he said, "They're just too wonderful ... I never thought I could feel like this again ... so we'll call them Secondo and Seconda!" ... There, that's my husband ... I haven't left my husband because he's my husband ... he may be straight as a die or bent as a dog's hind leg ... but he's my husband!

PRIMO – Yes alright, but now... it's different ... now ... For fuck's sake! What's that stink? ... Christ, he's shit in his pants again!

MAMMA – Will you change him?

PRIMO – Just for a change ...

MAMMA – You know the nurse said it's better if you change him ... I've got nothing against cleaning up my son ...

PRIMO – I know ... I know ... here we are ... set yourself down here, dear brother! Come on, we'll have a nice wash down ... Ma, fetch me his nappy, would you ... Well little brother, how did you get on at the Institute today? What did you do?

SECONDO – ---

PRIMO – Come on, Secò ... answer me ...

MAMMA – Primo, what do you want to eat tonight?

PRIMO – Listen Mà ... I can't make up my mind about anything ... how should I know what I want for dinner? ... and anyway you know what day it is today ... it's not me you have to ask ...

MAMMA – Secondo, listen to Mummy, what do you want to eat tonight? Tell Mummy, won't you? Do you want spaghetti with mussels, like your brother makes for you?

PRIMO – Ma! You're crazy! Shut up! You'll start him off!

MAMMA – No, you're the crazy one! There he is, bent over double for the last two years, and it's my fault if he starts crying! You're a fine one, you really are!

PRIMO – Forget it! If you don't understand ...

MAMMA – Obviously, I never understand anything ...

PRIMO – Don't cry, Secò ... Come on ... don't take any notice ... why are you crying?

SECONDO (very slowly) – I w-a-n-t F-r-a-t-e-r-m-e.

PRIMO – I’m your brother ... you can see me ...

SECONDO – A-n-t-o-n-i-o

PRIMO – Secò ... you know ... we haven’t seen Antonio for nearly three years ... Antonio was very selfish with you ... we’ve been over it so many times. Antonio doesn’t deserve you ... don’t you remember we’ve said it so many times?

SECONDO – -----

PRIMO – Listen, Ma!

MAMMA – What’s up?

PRIMO – This evening Alfredo’s coming to dinner too.

MAMMA – Have you started seeing each other again?

PRIMO – You honestly think we ever stopped? ... where would he go without me? ...

MAMMA – Holy Mary, you’re nothing if not modest ... I don’t know who you’ve got it from ...

PRIMO – Secondooo! ... Listen, why don’t we go and see something nice at the theatre this evening, instead of staying in? There’s a good play on in the arts theatre, they’re doing a retrospective ... and tonight there’s “Querelle” ... you remember, Secò, we went to see it years ago ... the director was brilliant ... do you remember? ...

SECONDO – y-e-s

PRIMO – Shall we go, then? I’ll book tickets now ... I know the girl in the box office ... I’m sure she can find me two tickets, he he ... tell you what, we’ll take Alfredo along too! So, Mum, no dinner tonight, cos Secondo and me are going

SECONDO - ...no.

PRIMO – What do you mean, no? You don't want Alfredo to come? Alright, don't worry, I'll tell him ... no problem ...

SECONDO –No ... the ...th....th....th.....theatre

PRIMO – I'm going to flush those fucking drugs down the bog! They do him nothing but harm!

MAMMA – You shit! You mustn't say such things in front of him!

PRIMO – Because in your opinion, Ma, they've done him good?

MAMMA – What's that got to do with it? But you mustn't say it in front of him!

PRIMO – In any case he doesn't understand anything any more, Ma! He gets worse every day.

MAMMA – My son understands everything! He'll get better! I'm telling you ... he's going to get better ...

PRIMO – What do you mean he's going to get better, Ma? ... Things have been getting worse day after day for three years ... and the worse it gets the more drugs they give him ... and the more drugs they give him ... the worse he gets ...

MAMMA – I told you you're to shut it! Not in front of him!

SECONDO – tirmss'...

PRIMO – What was that?

SECONDO – t-i-r-a-m-i-s-u

MAMMA – You want tiramisu, do you, Mummy's own?

SECONDO – Yes ...

MAMMA – Well Mummy's off to make you tiramisu right now ...

SECONDO – I-s A-n-t-o-n-i-o c-o-m-i-n-g?

