

L'avventura (The Adventure)

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It is the afternoon of a summer's day. Anna, a twenty-five-year-old brunette, comes out from the entrance of a stately building and walks along a pathway that leads up to a dirt road. She is in a great hurry and becomes a little annoyed and surprised at seeing her father, a meticulously dressed and elderly gentleman, standing near the curb busily talking to his chauffeur in front of a black British car.

**ANNA**

So, there you are... I've been upstairs looking all over for you...

There is a moment of silence during which Anna's father deliberately ignores her presence. She stares at him intently, trying to determine his mood and wondering how she is going to tell him what she has to say before she leaves. Finally, he turns around and faces her.

**FATHER**

Oh, I thought you were already on the high seas.

Anna is barely able to control her temper, but realizing that the discussion is about to take the usual sarcastic turn, she immediately checks herself.

**ANNA**

No, not yet, Dad.

Her father fixes her with a long ironic look. Conscious of his daughter's haste, he is apparently trying his best to detain her.

**FATHER**

Isn't it fashionable any more to put on a sailor's cap with the name of the yacht?

**ANNA**

No, Dad, it isn't.

There is another moment of silence. Meanwhile, a car has pulled up on the other side of the road. It is Claudia, a twenty-four-year-old blonde and a friend of Anna's. Both she and the driver get out of the car and remain discreetly in the background, waiting for the conversation to end. Anna's father resumes speaking, after a cursory nod to Claudia who, in turn, responds with a polite but half-hearted smile.

**FATHER**

And how long will you be away?

**ANNA**

Four or five days.

**FATHER**

(resignedly)

Oh, very well. I'll just spend the weekend alone by myself and take a little rest. I should be used to it by now.

Anna glares at him furiously but still manages to restrain herself.

**ANNA**

Used to what?

**FATHER**

To the fact of my retirement, not only as a diplomat but also as a father.

**ANNA**

(protestingly and with a deep sense of compassion)

But how could you say such a thing?

**FATHER**

Because it's true. After thirty years -- not having ever spoken the truth to anyone, I should at least allow myself to do so with my own daughter.

**ANNA**

And have you any other truths to tell me?

**FATHER**

You already know what they are.

**ANNA**

You mean Sandro, don't you? Well, I beg of you, please, spare me that. Goodbye, Dad.

She kisses him on the cheek but the father remains unmoved. It is obvious that he still has something else he wants to say to her. In fact, after gazing upon his daughter with a certain amount of pity, he finally does say it.

**FATHER**

That type will never marry you, my child.

Anna has a difficult time restraining herself but manages somehow to keep calm as she answers.

**ANNA**

Up until now, Dad, I've been the one who hasn't wanted to marry him.

**FATHER**

It's the same thing. Goodbye, dear.

He now returns the kiss his daughter had given him a short while ago. Then, without once turning around, he heads slowly towards the entrance of the house, as Claudia comes into the foreground.

Anna, still very tense and upset over the scene with her father, gets into the car. Claudia follows after her, as the driver puts her suitcase into the trunk.

**CLAUDIA**

Have you been waiting long? You'll have to excuse me.

Anna doesn't answer. She merely pats Claudia's hand. The car takes off, as Anna's maid, standing to one side of the road, waves a warm goodbye. Claudia responds by waving back, but Anna doesn't even look around. Instead, she turns to the driver and says:

**ANNA**

Please hurry, Alvaro. We're late.

The car speeds ahead along the dusty road, across a verdant strip of land, until it reaches the archway of a stone-wall fence around which it turns and disappears. It is seen again emerging from behind a cement wall and continues racing swiftly onward over a road that runs between two high walls. There is no sign of traffic. Only silence. It is an ancient road, and a very elegant one. Claudia looks at it admiringly. Anna continues to remain wrapped up within herself. The car now makes another turn, heading into a small, narrow road flanked on each side by gardens of patrician villas. Suddenly, it emerges on a drab, modern street amid the kind of traffic typical of any modern town.

Finally the car enters the street where Sandro lives and pulls up in front of a small but very fashionable palazzo. Anna and Claudia get out. And as the driver starts to remove the suitcases from the trunk, Claudia turns to Anna and says:

**CLAUDIA**

I'll wait for you here.

Anna starts to walk across the street and is about to enter a building. Surprised, Claudia calls out to her:

**CLAUDIA**

But where are you going?

**ANNA**

I'm thirsty.

**CLAUDIA**

If I had a man waiting for me for half an hour and whom I hadn't seen for a month ...

All of a sudden, Anna stops. She is pensive, almost sullen.

**ANNA**

You know, I could just as well go without

seeing him today.

**CLAUDIA**

What! After giving us such a run around...

Claudia stops, smiles, and jokingly tries to laugh it off.

**CLAUDIA**

I see... so it's farewell to the yacht...and  
farewell to the cruise...

Anna pays no heed to Claudia's teasing comments but follows her own original line of thought.

**ANNA**

You know, it's terrible to be far away from one another. Really, it's difficult to keep an affair going when one is here and the other is somewhere else. But, at the same time...it's comforting. Because it gives you a chance to consider what you want and how you want it... but when he's right there before you all the time... well, he's right there...

(Then, with a sense  
of exasperation)

Oh, let's go back....

Claudia notices Sandro leaning out of the window from his apartment on the first floor of the building. He is looking at them attentively. He is a young man of thirty-five. His shirt is unbuttoned and the tie around his neck is unknotted. Realizing that he has been spotted, he smiles and waves a cheerful hello.

**SANDRO**

I'll be right down.

As if seized by a sudden powerful impulse, Anna heads straight towards the of the building. Claudia looks at her with astonishment, and watches her disappear into the doorway. Then she looks up again at the window. But Sandro is no longer there.

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Sandro's apartment is extremely small. Although it contains many books, it has the atmosphere of a place that is very seldom lived in. Sandro has just finished knotting his tie. He closes his suitcase and heads toward the door. He turns back, however, to pick up a towel fallen from the bed. He takes the towel into the bathroom. Then he goes to the door again, opens it, and sees Anna. She appears a little anxious. Without giving Sandro a chance to say a word, she enters the apartment, closing the door behind her. Sandro puts down his suitcase and is about to embrace her, but Anna steps aside and begins staring at him with an intense look upon her face. Taking him all in with her eyes, she examines his suit, his hands, his legs, his shoes. Then her gaze moves back up to his face which she proceeds to scrutinize. Sandro is unable to understand her behavior, so he shrugs and jokingly exclaims:

**SANDRO**

Would you like to see my profile?

He snaps himself into profile, then turns, slowly, in the manner of a store window mannequin. Anna continues to stare at him. This time she peers directly into his eyes. Sandro is no longer amused.

**SANDRO**

Well, what is it?

Finally, Anna puts an end to her staring, and taking Sandro by the hand she leads him around the room. She stops in front of a mirror and looks at herself. The expression on her face becomes taut, determined. She starts unbuttoning her dress as she continues looking at herself in the mirror. Sandro comes up close to her shoulders, caresses her hair, and whispers softly into her ear.

**SANDRO**

But your friend is waiting downstairs.

**ANNA**

She'll wait.

Anna turns around and presses herself up against him with such a violent passion that Sandro is somewhat dismayed. But only for an instant. Soon they are feverishly kissing each other, and it is almost with a sense of sheer animal pleasure that Sandro abandons himself.

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Meanwhile, left alone, Claudia is pacing back and forth outside in front of the building. She is bored and obviously tired of waiting. Then, as she is about to cross over to the other side of the street, she sees Sandro and Anna coming out of the doorway. The expression on Anna's face hasn't changed -- she appears sad and gloomy. But Claudia doesn't take note of it; she is too busy fuming over Anna's lack of consideration, eager to let them both understand that she is sick and tired of waiting around.

As Sandro opens the window of the car, which is pointed towards Milan, he says to Claudia:

**SANDRO**

I have a feeling that you're not used to being alone.

**CLAUDIA**

(glancing first at Sandro  
and then at Anna)

That seems to apply to you also...

Meanwhile, the driver has taken Anna's suitcase out of the black car and puts it into Sandro's. Claudia picks up her own suitcase and is about to do the same but Sandro intervenes and takes it from her.

**SANDRO**

Don't be so humble.

**CLAUDIA**

How should I be ... arrogant?

**SANDRO**

But of course... arrogant, haughty... Hasn't Anna ever told you?

While this exchange was going on, Anna has already climbed into Sandro's car. Sandro follows and takes his place at the wheel; Claudia gets in alongside him. The car takes off at high speed.

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Heading south along a state highway, Sandro's car is traveling at high speed over a straight open road. It is twilight and as the evening shadows begin to fall, the surrounding countryside is bathed in an aura of mystery.

Inside the car Anna, Claudia and Sandro sit in complete silence. Anna is deeply absorbed in her own thoughts. Claudia is looking out of the window, enthralled by the dark beauty of the landscape. Another car draws up alongside of Sandro's and is about to pass him. But Sandro steps on the accelerator and pulls ahead with a tremendous burst of speed. The other car lags behind and then turns off at a crossroad. However, Sandro makes no attempt to slow down. In fact, spurred on by what has now become a definitely hostile atmosphere, he drives even faster.