PRIMO – Secondo ... you know we're not seeing Antonio any more ... Antonio is no longer a friend of ours ... Antonio betrayed us ...

SECONDO – Antoniooooo ... Fratemeeee ... mine.

MAMMA – There's someone at the door ... are you expecting someone ...?

SECONDO – Antoniiiiiooooo

PRIMO – Alfredo ... but it's early yet ... calm down, Secò....

MAMMA – So who can it be ...?

SECONDO – Fratemeeee ...

PRIMO – It'll be Dad because he's gone out without his keys ... what are you pulling that face for?

MAMMA – What face? I'm not pulling any face ...

PRIMO – You'd do better to wash that face of yours ... that face full of hope, you've got to wash it off once and for all, do you hear, Ma? ... Got it? ... Cos she's not going to come back ... and even if she did ... the day she walks in, I walk out!

MAMMA – Don't talk crap ... I'll go and see who it is ...

PRIMO – There you are, brother ... now you're all clean and dry, aren't you? ... So, shall we go to the theatre this evening, you and me and Alfredo ... eh?

SECONDO - ----

Enter Alfredo

ALFREDO – Oh.

PRIMO – Honey, you're here already ...

ALFREDO – Yep ... thought I'd come a bit earlier ... where I live the stench of rubbish is unbearable ...

PRIMO – Of course, down here in Forcella we have pure mountain air ... he he he ...

ALFREDO - ... No ... I know ... But what can I do? ... It's getting me down ... I've never seen so much rubbish underneath my balcony ... two or three more days like this ... and it'll be inside the living room ...

PRIMO – That's the fate we deserve: to be buried under heaps of rubbish ... and that's how it'll end ...

ALFREDO – The fate we deserve ... Who?

PRIMO – All of us! in this shit city!

ALFREDO – Well then, why don't we clear out ... you and me ...

PRIMO – Alfrè ... have you taken leave of your senses? ... What are you talking about? ... Where am I supposed to go? ... You see this ... my place is here, in the stink ... after all, I'm too tied to Naples ... and if I run away ... I'll always be branded 'made in Naples' ... some stinks can't be got rid of ... you can scrub as much as you like ... No, Alfrè ... my place is in my own stench...

SECONDO – A-l-f-r-e-d-o...

PRIMO – Yes, yes, little brother ... Alfredo's here ... you're pleased to see him, aren't you? ... And so am I! He he.

ALFREDO – How are you, Secondo?

PRIMO – Hey, there's no need to shout ... he's not deaf! And you're the one who's supposed to be the psychologist!

ALFREDO – What's that got to do with it? ... I'm a screwed up psychologist ...

PRIMO – Yesssss, come here my little screwed up psychologist ... I love it when you come over all vulnerable ...

ALFREDO – Leave me be ... stop it! ... your brother's here ...

PRIMO – Hey ... don't worry ... it won't bother him ...

ALFREDO – Come on ... Primo, listen to me a moment ... I mean ... anyway ... don't fly off the handle ... I just wanted to say that I can't manage to come to dinner this evening ... I don't feel up to it ...

PRIMO – Alfrè ... What can I say? ... You know ... it was important for me ... but if you really don't feel up to it ... there's no point us always going over the same old arguments ...

ALFREDO – The fact is it still hurts deep down ... it's only been three years ... and everything has changed for everyone ...

PRIMO – Well yes, but in your case for the better, don't you think? ... At least you've got me! He he he!

ALFREDO – I suppose so ... But listen ...

PRIMO – Well? ...

ALFREDO – No, I mean ... never mind ...

PRIMO – Tell me, tell me.

ALFREDO – I mean ... hasn't she been in touch this year?

PRIMO – No, she hasn't been in touch, and I hope she won't be, just as I told her on the phone last year, when she started going on at me about how we were doing harm to her brother ... That's what she said ... to my brother ... go fuck yourself ... My brother ...

ALFREDO – If that's what you think ...

PRIMO – Forget it, Alfrè ... just drop it ... This evening I wanted to go to the theatre with Secondo ... there's a really good play on ... it's based on Genet ... there's someone who knew about queers alright ... he he ... I went to see it eight or nine years ago with Secondo ... It was after that performance that we looked at each other and just burst out crying, both of us ... You know, we had never said to each other that we were poufters – it's true, isn't it Secò? – it just took that look, with the tears and us hugging each other. Then the show hit the road ... the Piscopo magic! Piscopos rule, OK? Over everything and everybody! Piscopo pride! ... I shall never forget a phrase somebody said after making love to a man ... making love I said Alfrè ... not a blow job down at the station, Alfrè ... this is what he said, more or less: 'I was seized by terror at the realization of how normal it all was' ... that's what he said ...

ALFREDO – Wonderful.

PRIMO – Yes, I know. But you, this evening, are not going to stay for dinner. Because you don't feel up to it. Well alright. Because anyway, the 1st of June, the 1st of November, the 18th of March ... It's all the same thing ... that's right, isn't it Secò? ...

SECONDO – Tiramisu ...

PRIMO – Yes, yes ... Mum's making tiramisu for you ... Hey, Ma ...

MAMMA (off) What's up?

PRIMO – Do me a favour, would you? ... No chocolate drops this year ... chocolate brings me out in spots ...

ALFREDO – You're impossible ...

PRIMO – Yes. I know. In all modesty ... Hey, little brother, how about it? ... Shall we go swimming next week? ... I'll take you to the swimming pool, OK? Secò ... do you want to come to the swimming pool with me ... yes?

SECONDO – I'm going to Procida ... Procida ... Procidaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

PRIMO – Alright, but you mustn't shout ... don't shout ... You've got to stop shouting ... got it?

ALFREDO – Hey, take it easy! Primo! Calm down!

PRIMO – I'm going down for a smoke ... Will you stay here for a bit?

ALFREDO – Alright ... calm down, Secondo ... you see, everything's alright ...

PRIMO – Mum, I going out for a moment ... do you need anything?

MAMMA (off) – No ... well, yes ... get your father some cigarettes ...

PRIMO – He can go stuff himself! (goes out)

MAMMA (off) – Thanks!

ALFREDO – Well, Secondo, how are you feeling today? Would you like to have a nice game of cards? You're really ace at cards ... much better than Primo ... what about having a game together?

SECONDO – ----

ALFREDO– Secò ... give me an answer ...

MAMMA (entering): Alfrè...

ALFREDO – Yes ...

MAMMA – I’m really worried ...

ALFREDO – I can understand ... he’s not doing too well ...

MAMMA – No, Alfrè ... I’m worried about Primo...

ALFREDO – How do you mean? ...

MAMMA – He has no sort of a life ... well ... I mean ... apart from you, Alfrè ... he’s left alone with his brother ... it can’t go on like this ...

ALFREDO – Mrs Piscopo ... you know perfectly well how it is ... one can’t reason with Primo ... the only reality he’ll recognise is what’s inside his head at that moment ... all the rest is absurd ...

MAMMA – Yep ... I know ... but ...

ALFREDO – But?

MAMMA – God help me ... I can’t stand it ... I don’t know how to explain ...

ALFREDO – Tell me

MAMMA – Alfrè ... today she ... my daughter ... today ... she’s rung ...

ALFREDO – She’s rung! How is she? Where is she? Primo told me she hadn’t been in touch ...

MAMMA – Primm’ knows nothing, Alfrè ... he’s too worked up ... he just won’t listen ...

ALFREDO – ... Well, so what did Seconda say...?

MAMMA – That today she’d come by ... she said first she was going to the cemetery for Ivàn and Miss Corinna ... to put some flowers on the graves ... and then she’d come by ...

ALFREDO – But ... you’re not happy ... Oh Lord, yes ... I understand ... you’re worried about when she and Primo meet ... Yes, yes, I understand ... What

can we do? ... Well, yes ... I'll try and convince him to go out anyway ... Yes, yes, then with luck they won't meet ... perhaps

MAMMA – No, no ... he'd get suspicious ... and then ... Alfrè...

ALFREDO – What's going on? ...

MAMMA – Alfrè ... I feel bad just at the thought, Alfrè ...

ALFREDO – But what's going on, Mrs Piscopo? ... Don't start crying or you'll set Secondo off ... Tell me ... quite calmly ... tell me ...

MAMMA – Alfrè ... Seconda ... said this ... that she wants to take her brother away with her ... she said he needs a change of air ... and that she is in a position to look after him now ... she's not alone ...

ALFREDO – But ... you ... told her ... that this was madness ...