As Sandro suddenly switches on the headlights, the violent glare that polarizes the roadside cuts off Claudia's view. She turns to Sandro with a look of disappointment

**CLAUDIA**

It was lovelier before.

To please her, Sandro turns the headlights off and once again the countryside is covered by a veil of thick but romantic shadows.

**SANDRO**

Like this?

Now Claudia again peers out at the landscape -- but only for an instant. Sandro abruptly turns the headlights on again, revealing a sharp curve in the road up ahead, only about a hundred yards away. He quickly shifts into lower gear, and the car swerves slightly. The sudden shift from fourth to third gear causes the motor to emit a sound that resembles a cry. The car races swiftly towards the curve, getting closer and closer. But at such high speed it appears impossible the car will be able to make the turn. Further up ahead, where the curve fades, there is a stone wall that runs along the side of the road. At this point, even Anna is attentive, her eyes wide open. Both she and Claudia are petrified and terror-stricken as the curve and the wall loom closer and closer. Fifty yards, forty, ten. All of a sudden, the headlights illuminate a large gap in the wall about three or four yards away, just on the other side of a small ditch that separates the road from the wall itself. There seems to be no other choice. With a frightening leap -- and going well over fifty miles an hour -- the car barely makes it over the ditch and right through the opening in the wall. The car comes to a sudden halt, but skids along on the muddy ground of an empty lot until it finally stops

near the door of a small farmhouse in front of an old man. He is seated on a bench and has been observing the entire scene without budging an inch.

There is a brief pause -- silence. Then Sandro comes out of the car followed by Claudia and Anna. Claudia is visibly shaken. She leans up against the building for support, as though in search of something solid and dependable. She is also unnerved by the feeling that she is responsible for what has just happened.

**CLAUDIA**

It's all my fault!

But instead of reproaching her, Sandro turns to the old man and excuses himself for having broken into his property. Imperturbably, the old man looks up at him and says:

**OLD MAN**

And who do you think made that hole over there?

Even before he has a chance to be surprised at the old man's remark, Sandro becomes aware that Anna is laughing. It is not the hysterical laugh that normally might be expected after such a close call. It is, instead a pure and simple laugh, almost a happy one, and leaves both Sandro and Claudia plainly baffled.

**CLAUDIA**

There's nothing much to laugh at.

**SANDRO**

And that's what I say, too. We could have all been killed.

Anna looks at them as she continues to laugh.

**ANNA**

I'm sorry ... but I can't help laughing...

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On a calm sea, amid the Aeolian Isles, just off the coast of Sicily, a motor yacht is moving quietly and smoothly over the water. It is heading directly towards a small island that appears like a huge rock jutting up from the sea, sharply silhouetted against the sky, about a hundred yards away. A few sea gulls are lazily wheeling around up above.

Aboard the yacht, a sailor is at the helm, peacefully smoking his pipe, while another peers out over the water as he munches on a sandwich. It is almost noon.

Raimondo, a deeply bronzed young man in his thirties, is lying outstretched in the sun on top of the cabin. Towards the prow, lying flat on her stomach upon a small rubber mat, is Claudia. Her arms are dangling over the side of the boat, catching the cool, fine spray of water splashing gently against the prow. Corrado comes out of the cabin. He sits down on a bench near the stern after placing a cushion under himself so as not to soil his suit, which is white and of an elegance that is slightly out of style. Corrado has a

sensitive face, with a look that is both sharp and intelligent. In age, he is closer to his fifties than his forties. Following directly behind him is Giulia, one of those impossible women who are so terribly sweet and coy and yet so demanding of attention. The pose she strikes as she looks out over the water, and the saccharine tone of voice in which she speaks, are precisely characteristic of her nature.

**GIULIA**

It's as smooth and slick as oil.

**CORRADO**

I detest comparisons made with oil.

Anna also appears on deck, looks around and, noticing Claudia, goes over and lies down beside her. Claudia rolls over on her back to embrace all that wonderful sun but her outstretched arm comes in contact with Anna, who smiles and joins her in a friendly embrace.

**CLAUDIA**

Did you sleep well?

**ANNA**

Yes, fairly well. But I went to bed last night planning to do some thinking about a number of things ... instead, I fell asleep.

**CLAUDIA**

I didn't know one could sleep so well on a yacht. It lulls you ...

Their conversation is suddenly interrupted by Sandro's voice shouting "Hello." He comes up to them and gives Anna a warm hug, then nods hello to Claudia. He is in a jaunty mood. Stretching himself out on the deck, he opens a picture magazine he had brought with him and starts to read. But Anna places her hand over the page he is looking at and says to him:

**ANNA**

It would be better for you to get some sun.

Sandro closes the magazine and throws it overboard. The pages come apart in the water. Some of them are quickly swept under by the waves, while others float and slowly drift away: white specks upon which a few sea gulls converge emitting their guttural cries.

As Sandro stretches himself out in the sun, Anna looks upon him with tenderness. She is about to embrace him but stops midway, and then finally changes her mind. Instead, she proceeds to stare at him with a profoundly troubled expression. Then, momentarily dismissing her anxiety, she cuddles up close to him in an effort to provoke his affection. Sandro responds, but only with a fleeting kiss. Seeing them together like this, Claudia gets up and moves away to the far side of the prow. Sandro and Anna remain as they are until they are suddenly enveloped by a dark shadow. Sandro opens his eyes and sits up. Anna does the same. The rocky island is now quite close, almost directly upon them. It is larger than it previously appeared and casts a long, dark shadow over the yacht. The water beneath the overhanging cliffs is extremely clear and almost motionless. Sandro rises to his feet and shouts out to everybody aboard.

**SANDRO**

Shall we go for a swim?

**CLAUDIA**

Oh, no... please... not here. It looks too dangerous.

The yacht proceeds to encircle the island. Up ahead, another island comes into view. It is smaller, brighter, and less foreboding. Corrado gets up and comes over to the prow to join Sandro, Anna and Claudia. He is immediately followed by Giulia, who peers intently at the landscape.

**GIULIA**

At one time the Aeolian isles were all volcanoes.

**CORRADO**

You must know your third grade geography book inside out.

Giulia looks at him resentfully and abashed. Claudia points to an island which they have just passed.

**CLAUDIA**

What is that one over there called?

**CORRADO**

That must be Basiluzzo.

**CLAUDIA**

Sounds like the name of a fish -- merluzzo, basiluzzo...

Corrado then points to an even smaller island which they are now approaching.

**CORRADO**

Now that one is Lisca Bianca.

Anna, who had been absorbed all the while in contemplating the landscape, though still preoccupied with certain personal thoughts of her own, suddenly unfastens her thin dress. Stripping down to her bathing suit, she turns to the group and exclaims with a note of exasperation:

**ANNA**

Oh, my goodness... All that yapping just for a little swim.

She then goes to the edge of the boat, which has slowed down somewhat, and before Sandro has a chance to call out to her, she dives into the water.

**SANDRO**

Anna!

Once in the water, Anna starts swimming towards the island. The sailor at the helm slows the boat even more so as to keep it within Anna's range. Raimondo, meanwhile, has gotten his skin-diving equipment ready; around his waist he is

tightening a belt to which a long knife is attached. The yacht continues to slow down. Sandro now dives into the water and starts swimming towards Anna. Claudia and Giulia are removing their clothes and they too get ready to go into the water. But Claudia is afraid to dive in while the boat is still in motion, so she turns to the sailor and shouts:

**CLAUDIA**

Stop ... stop the boat!

The motor is turned off and the yacht soon comes to a halt. A sailor places a ladder over the side of the boat. Claudia goes down the ladder, easing herself into the water. She moves away from the side of the yacht by swimming backwards. Giulia follows her down the ladder but stops on the last rung.

**GIULIA**

How's the water?

Sandro looks up and, pointing to the rocks at the highest part of the island, answers her.

**SANDRO**

Let's see you dive from the top of those rocks, Giulia. That would be really sensational. Come on, Giulia ... your life is much too circumscribed.

**GIULIA**

What has everybody got against me this morning?

From inside the cabin, a feminine voice is heard shouting:

**PATRIZIA**

Raimondo!

Solicitously, Raimondo goes over to the door of the cabin, from which Patrizia emerges wrapped in a filmy nightgown. She is a woman of great elegance, somewhere in her thirties.

**PATRIZIA**

Why have we stopped?

**RAIMONDO**

(kissing her hand)  
Lady Patrizia!

Then, holding her by the hand, Raimondo leads her towards the prow, where Corrado greets her and likewise kisses her hand.

**CORRADO**

Aren't you going in for a swim, Patrizia?

**PATRIZIA**

What makes you think I would even dream of such a thing? Raimondo, why don't you go in for a dip?

She turns around to look at Raimondo and becomes somewhat startled to see him

all rigged out in his diving equipment, complete with mask, spear-gun, etc.

**PATRIZIA**

Raimondo... Do you enjoy fishing underwater?

**RAIMONDO**

I detest it. But, after all, what can you do...  
It's the latest...and I try my best to adapt  
myself.

He dives in. As soon as he hits the water, he starts shivering and exclaims:

**RAIMONDO**

Who ever said that man was originally a  
creature of the sea!

Then, lowering the mask over his face, he begins to submerge. On deck,  
Patrizia peers out over the sea and covering her eyes to shade them from the  
sun, remarks:

**PATRIZIA**

I have never understood the islands. With all  
that water around them, poor things ...

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Out on the water, Sandro and Anna are almost at a standstill, keeping  
themselves afloat with only the slightest movement of their arms. Sandro is  
laughing and joking as though all this purely physical enjoyment of sun and  
water has freed him of all other cares. Anna tries to emulate him but is not  
entirely successful. Every now and then, her face becomes clouded with that  
same worried expression.

**ANNA**

When do you have to go back?

**SANDRO**

I don't know... It depends on Ettore... He's  
now in the process of negotiating for a  
contract here in Sicily...

**ANNA**

Then how come you're not with him?

**SANDRO**

What a question... Because I want to be with  
you, naturally. I hope he doesn't close the  
deal so he'll leave me alone at least for a few  
days... Isn't this water wonderful!

He is lying on his back in the water, with his eyes closed, his face to the  
sun, cradled in the gentle movement of the waves. Anna looks at him, then  
after a moment of silence, she says:

**ANNA**

I'd like to find a place where I can get some

peace and rest, maybe around here somewhere.  
I'd like to try...

**SANDRO**

What could be more restful than this?...

(He opens his eyes and  
is upright in the water)

Excuse me, what is it that you want to try?

Instead of answering him, Anna starts swimming rapidly out to sea. Sandro tries to hold her back but because she swims much faster, he gives up and finds himself alongside of Giulia.

**GIULIA**

(referring to Anna)

Where is she going?

**SANDRO**

Ask her.

Giulia is not much of a swimmer; she bobs up and down in the water, doing a crawl, and it seems she is always on the verge of going under. Still, she manages to stay afloat, enjoying herself like a little child. Slightly off to one side, Raimondo is exploring the depths, with his spear-gun in hand, ready to shoot. He seems to be chasing a fish that is apparently trying to elude him. But the water is so clear that it would be difficult even for a fish to hide. In fact, only a moment later, Raimondo takes aim with his spear-gun, pulls the trigger and the little harpoon shoots out. Then, with a great splash, he swims off in hasty pursuit of the fish. A rubber raft, piloted by one of the crew and bearing Corrado ashore, comes passing through the swimming area. The sailor is carrying on a conversation with Corrado.

**SAILOR**

I've always worked on pleasure boats... even though it's more tiring.

**CORRADO**

Why?

**SAILOR**

Because the owners never seem to have any fixed hours. For example, last night we kept right on sailing... We didn't even have a chance to get some sleep. Still, I like it better.

The raft passes alongside of Sandro, and Corrado calls out to him:

**CORRADO**

I'm going ashore to take a look around the island. There are some ruins up there...

**SANDRO**

There too...

**CORRADO**

Well, we're still in Italy, you know!

The raft continues on its way towards shore. A little distance away, Claudia is floating on her back, basking in the sun, with her eyes closed -- almost motionless. Her arms are outstretched and only the very slightest movement of her fingers in the water is sufficient to keep her afloat. Suddenly, her hand comes in contact with something viscous... which seems to be a fish that has shot up to the surface of the water. At first, Claudia merely withdraws her hand without bothering to see what it is, but since it persists in following her, she opens her eyes and notices something moving right next to her. Frightened, she lets out a tiny yelp. At that very moment, directly behind the fish, Raimondo's rubber fins appear above the water, and she realizes that it is Raimondo himself. He removes his mask and breaks out into a hearty laugh as Claudia playfully splashes some water into his face.

Observing them from a few yards away is Anna. Having returned from her swim out in the open sea, she was about to join Claudia. But Claudia, involved now in chasing after Raimondo, doesn't notice her.

Meanwhile, Raimondo, outdistancing Claudia, finds himself alongside of Sandro.

**SANDRO**

What kind of a fish is that?

**RAIMONDO**

It's a cernia.

**SANDRO**

My God, it's enormous.

Claudia, having given up trying to catch Raimondo, swims up alongside of Giulia, who is busy observing Corrado disembark on a little strip of beach that stands out distinctly white against the dark rocks. Claudia is in a playful mood. She dives underwater, grabs hold of Giulia's leg, comes up, and then dives under once again. Giulia, caught up in the spirit of all this playfulness, drops her concern with Corrado and joins in with the fun and merriment.

Suddenly there is a loud shriek, then Anna's voice is heard screaming:

**ANNA**

A shark!... A shark!

They all turn around to look at her. Anna is swimming furiously towards the boat. Then, immediately, the booming voice of the sailor aboard the yacht sounds out:

**SAILOR**

Don't move, lady... Stay where you are...  
Stop! Everybody keep still.

But Sandro ignores the warning and starts swimming out towards Anna like a demon. Raimondo, who was about to climb aboard the yacht, grasps his spear-gun firmly in his hand, hurls himself back into the water, and also starts to swim in Anna's direction. Claudia is stricken with fear, and holds on tight to Giulia. Anna has stopped swimming and is cautiously looking around to see if anything comes up out of the water. Then, she looks up and seeing Sandro and Raimondo approaching, she shouts:

**ANNA**

Stay away!

They both stop. Then, Raimondo hurriedly dons his mask and disappears under water while Sandro again starts swimming out towards Anna. Sandro comes up alongside her.

**SANDRO**

Anna...

But Anna doesn't say a word. Instead, they both swim silently back to the yacht, where Claudia and Giulia are already climbing aboard. Patrizia comes out of the cabin to see what is happening.

They all lean over the side of the boat, looking down into the water, expecting the shark at any moment to come into view. But the water remains unruffled, the seaweed below is clearly visible, waving like so many fans. Even the rocks at the bottom can be seen with all sorts of small-gilled fish darting about. A mysterious, fascinating world and yet, because of what happened, one that arouses fear. Everyone aboard is silent. Until Anna and Sandro, followed by Raimondo, finally arrive and climb aboard. Sandro immediately takes Anna to her cabin, and the others follow, making various comments.

**CLAUDIA**

(to Anna)

But how did you become aware of it? Did it touch you?

Anna doesn't answer but continues on ahead amid the overlapping remarks.

**GIULIA**

I would have died.

**PATRIZIA**

... and how ugly they are ... with all those teeth...

**CORRADO**

(shouting from the shore)

What happened?

**GIULIA**

(shouting from the prow)

There's a shark in the area. Don't move from where you are!

**CORRADO**

Who's moving?

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Inside the cabin, which is partitioned into separate rooms, the general layout is neat and orderly, with a number of prints decorating the walls. Sandro and Anna, followed by Claudia, enter from the outside deck and cross over into Anna's room. It is extremely small, with two cots on one side and a

long curtain that partially conceals a bureau from which several dresses are seen hanging.

Anna is soaking wet in her bathing suit and her hair is all knotted into clusters that hang down over her face. Without bothering to dry herself, she crouches down on the cot and, assisted by Claudia, wraps a blanket around her body. Sandro and Claudia look at her with great concern. A member of the crew enters carrying a tray on which there is a half-filled glass of liquor, which Sandro takes and offers to Anna.

**SANDRO**

Here, drink some cognac.

Anna positively refuses it, and the sailor leaves as Sandro sets the glass down on a shelf. Looking up at both Sandro and Claudia, Anna appears pleased with their solicitude.

**ANNA**

It's nothing... really. Let's go back... It's all over now.

A pause and then an instant later, she begins shivering under the blanket.

**ANNA**

Only, I'd like to change. I'm a little cold.

Leaving Anna and Claudia alone on their own, Sandro turns and goes outside the cabin where the others are still congregated, busy chattering. Among the remarks exchanged, one that is distinctly heard is Patrizia's.

**PATRIZIA**

But where did the shark go to?

As soon as Sandro closes the door to the cabin, Anna is suddenly and completely changed. She gets up from the cot, goes over to the curtain and draws it aside, revealing an array of feminine attire. Wondering which dress to choose, she finally selects two and tosses them on the cot.

**ANNA**

Which one shall I wear?

**CLAUDIA**

(picking up one of the two dresses)  
This one is gorgeous.

**ANNA**

Then why don't you try it on?

As Anna begins to dry herself with a large bath towel, Claudia slips on the dress and looks at herself in the mirror with a coquettish expression on her face.

**ANNA**

It looks better on you than it does on me...  
You keep it.

Anna is removing her bathing suit as she continues talking to Claudia with a

tone and manner that reveal a sense of excitement mixed with one of amusement.

**ANNA**

You know, that thing about the shark was all a joke.

Claudia looks at her as though dumbfounded, as though she had never known her before. She is obviously piqued and angry, but more with herself than with Anna.

**CLAUDIA**

There's the difference between you and me: you know how to put over certain things, and I don't. Sometimes I envy you.

Anna is all dressed and ready. She opens the door and steps outside, as Claudia follows behind.

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Out on the deck, Sandro, Patrizia, Raimondo and Giulia are looking over the side of the boat, watching the sailor as he approaches the yacht with a rubberized raft. Giulia, with her usual air of affectation, looks down at the water splashing up against the raft and asks the sailor:

**GIULIA**

But aren't you afraid?