MAMMA – ----

ALFREDO – Mrs Piscopo, you do understand, don't you?, that this would be quite wrong ... Primo will never accept such a thing, never ever ...

MAMMA – I don't understand anything any more ... and then ... my husband is tired ... Primm' talks and talks ... he's got the brains alright ... but he doesn't work, Alfrè...

ALFREDO - ... I realise ... but then ... has Seconda got a job?...

MAMMA – Alfrè, you know perfectly well ... God knows and Mary sees how long it is since I set eyes on her ... I don't know anything, Alfrè ... All I know is she's changed, Alfrè ... she's changed ... and she says she's doing well, Alfrè

ALFREDO – Yes ... I see ... but after three years ... we don't even know if Secondo would want it ... and anyway Primo will never accept ...

MAMMA – Alfrè ... in this case it isn't Primo who takes the decisions ... and in any case, Alfrè ... before long everyone of us will land up in hospital ... if we go on like this ... really it's a good thing if his sister will start to do something

about the whole situation ... I can't carry on like this, Alfrè ... I can't, I can't ... and my husband ... my husband

SECONDA – Mum.

MAMMA – Seconda.

SECONDO – S-e-c-o-n-d-a...

ALFREDO – ... Yes ... Secondo ... yes

MAMMA – Seconda ... you've come, Mummy's own ... come and give your Mum a hug ...

SECONDO – S-e-c-o-n-d-a-C-o-r-i-n-n-a

SECONDA – Hi little brother ...

SECONDO – Seconda ... Seconda ...

SECONDA – Come here ... Give me a hug ... how's my little brother then? You are my own wonderful little brother ... I think of you every day ... every day

SECONDO – Seconda...

SECONDA – Hello, Alfredo ...

ALFREDO – Hi, Seconda ... how are you?

SECONDA – What's up? Have you seen a ghost?

MAMMA – Oh, Mummy's own ... you look beautiful ... you're really elegant, Mummy's treasure ... sit down ... would you like some water? ...

SECONDO – Seconda... heeehhh

ALFREDO – You really are ... different ...

SECONDA – Yes. I've changed.

MAMMA – Do you want a coffee? ...

SECONDA – No, don't worry Mum ... Is Dad at home?

MAMMA ... Yes ... he's inside ... he's on the bed, he had nights ... he's tired, wasn't feeling well ...

SECONDA – Of course, of course ... Morning, Dad! You'll see, if he hears my voice it won't be a nightmare! I'm here in the living room! Come on, Mum ... don't cry ...

SECONDO – Secondaaaa.....eheheh

SECONDA – Yes little brother, I'm here ...

MAMMA – You look so beautiful ... really beautiful ... let me smother you in kisses ... come on ... I'm due some

ALFREDO – You're so ... changed ... yep ...

SECONDA – My own little brother ... yes, Alfrè ... I'm different ... I've grown up ...

MAMMA – There was I thinking who knows where she's ended up ... still, you too ... ringing up just once in the year ...

SECONDA – Mum ... otherwise when would we have got over it? ...

MAMMA – But three years ... what have you been doing for three whole years? ...

SECONDA – I began to live ... to read ... to study ... and to forget ... well no, the body never forgets ... but ever so slowly ... you can ... bit by bit ... when you've reached the bottom ... you can begin to rebuild ...

ALFREDO – But how? ...

SECONDA – When it happened, a week later ... I got a call from Mrs Loredana ... she was a friend of Corinna's – her only friend ... she said a letter had been found in the flat ... a holograph testament ...

MAMMA – And what's that?

SECONDA – A will written by Corinna herself ... it's not strictly a will, but in any case it contained all her last wishes ... so Loredana told me that even if it should be the last thing she did in her life, she was going to make sure her

wishes were honoured ... Loredana's husband is a lawyer ... he's old, really old, but very kind and generous ...

MAMMA – And what did this letter say? ...

SECONDA – It said that the universal heir to all Corinna's property ... was me ... now Corinna was no millionaire ... but still, when you've spent a whole life on your own, saving up ... it comes to enough ...

MAMMA – Well, why didn't you say anything to us? ...

SECONDA – Ha ha ha ... what d'you mean? Ha ha ha ... and what else should we have said to each other, while we were about it?

MAMMA – But why did you run away?

SECONDA ...In the will there was one condition ...

ALFREDO – What condition? ...