**SAILOR**

Ma'am, sharks never attack anybody. Anyway, the raft is dark, and they wouldn't be able to see it.

**PATRIZIA**

So, it is true that they're blind...

Anna appears at the door of the cabin and Sandro rushes over to meet her, a little surprised to find her looking so cheerful, as though the incident that had just taken place were completely forgotten.

**SANDRO**

How are you?

**ANNA**

Fine. Can't you see so yourself?

Anna goes over to the edge of the boat and stands at the head of the little stairway leading down to the water.

**ANNA**

I have an urge to put my feet on some land.  
Aren't you coming?

As she starts to go down the steps, Sandro quickly comes over to her.

**SANDRO**

Anna... Maybe it would be better to wait a while.

**ANNA**

Wait for what?

**PATRIZIA**

Well, with a shark running loose around the place, I for one won't get aboard that raft! They'll have to catch it first. I want to see it right here before my feet, dead or alive.

**CLAUDIA**

Better dead.

But Anna has already stepped aboard the raft, and Sandro follows her. Giulia has her eyes fixed on the beach where Corrado in his white suit is waiting for them. Her desire to join him is greater than her fear of the shark, so she looks down at the sailor and asks:

**GIULIA**

Will the three of us fit?

**SAILOR**

Sure, sure. There's plenty of room.

Patrizia, instead, turns around and heads back to the cabin. And Raimondo follows her shortly after. Giulia descends into the raft and, as it moves away from the boat with a slight pitch, she lets out a few hysterical shrieks.

Anna laughs and then shouts out to Claudia:

**ANNA**

Claudia, aren't you coming?

**CLAUDIA**

I'm certainly not going to swim across.

**ANNA**

We'll send the raft back to you.

**GIULIA**

And bring some cushions when you come, and a towel...

Claudia nods assent, and remains there looking over the side and watching the water splash against the boat. Suddenly, she looks up at the sky and realizes that the sun has disappeared. Actually, it is hidden behind a cloud, and over on the horizon a group of other clouds have accumulated.

The sailor left aboard the yacht is now signaling the other sailor on the raft who, having deposited Sandro, Anna and Giulia on the beach, is returning to pick up Claudia. He sounds the depths with his oar and then shouts up:

**SAILOR**

Okay. Come ahead, come ahead.

The sailor aboard the yacht goes over to Claudia and says:

**SAILOR**

I'm taking the boat right up to the shore, and we'll let you get off from the gangplank as soon as we get there.

Then he disappears inside and soon the yacht starts moving towards the shore. Claudia peers out over the landscape; the islands are sharply silhouetted against the sea and sky, the volcano on Stromboli smokes feebly, and in the distance a ship passes by. Claudia is plainly enchanted by the view. Then she collects her thoughts and slowly heads towards the cabin.

\*\*\*

Patrizia, seated at a small table inside the cabin, is busy working on a complicated jigsaw puzzle, which, once completed, is supposed to represent a typically classical scene. One by one, she selects the various pieces of cardboard and inserts them in their rightful places. Simultaneously, she is munching on some crackers spread with jam, and a piece of cold fruit. Beside her is Raimondo. He is staring at Patrizia with such an intense expression that she becomes thoroughly annoyed and says to him, as she continues working at her puzzle:

**PATRIZIA**

What do you want, Raimondo? Do you want me? A few years ago, maybe... but now... And, then, at this hour of the day!

Coming down the steps that lead into the cabin, Claudia overhears the end of the conversation, and decides to withdraw. But Patrizia sees her and calls her back.

**PATRIZIA**

Come, Claudia, do come in... There's no romance going on here.

Claudia enters. Raimondo continues to stare at Patrizia, particularly at her legs. Patrizia becomes aware that Raimondo is staring at her, and with a condescending gesture, she lifts her skirt a little higher to make him see better.

**PATRIZIA**

There, have you seen enough now? Are you satisfied?

Raimondo nods yes. Claudia is amused by their behavior but also a little surprised.

Patrizia calmly resumes her game and Raimondo again begins to stare at her. This time, at her breasts. And again Patrizia becomes conscious of the fact that he is staring at her. She assumes a bored attitude and looks up at the ceiling in a gesture of quiet forbearance. Raimondo reaches out with his hand and gently caresses Patrizia's breast. Claudia looks on in amazement. Raimondo withdraws his hand.

**PATRIZIA**

(regretfully)

Now, tell the truth, aren't you a bit disappointed?... But I already told you...

**RAIMONDO**

If women's breasts were colored, yours would be blue...

Patrizia laughs at Raimondo's remark and looks at him sympathetically. Then she turns to Claudia.

**PATRIZIA**

Tell me, Claudia, what do you think of Raimondo?

**CLAUDIA**

I would say he's pretty depraved.

**PATRIZIA**

Oh no; quite the contrary. He's really just a child.

**RAIMONDO**

Patrizia, don't start in again... I would rather be called depraved. Unless you happen to love children.

**PATRIZIA**

You know, I don't love anybody.

**RAIMONDO**

(angrily)

I know, dammit, I know!

(turning to Claudia)

And just think -- if there ever was a woman so right, so perfectly cut out for all kinds of dissipations, degradations, infidelities... of... of... of debaucheries, it's her. Well, anyway, she's faithful. Faithful out of laziness... of unwillingness.

Raimondo has such a disgruntled look on his face that Patrizia laughs.

**PATRIZIA**

He amuses me. I don't know of anything more amusing. Outside of this jigsaw puzzle. Don't you find it so, Claudia?

**CLAUDIA**

One would have to be in love with somebody to know that.

**PATRIZIA**

Have you ever been in love?

**CLAUDIA**

Not really... It's suffocating in here... Shall we go out?

Claudia leaves the cabin and goes up to the deck. Patrizia returns to her game, and Raimondo continues to stare at her.

\*\*\*

Along a narrow strip of beach on the island of Lisca Bianca, Sandro, Anna, Corrado and Giulia are waiting for Claudia to come ashore. There are some patches of vegetation growing here and there, but by and large the island is one huge rock with rugged cliffs which descend perpendicularly to the water. Jutting promontories give the place a sense of raw, primitive beauty. Seeing Anna and Sandro climbing a short distance up along the rocks to find a comfortable place where they can lie down and stretch themselves, Corrado remarks:

**CORRADO**

If any of you get into your bathing suits again, you can be sure we won't be seeing one another for the rest of the year. I just can't stand seeing anybody in the city after having seen them naked on the beach.

The yacht finally has arrived and the gangplank is laid out between the boat and the shore. Claudia descends and as she wades ashore she stops, bends over to dip her hand in the water, and with a tone of voice resembling that of a mother speaking to its newborn child, she pretends she is speaking with someone or something in the water.

**CLAUDIA**

Oh, how sweet... What a dear little darling!

They all turn around to look at her, wondering to whom or what she is referring.

**GIULIA**

Who are you talking to?

**CLAUDIA**

To the shark.

They all break out into a laugh, and Claudia continues her comic bit as she playfully pretends to lose her balance on the slippery pebbles along the shore. Corrado looks at her somewhat surprised, as though up until now he had never seen her comport herself with such a lively sense of humor and wit.

**CORRADO**

Say, Claudia, wouldn't you like to climb up with me and take a look over there?

**CLAUDIA**

At what?

**CORRADO**

At the ruins. They're very ancient, you know.

Out of the entire group, Claudia is perhaps the only one who really has the desire to explore, to see, and to generally take advantage of whatever the cruise has to offer.

**CLAUDIA**

That sounds like a good idea. But why don't we all go together?

Though Claudia's suggestion is heard by all, none of them make a move. Relaxing so comfortably in the sun as they are, it seems the last thing they would want to do is to climb up the rocky slopes. So Claudia starts to go up on her own, following Corrado who is already under way. But Giulia immediately comes up to him and, squeezing his arm to emphasize her plea, whispers to him:

**GIULIA**

Please, I beg of you, stay here.

Giulia's plea is expressed with such a pitiful sense of humility that Claudia is immediately taken aback, although she does not fully understand its motive.

**CORRADO**

(noticing Claudia's hesitancy)

Well?

**CLAUDIA**

Well, what?

**CORRADO**

Have you decided?

**CLAUDIA**

All I said was that it sounds like a good idea.

Disappointed and rather irritated, Corrado turns back, while Claudia looks around for a place on the rocks where she can comfortably set herself down. Giulia, in turn, approaches Corrado.

**GIULIA**

Why didn't you ask me to go with you?

**CORRADO**

Do you know why? Because if you saw those ruins I'm sure you would have said they were very, very beautiful. You always say "how beautiful" to everything -- whether it's the sea, or a baby, or a cat! You have such a sensitive little heart that it throbs for anything.

**CORRADO**

(ironically)

But Corrado... If something is beautiful why shouldn't one say so?

**GIULIA**

(referring to Corrado)

He never misses a chance to humiliate me, to let me know that he doesn't care about me any more.

**CORRADO**

Giulia, that remark is not worthy of our twelve years of honest concubinage. I repeat, once and for all, and publicly, that I admire you. Does that please you?

**CLAUDIA**

(under her breath to  
Anna and Sandro)

Twelve years ... But why haven't they married?

**SANDRO**

(with a faint smile)

And why haven't they left each other?

**CLAUDIA**

I'm beginning to have my doubts. It couldn't be that they're in love?

**SANDRO**

Could be. They're the kind of people who are capable of anything.

Sandro suddenly grabs Anna around the waist and pulls her to him. His action is so unexpected that even Anna is astonished. But Giulia's voice is heard again.

**GIULIA**

(to Corrado)

The trouble with you is that nobody can speak to you, that's all.

**SANDRO**

(placatingly)

Giulia, don't you understand that the more involved you become with people, the more difficult it is to speak with them?

**GIULIA**

You men are all so dreadful!

**SANDRO**

I know we are. But as the years go by, we become even worse. Isn't that so, Corrado?

**CORRADO**

I hope so.

Breaking the nervous tension that has spread itself throughout the group, a seaman appears with a small basket of frozen peaches brought from the yacht. Claudia runs to the basket, picks up a peach and quickly bites into it.

**CLAUDIA**

How wonderful!

**CORRADO**

That's Patrizia's way of letting us know she's with us.

Claudia takes another peach from the basket and gives it to Corrado.

**CLAUDIA**

I think you're very sweet, Corrado.

**CORRADO**

More so than the shark?

**CLAUDIA**

There's no comparison.

**CORRADO**

Then why don't we go up and see the ruins?

\*\*\*

Anna and Sandro have left the group and are ensconced further up among the rocks, on a grassy slope overlooking the beach.

**ANNA**

Sandro... A month is too long a time. I have become used to being without you.

**SANDRO**

You'll get over it soon. It's the usual anxiety.

**ANNA**

A little more so this time.

**SANDRO**

So, it will just take you a little longer to get over it.

**ANNA**

(angrily)

But I think we should talk about it. Or are you fully convinced that we too won't understand each other?

**SANDRO**

There will be plenty of time to talk about it later. We'll get married soon. That way we'll have more time...

**ANNA**

In this case, getting married means nothing. Aren't we already the same as being married? And Corrado and Giulia -- aren't they already the same as being married?

**SANDRO**

But why rattle your brains by arguing and talking... Believe me, Anna, words never help at all. They only serve to confuse. I love you, Anna. Isn't I that enough?

**ANNA**

No. It's not enough... I told you before that I would like to get away for a while and be alone.

**SANDRO**

But you just said that a month was too...

**ANNA**

(interrupting)

I mean, to stay away longer -- two months... a year... three years... Yes, I know, it sounds absurd. And I feel awful. The very idea of losing you makes me want to die... And yet... I... I just don't have the same feeling for you any more.

**SANDRO**

And what about yesterday... at my house... didn't you have any feeling for me, even then?

**ANNA**

(angrily)

There you go... Must you always spoil everything!

She turns and walks away in a rage. Sandro breathes a deep sigh, as though the scene had exhausted him, then stretches himself on the ground, his face turned skyward, his eyes shut tight.

\*\*\*

The sky over the island of Lisca Bianca is completely filled with clouds. It is early afternoon, the atmosphere has darkened, and occasional sounds of thunder are heard in the distance.

Sandro is asleep with his arms folded under his head. Further below, Claudia, Corrado and Giulia are also taking a nap. Gradually, however, with the sound of thunder, they become aroused.

**GIULIA**

Looks like the weather is changing.

**CORRADO**

Please, Giulia; must you always emphasize the obvious? I can see for myself that the weather is changing.

Corrado rises and looks around lazily, listening to what appears to be the sound of a motor boat and which seems to be coming from the other side of the

island. Claudia, spotting a sailor approaching, also rises.

**SAILOR**

We'll have to get going.

Claudia turns around, looks up, and sees Sandro asleep by himself.

**CLAUDIA**

And where's Anna?

(then, turning to the sailor)

Isn't she on the yacht?

**SAILOR**

I don't know... you see... we were taking a little nap...

\*\*\*

Out on the yacht, Patrizia is completing her puzzle. Only a few pieces are missing but the area to be filled in is a very difficult one. Raimondo, who has grown impatient over Patrizia's long and tedious concentration, exclaims:

**RAIMONDO**

You've made some mistake there with the bushes... that's why you can't finish it.

**PATRIZIA**

Take it easy, Raimondo. Why are you getting so impatient?

Claudia's voice is heard, calling out from the shore.

**CLAUDIA**

Patrizia! ...

Patrizia raises her eyes and gives a quick, casual glance at the porthole. Raimondo immediately takes the hint that she would like him to get up and see what Claudia wants. So he goes out to the deck where he sees Claudia calling from the shore.

**CLAUDIA**

Is Anna there?

**RAIMONDO**

I don't think so.

He goes over to the cabin, and looking through the portholes, calls out Anna's name. But there is no answer, so he returns to the side of the boat and shouts back.

**RAIMONDO**

She's not here.

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, on the beach, Sandro is also looking for Anna, disturbed and amazed that she is not in sight.

**SANDRO**

(angrily, to himself)

This is the kind of behavior that drives me  
crazy!

Down at the shore, Giulia is getting ready to step on the gangplank and go aboard the yacht but, anxious about Anna's whereabouts, she changes her mind and turns back. Claudia, also deeply concerned, decides to remain and look around for herself. She turns and starts climbing up towards the rock in an opposite direction than that taken by Sandro, who has now reached the top.

The search is fruitless; there seems to be no trace of Anna. But Sandro continues to explore the area, stopping every now and then to call out Anna's name. Then, looking down over the slope, he notices Claudia, Giulia and Corrado coming towards him.

**SANDRO**

Did you find her?

None of them answer but it is clear from the worried expressions on their faces that they too have found no trace of Anna. Still they continue the search, each going off in different directions. Claudia, walking over land covered with large white rocks and clumps of dry brush, spots something moving behind one of the bushes. Anxiously, she starts to walk up closer. Suddenly the branches begin to move and a stray lamb emerges. Surprised, but also somewhat relaxed, she turns around and calls out to Corrado, who is following her only a short distance away.

**CLAUDIA**

It's a lamb!

Corrado looks at her without answering, then stops and notices further up ahead a jumbled pile of rocks which he feels might very well be the ruins he had previously intended to explore. He is about to head towards them but suddenly realizes that Giulia is following directly behind him. He quickly changes his direction in an effort to avoid her.

Sandro comes upon a small stone hut that leans up against a high section of rock. As he starts to approach it, another stray lamb appears, as if from nowhere, and runs off, frightened by Sandro's approach. He tries to open the door to the hut but finds it locked. As he looks around the area, uncertain as to his next move, he sees Claudia and Corrado coming towards him.

**CLAUDIA**

Find anything?

**SANDRO**

No.

**CORRADO**

Perhaps she's taking a swim somewhere...

Though no less concerned over Anna's disappearance than any of the others,

Corrado attempts to lighten the tension by feigning a calm and sensible attitude. Taking note of the stone hut before him, he observes it carefully and remarks:

**CORRADO**

It's really a fact -- there's nothing new under the sun. Now, look here. Look at this structure... a kind of natural shelter. Sandro, that's how you should design your houses.

**SANDRO**

Me?... I no longer have any interest in building... And, then, where can you find boulders of rock like this in Milan?

Claudia comes up close to the hut and tries to peer through the tiny window but inside it is so dark that nothing can be seen. Suddenly, she finds a small piece of bread on the ledge of the window. She picks it up and starts examining it. Then, realizing the bread is still fairly fresh, exclaims:

**CLAUDIA**

Somebody must live here!

**CORRADO**

(after examining the bread himself)  
But Anna wouldn't be staying with the kind of people who live here.

The discussion is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of one of the sailors who has come up from the shore.

**SAILOR**

We had better get started. The storm may break any minute now.

**CLAUDIA**

(angrily)  
What do you mean! What about Anna?

**SANDRO**

(to the seaman)  
Tell Lady Patrizia that we can't leave now. In fact, we'll have to make a tour around the island...

**SAILOR**

Wouldn't it be better if you told that to the Lady yourself. I can't assume the responsibility for keeping the boat here. There's no place to tie it up... And then, you know, it's got a flat bottom, and if the sea gets a little too rough...

**SANDRO**

(angrily)  
That doesn't make any difference! If we have to stay, we'll stay!

\*\*\*

Aboard the yacht, which is circling the island, Sandro, Patrizia, Raimondo and one of the sailors are peering out over the side, scrutinizing the banks and rocky slopes in hope of finding some trace of Anna. The jagged cliffs appear enormously tall and ominous, harboring tiny grottoes in which someone could easily hide.

**PATRIZIA**

Perhaps she wasn't feeling well... Maybe a cramp or something...

**SANDRO**

Anna is an excellent swimmer. Even with a cramp, she would have managed to reach shore somehow.

**PATRIZIA**

But you have to consider all possibilities, Sandro.

Incensed by her remark, which he considers to be absurd, Sandro moves away from Patrizia and goes towards the stern of the boat where he notices Corrado signaling to them from a remote section of the beach.

**CORRADO**

(calling out)

There are some footprints around here...

But he stops in the middle of the statement, and throws up his arms to indicate that the discovery is really of little significance. So he proceeds to climb back up along the pathway from which he descended, and the yacht continues on its way.