SECONDA – In actual fact ... there could have been a way out of it ... but it was Corinna's wish ... and Loredana made me swear I would honour it ... and it was the sole condition she made for helping me ...

MAMMA – So what was this condition? ...

SECONDA – It was to study ... Yes, to study, and get away from Naples for at least two years ... so quite soon ... thanks to Loredana's husband, we were able to sell the house and get the money in the bank released ... Loredana found me a fantastic place near Como ... all of a sudden I no longer had any problems about eating, work ... and above all there was no longer the stink of my life ...

MAMMA – What! Your life was just a stink?

SECONDA – Mum ... I spent a whole month crying. Crying, nothing else ... but I resisted ... because little by little, as I was crying ... I started to stink a bit less and read a bit more ...

MAMMA – OK ... but three years ...

SECONDA – After two years I was up and off again ... I went to London ... Loredana's got a daughter there ... who gave me a hand at the beginning ... I thought that once I'd learnt Italian ... if I learnt English too ... I would have made Corinna's dream come true ...

SECONDO – C-o-r-i-n-n-a-a-a-a-a

SECONDA – Yes, Secò, yes ... Corinna was so kind ...

ALFREDO – But just a moment ... you said that with Corinna ... I mean ... it was just beginning ...

MAMMA – What was beginning?

SECONDA – Mum ... Miss Corinna was my girlfriend ...

MAMMA – But she was ... old ...

SECONDA – And me? What was I, Mum? ...

MAMMA – And you knew, Alfrè?

ALFREDO - ... I found out later ...

SECONDA – Yes, Alfrè ... it was just beginning ... but apparently for Corinna that was enough ... the letter bore the date when we kissed for the first time ... obviously for her, just one kiss meant so much ...

PRIMO (off, entering) – Christ! There's a limousine down in the street with a super sexy tart inside ... What are you doing here? You knew! You knew all along! Tell the truth! You knew this fucking bitch was going to turn up today ...

MAMMA – ----

SECONDA – Hi Primo...

PRIMO – I'm going.

SECONDA – No, please, wait a moment ...

PRIMO – Hey Secò ... why should I wait? ... suddenly you up and off, for three years you don't show up ... and I'm supposed to wait ... go fuck yourself!

SECONDO – aaaahhhhhh.....aaaaahhhhhh.....

PRIMO – Calm down, Secò ... calm down ...

SECONDA – Keep calm little brother....

SECONDO – aaaaahhhhhhhhhhhh

PRIMO – Leave him alone ... you're not to lay a finger on my brother! ... Secò, calm down ...

SECONDO – y-y-y-y-y-you ... s-t-a-y- ...

PRIMO – Yes, I'm staying ... I'm staying ... now you go in your room ... now ... go on, there's a new PlayStation game, it's fantastic! Go on, go and see how it works ... then later we'll have a great match, Piscopo versus Piscopo!

SECONDO – M-y t-w-i-n ...

SECONDA– Go on little brother ... everything's OK ... later we'll go and have an ice cream together ...

(Secondo goes out)

PRIMO – Now can we know what she's come for?

SECONDA – Mum ... haven't you told him anything?

PRIMO – Told him anything about what?

MAMMA – Primm...

PRIMO – Told him anything about what?

SECONDA – Alfredo ... d'you mind ...

ALFREDO – I'll go

PRIMO – No, no, you stay!

ALFREDO – No Primo. These are things for the three of you.

PRIMO – Well thanks as ever, my love. Truly.

ALFREDO – ---- (goes out)

PRIMO – What's happening?

SECONDA – ... Primm, d'you remember ... when was the first time you became queer?

PRIMO – You're born queer ...

SECONDA – You reckon ... but the first time you did something ...

PRIMO – Listen ... what the fuck do you want? ...

SECONDA – Please, Primo ... tell me ...

MAMMA – I'm off!

PRIMO & SECONDA – No! You stay right here!

SECONDA – The very first time ...

PRIMO – The first time?

SECONDA – Yes.

PRIMO – The first time was ... at primary school, in the third year ... a classmate of mine ... who had a penknife ... he told me to jerk him off ...

MAMMA – I'm off!

SECONDA – Stay here! And did you like it?

PRIMO – Yes.

SECONDA – Yes.

PRIMO – You're born queer ...

SECONDA – Yes ... maybe ... listen, Primo ... you know, don't you, when was the first time for your brother?...