**SANDRO**

(calling from the stern, excitedly)

Patrizia!

Both Patrizia and Raimondo come rushing over to the stern and look towards where Sandro is pointing at something dark and obscure afloat on the water up ahead.

**RAIMONDO**

(to the sailor)

Mario...Steer the boat that way.

The yacht heads in the direction of the black object in the water, but as they come up close, they realize it is nothing more than some wooden piece of furniture. The turn has taken the boat slightly away from Lisca Bianca and they now find themselves closer to the little island of Basiluzzo.

**SAILOR**

Shall I turn back?

**SANDRO**

No. Now that we're here, let's have a look around Basiluzzo.

(then turning to Patrizia)

When we were swimming, she swam out in that direction.

**SAILOR**

It won't be easy to find a place to go ashore.

\*\*\*

The first shadows of evening begin to fall over the island of Lisca Bianca. The sky is now even gloomier, streaked with flashes of lightning. Rumbling sounds of thunder are heard in the distance. The entire group is once again reunited on the beach, and the impending storm has heightened their fears and anxiety. They are cold, restless, and exhausted, but profoundly moved and shaken by the reality of Anna's strange disappearance.

**SANDRO**

Let's try to be practical about this. The best thing to do is for all of you to go to the closest island that has a police station, or something, and report the disappearance. I'll remain here... because... well, I don't know, but it seems to me that something may turn up. Anyway, I just don't feel like leaving.

**CORRADO**

Then let's get started... It's senseless to waste any more time.

**PATRIZIA**

(to the sailor)

How long will it take to go there and come back?

**SAILOR**

If there's a police station at Panarea, it should take us a couple of hours. But if we have to go to Lipari, it will take much longer. Then it also depends on how rough the sea is.

Giulia is about to get on her way but she stops and turns around to look for Corrado, who notices her looking at him.

**CORRADO**

I'll stay here also.

**GIULIA**

(alarmed)

But why?... What if it starts to rain?

**CORRADO**

If it rains, I'll buy myself an umbrella.

Claudia, who has remained to one side, wrapped up in her own thoughts,

doesn't make a move to leave. Sandro and Corrado look at her in surprise.

**CORRADO**

(to Claudia, understandingly)  
Claudia, I know how you feel, but there are  
already two of us staying...

**SANDRO**

I'll go even further and say that her presence  
here -- I don't want to sound offensive -- could  
be a great hindrance.

Ignoring Sandro's remark, Claudia turns and determinedly heads towards the interior of the island. Meanwhile, Patrizia and Giulia have gone aboard the yacht.

**GIULIA**

(calling to Corrado  
from the boat)  
Do you want some blankets? ... and something  
to eat?

Corrado makes an irritated gesture signifying no, then together with Sandro starts climbing up the rocky slope towards the stone hut. As they meet up with Claudia midway, the first drops of rain start to fall and it is clear that the storm is on the verge of breaking. The three of them reach the door of the hut and Corrado tries to pull it open, but the lock resists. Then Sandro comes to his aid, and placing their shoulders up against the wooden door, they finally manage to force it open.

\*\*\*

Inside the hut it is pitch black. Sandro strikes a match and finds a kerosene lamp on a nearby table. He lights it and the room is suddenly illuminated, revealing a miserable interior with a few broken chairs, several empty boxes, a shovel and a few other utensils. Over to one side is a small pile of straw suggesting a makeshift bed.

**CLAUDIA**

As far as I'm concerned, I think she's alive...  
Why, even this morning... that business about  
the shark... it wasn't at all true.

**SANDRO**

And why do you tell us this only now?

**CLAUDIA**

I... I don't know... I didn't think it was  
worthwhile... She was laughing over it...

**CORRADO**

Really! Still, it remains to be seen why she  
invented a shark. What was her purpose in that?

**CLAUDIA**

(indicating Sandro)  
Maybe you'd better ask him.

**CORRADO**

(to Sandro)

What were you and Anna arguing about?...  
Excuse me for being so indiscreet, but this is  
serious...

**SANDRO**

Nothing but the usual argument... The only  
thing was -- if I remember correctly -- that  
she said she had a need to be alone.

**CLAUDIA**

And how do you explain that?

Ignoring the question, Sandro begins pacing back and forth across the room. The silence is broken only by the sound of the rain outside which is now coming down harder and harder. Suddenly, footsteps are heard approaching the hut. Sandro, Claudia and Corrado quickly turn around and face the door, their faces clearly revealing the expectation that it might be Anna. Finally the door begins to open and an old man appears, carrying a sack in his hand.

**SANDRO**

Are you the owner of this place?

**OLD MAN**

No. The owners are in Australia.

**SANDRO**

But where did you come from?

**OLD MAN**

From Panarea. Why?

**CORRADO**

Ah, then it was you... I heard a boat leaving  
here at two o'clock today...

**OLD MAN**

(scratching his head)

It must have been around four or five...

**CORRADO**

In the afternoon?

**OLD MAN**

No... in the morning. Why? What's happened?

**SANDRO**

Nothing... nothing at all!

**CLAUDIA**

But why don't you tell him?

(then turning to the old man)

A girl who was with us has disappeared.

**OLD MAN**

What do you mean... disappeared? Was she drowned?

**CLAUDIA**

No, she didn't drown... She just disappeared, and nobody knows where.

**SANDRO**

And I suppose it's my fault... Why don't you tell him that too. That's what you believe, isn't it?

**CLAUDIA**

Rather than being so occupied with my thoughts, you would have been better off trying to understand what Anna was thinking.

**OLD MAN**

Have you searched in back of the house to see if she might have fallen off that cliff? Last month that's what happened to one of my sheep... I looked all over for it all day long and it wasn't until late at night that I heard it bleating... It had been there the whole day... and was almost dead.

Claudia suddenly jumps up and runs out of the hut and into the dark, calling out desperately.

**CLAUDIA**

Anna! . . . Anna!

But her cries are lost in the sound of the storm. Drenched by the rain, her shoes full of mud, her dress soaked, she stops, as Corrado, who had followed after her, grabs hold of her arm and leads her back to the hut.

**CORRADO**

Come, Claudia...come back inside.

\*\*\*

It is early morning inside the hut, and the flame of the kerosene lamp has dwindled down to a tiny, flickering light. Claudia awakens with a bewildered look upon her face, wondering where she is and how she comes to be there. She notices Corrado dozing on an empty box in a corner of the room, then realizing that Sandro and the old man are no longer there, she gets up and goes out the door.

Outside, everything is covered by a thick haze, which is gradually beginning to lift. Sandro, who is standing a short distance away from the hut, hears Claudia approaching and turns around to greet her.

**SANDRO**

Are you feeling better?

**CLAUDIA**

(nodding yes)  
I'm sorry about last night. Please forgive me.

**SANDRO**  
You're very fond of Anna, aren't you?

**CLAUDIA**  
Yes, very much so.

**SANDRO**  
Has she ever spoken to you about me?

**CLAUDIA**  
Occasionally, but always with affection.

**SANDRO**  
And yet, she seemed to feel that our love for her -- mine, yours, even her father's, in a certain sense -- weren't enough for her, or didn't mean much to her.

**CLAUDIA**  
I know. I keep asking myself what I could have done to prevent all this from happening.

There is a pause, then suddenly they both hear the sound of a motor growing louder and louder. They look out over the shore but the haze is so heavy that it is impossible for them to determine the source. Then, seeing the old man coming up the path, Sandro impulsively runs towards him and seizes him by the collar.

**SANDRO**  
Whose boat is that?

**OLD MAN**  
(astonished)  
What boat?

**SANDRO**  
Just a moment ago... didn't you hear the sound of a motor?

**OLD MAN**  
At this time of the year there are so many boats...

**SANDRO**  
And how come you're up so early?

**OLD MAN**  
Early? Is four in the morning early for you?

Sandro is visibly deflated by the old man's casualness, and he decides to abandon his questioning. He turns away from him and looks up to see Claudia walking slowly towards the top of the cliffs, directly behind the hut where the night before the old man had said Anna might have fallen. She looks down over the side and quickly withdraws, almost in fear of being sucked down into

the swirling waters below. She turns away and starts walking towards the interior part of the island. In the rocky hollows around her, she notices small accumulations of yesterday's rain and, scooping up some of the water from one of these rocks, she rinses her face. As she gets up again, Sandro is there, standing directly before her. Claudia is almost startled. They continue to gaze at one another in silence. Then Claudia abruptly turns away and heads towards a higher point of land. A moment later, Sandro joins her again and once more they find themselves staring into each other's eyes, almost embarrassed by their own behavior, yet unable to control it.

The wailing siren of a police boat resounds through the air like a shrill lament. Only then do Sandro and Claudia detach themselves from their trance-like state, from the sudden compulsion of being drawn towards each other. Through the haze, they notice a landing taking place down at the shore. Realizing it is their friends returning with the police, they both start descending the slope to greet them.

Stepping ashore are Patrizia, Giulia and Raimondo, followed by a Marshal of the carabinieri and two police agents. As Sandro and Claudia come rushing down over the rocks, Claudia suddenly stops and lags behind so as not to arrive on the beach simultaneously with Sandro.

Meanwhile, Corrado has already gone down to the shore and as he goes out to meet them, Patrizia, Giulia and Raimondo anxiously look to him as though expecting some good news. But Corrado remains silent, then throws out his arms in a gesture of despair.

**GIULIA**

How did you spend the night?... In that hut?...  
And what did you have to eat?

**CORRADO**

What do you think?

**GIULIA**

We, too, you know. It was disastrous. First at Panarea, where there weren't any boats... then at Lipari, where everybody was asleep... And the phone call to Rome...

**PATRIZIA**

We had to notify her father.

**CORRADO**

Yes, that was a very good idea.

**PATRIZIA**

He'll be here sometime today.  
(then turning to Sandro who  
has just arrived on the scene)  
I also phoned my house in Milan... but Ettore  
had already left.

**MARSHAL**

(to Sandro)  
Anything new develop?

**SANDRO**

Unfortunately, no.

**MARSHAL**

Very well. First of all, I'll have them search the waters around the island. I brought two frogmen with me... Meanwhile, we'll take a look up around here.

**SANDRO**

Look, Marshal, with those deep crevasses, you'll need some rope and ladders...

**MARSHAL**

Don't worry, we've got everything.

**SANDRO**

Another thing; there's an old man who lives here on the island...

**MARSHAL**

(interrupting)

I know, I know. One thing at a time.

The Marshal starts climbing up towards the interior of the island, with Sandro following behind. As Claudia sees them coming in her direction, she moves away to a lower section of the island to avoid coming in contact with Sandro. Peering over a precipice, she sees the frogmen below, and watches them slide into the clear water like two enormous fish.

Sandro and the Marshal have arrived on the edge of the same precipice, where two men are lowering a rope ladder into the depths. Moving up further to watch the operations, Sandro becomes aware of Claudia standing alone just a short distance away. He heads towards her but she tries to avoid looking at him. Sandro, however, is unable to take his eyes from her and continues walking in her direction. But seeing Patrizia and Raimondo approaching, he suddenly stops. A small stone, accidentally loosened from the ground, rolls along the path and comes to a halt directly in front of Claudia, almost like a message. She picks it up, looks at it, then throws it away. Sandro moves away and heads back to the edge of the precipice.

Patrizia and Raimondo join Claudia. Raimondo, who is carrying a box of crackers in his hand, offers them to both Claudia and Patrizia.

**PATRIZIA**

No, who wants crackers... Why don't you go and have some coffee made instead?

Meanwhile, Sandro has arrived at the edge of the precipice where he finds Giulia and Corrado. They are looking down at one of the carabinieri who is dangling from a long rope over the side of the rock, exploring the crevasses where a body might have fallen from the precipice above. The Marshal leans over to see if anything has been discovered.

**CARABINIERE**

(calling up to the Marshal)

Nothing here!

The Marshal turns around in disgust and looks at Corrado who is frankly sick and tired of the whole operation.

**CORRADO**

Don't look at me like that, Marshal... I had nothing to do with it.

**PATRIZIA**

(referring to the frogmen below)  
Let's hope they don't find her... If they do, they would find her dead.

All of a sudden, Claudia breaks out into tears. Patrizia doesn't say a word. She just lets Claudia cry, knowing it will do her good. Sandro comes over and as soon as Claudia sees him there, she stops crying, and avoids looking up at him.

**SANDRO**

Listen, Patrizia... The Marshal says there's a current that passes by here and ends up at another island... I don't know which... He wants to send one of his men over to have a look... One never knows... Do you mind if I ask Raimondo to go with him?

**PATRIZIA**

I don't see why I should mind.

**CLAUDIA**

(to Sandro)  
I think that you might go and have a look yourself.

**SANDRO**

Yes, maybe that is better.

He turns and starts heading down towards the beach.

**PATRIZIA**

(to Claudia)  
What amazes me, is Sandro. He seems so calm.

**CLAUDIA**

(rising)  
Calm?... He doesn't seem so to me... He was awake all night.

One of the frogmen emerges with an ancient vase in his hand, evidently found in the depths below. Raimondo, who has just arrived with a thermos of hot coffee, puts it down and goes over to the frogman to fetch the vase.

**RAIMONDO**

(to the frogman)  
What is it?

**FROGMAN**

An ancient vase. There's a buried city under here. It's full of this stuff.

Raimondo takes the vase and shows it to Patrizia and Claudia. It is an extremely beautiful amphora, in terra cotta, with a figured design around it. Patrizia and Claudia momentarily drop their thoughts to examine it. Then Corrado, who had observed the scene, comes over, followed immediately by Giulia.

**PATRIZIA**

(ironically)

Come on, Corrado, tell us what century it belongs to.

Corrado smiles, then comes closer to examine it. Claudia also kneels down to look at it. A moment later she feels a presence at her side, and even without turning around she knows it is Sandro. Taking advantage of the discovery that was made, he purposely has returned to join the group in order to be near Claudia. They both now feel between them the warmth of that contact, and for a brief moment, succumb once again to that sudden sense of wonderment which they already had experienced at dawn.

**GIULIA**

Corrado, why don't you ask them to give it to us as a gift?

**CORRADO**

Really! So that you can stuff it with your geraniums.

**PATRIZIA**

(to Sandro)

But aren't you supposed to be on your way?

Claudia, stricken with dismay, immediately detaches herself from Sandro, who replies with a certain sense of embarrassment.

**SANDRO**

Yes... I'm going... I'm going now.

\*\*\*

A patrol boat is anchored off the cliff of a small island where the current running through the surrounding waters comes to an end. Sandro is leaning against the wall of a dilapidated building, which is constructed right on that part of the rock where the sea close by discharges all kinds of refuse. Four or five islanders are busy scouring through the accumulated rubbish. They are taciturn, poorly dressed people who every now and then come to blows over the possession of some article washed ashore by the waves. Sandro is watching them, feeling distraught and melancholy. One of the carabinieri who had accompanied him is walking up and down beside an elderly gentleman who is obviously one of the local gentry.

**SANDRO**

(to the carabinieri)

It's already two hours... What are we going to

do?

**CARABINIERE**

It takes about twenty to twenty-two hours for the current to reach here from Lisca Bianca.

**ELDERLY GENTLEMAN**

And sometimes even twenty-four... depending on the wind...

**CARABINIERE**

If the girl disappeared yesterday afternoon, we'll have to wait at least until three or four o'clock.

Sandro looks at them without commenting, then turns and walks away towards the center of the village. The houses and shops around the square are very plain and shabby. Sandro spots a barber shop and, fingering his day-old beard, enters for a shave.

Shortly thereafter, a clamor of voices is heard outside and Sandro comes dashing out of the shop. Seeing the islanders fighting and arguing about something drawn up from the sea, he runs over to find out what it is. As he arrives on the scene, two policemen step out of the confusion dragging a large crate, which they carry over to the door of a nearby shack, amid the protests of the islanders who are still arguing and shouting among themselves.

**VOICES**

It belongs to me... We found it...

**GENTLEMAN**

Back... Stand back!

The two policemen set the crate down and lift the lid. It is full of cigarettes.

**CARABINIERE**

(to the islanders)

You see? It contains cigarettes. We'll have to confiscate it.

The islanders react violently, shouting out all sorts of epithets. But the policemen manage to restrain them and soon the commotion is quieted down.

**CARABINIERE**

(to Sandro)

These people are contemptible. They have no sense of dignity at all.

**SANDRO**

(referring to the crate)

And you say that came from Lisca Bianca?

**CARABINIERE**

It couldn't have come from anywhere else. At least, somewhere from that vicinity... But I

really can't understand it. Contraband cigarettes on that island! It's the first time that ever happened.

**SANDRO**

Look... I'd like to get back to Lisca Bianca.

**CARABINIERE**

But how could we...at a time like this when we just... well, let's at least first have a look around the other islands. Could be that something might turn up there.

**SANDRO**

(impatiently)

But even here we were supposed to find who knows what... And all we bring back with us is a crate of cigarettes.

**CARABINIERE**

(shrugging his shoulders)

As you wish.

\*\*\*

At Lisca Bianca, a helicopter is hovering above the island and preparing to land. Waiting for it to descend are Claudia, the old man, the Marshal and Anna's father, just arrived from the mainland.

**MARSHAL**

(to the old man)

... Is it also true that you saw no boat around here at Lisca between yesterday and this morning?

**OLD MAN**

How many times do I have to tell you, Marshal, that I was at Panarea.

**MARSHAL**

I believe you, I believe you... But I'm also certain that you're hiding something from me. I can see it written all over your face... And you know that I have never liked your face. And if you want to know something, that gentleman over there...

(indicating Anna's father)

...who's a very important person... doesn't like it either. So, just keep that in mind. I'll talk to you later.

The Marshal moves away from the old man and goes over towards Anna's father who is watching the helicopter come down.

**ANNA'S FATHER**

I presume by this method that you'll be able to

uncover some new clue, either a handkerchief or an article of clothing... In other words, something which your men have not been able to find as yet.

**MARSHAL**

Without any doubt, sir. If anything belonging to the girl who has run away is still here on this island...

**ANNA'S FATHER**

(resentfully)

Allow me to inform you that my daughter is not a fugitive.