PRIMO – What's that got to do with it? ... That doesn't matter ... He certainly liked it too, later on ... You're born queer ... not that first time ... but then he liked it too ...

SECONDA – Primo ... you know that's not how it went ...

MAMMA – Keep your voice down ...

SECONDA – I'm not keeping anything down, Ma, not any more ...

PRIMO – I don't want to know anything ...

SECONDA – You don't want to know anything ... because you already know everything ... everybody already knows everything ... that's true, isn't it, Dad?...

MAMMA – Shut up! Shut up!

SECONDA – That's true, isn't it, Dad?!

MAMMA – Shut up!

PRIMO – I've never understood ... why not me? ... I couldn't understand why ... I hated him ... he's repulsive ... but I've never understood why he's never so much as touched me ...

SECONDA – Well obviously it was twins ... who knows, it was twins that turned Dad on! Isn't that right, Dad? What's up? You really can't get out of bed, can you, Dad? Cos you've done nights! Don't cry, you! Don't cry, Mum ... it's too late now ...

PRIMO – But what do you want? What do you want? Swanning in with your nice new outfit, to tell us how things are and how things aren't ... What do you want?

SECONDA – Our brother is coming away with me, Primm ... out of here ... away from this stink ...

PRIMO – You're mad! Secondo is my brother. And he's staying here! Got it, you fucking bitch ... You no longer have any right to set foot here in my house ... Is that clear? Is that clear?

SECONDO (off) aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

PRIMO – What's happened?

MAMMA – Secondo, Mummy's own! ... What's happened?

(Mother goes out)

MAMMA (off) – Nooo ... nooo! Aaaaahhhhhhhh!

SECONDA – You’ve killed him ...

SECONDA – You’ve killed him ...

PRIMO – It’s your fault ...

SECONDA – And you can talk about “fault” ... ha ha ha ... “fault” ...

PRIMO – Yes fault, fucking bitch ... Fault! Fault! Fault! Christ! You came here to save your brother, right? ... like you say, and now ... You’ve fucked him up with all this bollocks you’ve gone and said ... his mental state is very fragile ... And now what the fuck are we going to do, eh? ... You’ve ruined our life, for all of us ... And you bugger off with your millionaire screw ... And us? What the fuck are we supposed to do? Well, fucking bitch? Fucking lesbian bitch!

SECONDO – A-n-t-o-n-i-o I-v-a-n

PRIMO – And what the fuck have you got to say for yourself? What the fuck are you saying?

SECONDO – aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhh! Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!

SECONDA – Take it easy, little brother ... easy ... my own little brother ...

PRIMO – I told you you’re not to lay hands on my brother!

SECONDO – aaaaahhhhhhhhhh!

(Mother enters)

MAMMA – Shut up, Primm! Shut up all of you! Shut up! All of you!

PRIMO – Ma ... let’s chuck her out ...

MAMMA – Shhhh ... now you've just got to shut up, Primm! And you too, Seconda. You can just get out of here, ... clear off with your girlfriend ... Get out.

You, Primo, get your brother, wash his hands, properly, with bleach, and take him out ... that's right, go to the theatre, go to the sea, go to the cemetery, go where the hell you like, just go.

PRIMO – Hey Ma! What are you saying? What about here? And Dad? Shall we call the police?

MAMMA – Why? Your father comes home late so often ... and we don't call the police each time ...

PRIMO – But ...

MAMMA – Get out ... and don't come back tonight ... cos they're going to burn the rubbish tonight here in Forcella ... they'll be burning lots and lots of rubbish ... now get out ... and if you see someone out in the street, ask them if they've seen your father, cos he's later than usual and Mum is worried ... you understand ... OK now clear out ... have a nice outing, Mummy's own ... Bye, Seconda, my best greetings to that friend of yours ... we'll be pleased to see you whenever you want to come by ... Secondo, Mummy's boy, have a nice time.

MAMMA – ... No Primm! Don't say anything ... You're not to say anything else, you've just got to clear out!

Primo, Secondo and Seconda go out

MAMMA – Jesus and Mary, what a load of rubbish is going to burn tonight in Forcella ... what a load of rubbish ... everything's going to burn ... tonight,

with the stench there's been in this house, we'll be able to breathe again ...
we'll be able to breathe ... all the poison's going to go up in flames tonight ...

SONG