**MARSHAL**

I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to put it that way. But, you must understand, sir, that I...

**ANNA'S FATHER**

I understand very well. Only I don't want any rash assumptions to be made.

One of the carabinieri appears with Anna's valise which he sets down on the ground.

**MARSHAL**

Here's her valise, sir.

The helicopter is now a few feet above the ground, and everyone steps aside to allow it room to land. The rush of wind from the propeller sends up a cloud of dust, and finally the helicopter touches down. The propeller stops, the door opens, and out comes two large bloodhounds accompanied by a police attendant. He immediately says something to the dogs in German which suddenly creates an atmosphere of resentment among the group assembled there.

Anna's father goes to his daughter's valise, bends down, but doesn't dare to touch it.

**CLAUDIA**

Do you want me to open it?

**ANNA'S FATHER**

Yes, please.

Claudia opens the valise and starts pulling out several dresses, a few intimate garments, and several other items of clothing. As she continues rummaging, she suddenly comes upon two books, Fitzgerald's Tender Is The Night and a copy of the Bible, which she hands to Anna's father who, in turn, examines them with great care and deliberation.

**ANNA'S FATHER**

This looks to me like a good sign. Don't you think so? As far as I'm concerned, anyone who reads the Bible could not have committed an act of impropriety. Why... as a matter of fact, I remember when I was in China, many years ago, I

happened to be involved in a similar situation, concerning an English woman, the wife of Ambassador Shafford, a good friend of mine. There, too, we found a Bible... And I said at the time that whatever had happened, that clue alone had definitely ruled out the possibility of... suicide. Why, it was logical, I said, that whoever reads the Bible believes in God and therefore...

(then, turning to Claudia in an almost supplicating tone of voice)  
No? You don't believe it? Well, as a matter of fact, I was right... The woman was found two days later. It was a case of amnesia.

**MARSHAL**

Sir, if you have no objections, may we start the search?

Anna's father turns around to look at the bloodhounds who are already sniffing the air for a scent and anxious to get on with the hunt. Then he throws a quick glance at his daughter's valise once more, and with an air of disgust and irritation, walks off in a huff, followed by Claudia.

**ATTENDANT**

(to the Marshal)  
Get everybody out of the way...

**MARSHAL**

Okay. I'll send them down to that part of the beach over there...

After they all have left the area, the attendant leads the two bloodhounds over to Anna's valise, instructs them to pick up the scent, then takes them up to the very top of the island, where he subsequently unties them from his leash and sets them off.

Claudia and Anna's father arrive on the beach where Patrizia, Giulia, Corrado, Raimondo and one of the sailors are seated on a pile of rocks.

As the dogs begin running in different directions over the island, trying to track down the scent from Anna's valise, the entire group remains silent, awaiting the outcome of the search. Suddenly, the bloodhounds come racing down the slope, heading directly towards the beach where they are gathered, apparently hot on the trail of some familiar scent. To everybody's amazement, the dogs stop in front of Claudia, jumping excitedly and barking at her as though they had found their prey. Claudia is nonplussed and almost petrified with fear. She turns around and sees the others all staring at her. But she cannot understand why they are looking at her that way nor why the dogs have stopped right in front of her. Then, as if struck by a sudden flash of memory, she touches her dress and cries out:

**CLAUDIA**

It's because of this... The dress... It's because of this dress. Anna gave it to me yesterday, right after the swim.

Completely relieved, Claudia smiles and bends over to pet the dogs, as the attendant comes up to them and ties the leash back on to their necks. Then he leads them away and heads once again up the slope towards the top of the island. Anna's father seems almost disillusioned by the negative results of the search. Corrado also feels dissatisfied, and addressing himself to the Marshal, says:

**CORRADO**

And what are we going to do now?

**MARSHAL**

We'll try again.

**PATRIZIA**

But is it really necessary? Those two beasts... How absurd!

Meanwhile, the patrol boat has returned and is pulling ashore. Giulia is the first one to notice its arrival and she calls out to the others that Sandro is back. Then she goes over to where Anna's father is standing.

**GIULIA**

Sandro's here.

**ANNA'S FATHER**

(coldly)

I don't know him.

**GIULIA**

It seems to me that at a moment like this...

**ANNA'S FATHER**

I don't want to know him.

By this time, Sandro has come ashore, followed by the carabinieri, and immediately goes up to Claudia.

**SANDRO**

Claudia, listen ... Claudia.

But Claudia hardly looks at him, and seeing Corrado approaching, she moves away from Sandro.

**CORRADO**

(to Sandro)

I didn't think you'd be back so early.

**CARABINIERE**

(interrupting)

We didn't check the other islands, so...

**CORRADO**

And why didn't you go there?

**CARABINIERE**

(referring to Sandro)

He wanted to come back.

The sailors have unloaded the crate of cigarettes from the patrol boat and the Marshal is getting all the details from the carabinieri.

**MARSHAL**

Up until now those smugglers were operating only around the Palermo area. This will be a nice surprise for the Lieutenant in Milazzo... Call up headquarters. Bring them up to date and have them give you instructions on what to do with this crate.

**CORRADO**

So... the boat we saw yesterday afternoon might have also been that of these smugglers. Could it be possible, then, that Anna...?

**MARSHAL**

(evading Corrado's question  
and pursuing his own thoughts)

I wonder where they could have unloaded the stuff ... Maybe right here at Lisca.

**CORRADO**

I was saying... it might even be possible that Anna had left with them.

**MARSHAL**

But for what reason would she have wanted to go away?

**CORRADO**

Listen, Marshal... As for there being reasons for going away, anyone of us might have three thousand of them. So you can assume that she had them. What I want to know, is it possible that the smugglers might have taken her aboard?

**MARSHAL**

I think it's possible.

**A SAILOR**

(calling from the patrol boat)

Marshal!... Headquarters is calling. They have an important message.

**MARSHAL**

What is it about?

**SAILOR**

They've stopped a suspicious-looking boat a few miles from here... yesterday afternoon. The crew has been taken to Milazzo for questioning.

The Marshal takes off for the patrol boat, and Corrado goes over to Anna's father.

**CORRADO**

Did you hear that? What do you plan on doing?

**ANNA'S FATHER**

(resignedly)

We are in the hands of God.

**SANDRO**

That's true...But in the meantime, as far as I'm concerned, it's absolutely necessary to go to Milazzo.

(directly to Anna's father)

I know that you have no desire to meet me, and I shall take pains not to impose myself upon you. But, besides you, I am the closest person to your daughter...

**ANNA'S FATHER**

However that may be, at this moment my daughter has more need of her father than of you.

**SANDRO**

Pardon me for being so frank, but there are certain things that a father -- especially a father like you --cannot understand. So don't be stubborn. I'm coming with you.

As soon as he finishes saying this, Sandro turns around and looks at Claudia, as though he had just now realized that she was there listening to him. Claudia goes to the gangplank and boards the yacht, disappearing into the cabin. Having followed her with his gaze, Sandro then turns to Patrizia.

**SANDRO**

Patrizia, what are you going to do?

**PATRIZIA**

What do you want us to do? I don't know myself... But we'll do something.

**SANDRO**

I'll go and get my valise.

Sandro goes aboard the yacht and enters the cabin. On the way to his room he meets Claudia who has just changed clothes and is about to return ashore. They stare at each other for a moment without saying anything. But the intensity in Claudia's look, mixed with fear and desire, is so overpowering that Sandro takes her in his arms and kisses her. Claudia immediately releases herself from his embrace, but for the moment it lasted, the kiss was full and passionate. Then she turns and goes out on deck. Sandro remains there, momentarily stunned, then picks up his valise and returns ashore.

As Claudia, followed by Sandro, steps back on the beach, she is met by Patrizia.

**PATRIZIA**

We've decided to go to Montaldo's place. In

fact, Ettore should already be there.

**SANDRO**

(intervening)

Good. Then I'll meet you there.

He says this primarily for Claudia's sake, hoping to catch her eye. But she keeps her head bowed low, and doesn't look up. After a moment of hesitation, Sandro turns away and heads towards the small motorboat in which Anna's father arrived from the mainland. And without saying another word, he climbs aboard. Patrizia places her arm around Claudia's waist and together they start walking towards the yacht. But upon reaching the foot of the gangplank, Claudia stops.

**CLAUDIA**

I'm going with the patrol boat to make a tour around the islands.

**PATRIZIA**

To do what?

**CLAUDIA**

I just can't leave without first searching those islands, one by one.

**PATRIZIA**

But aren't you tired? I can just about manage to stand on my feet!

(then turning around to look for Raimondo, she calls out)

Raimondo!

**RAIMONDO**

Here I am, Patrizia. I'm always here.

**PATRIZIA**

Claudia isn't coming with us. Will you please take care of her luggage? Thanks.

Raimondo goes aboard the yacht and returns with Claudia's valise. He consigns it to one of the carabinieri who, in turn, takes it aboard the patrol boat. Claudia follows him aboard. The Marshal comes out of the radio room, steps ashore, then joins Sandro and Anna's father on the motorboat, while Patrizia, Giulia, Corrado and Raimondo go aboard the yacht.

\*\*\*

In the seaport town of Milazzo, on the Sicilian mainland, Sandro and Anna's father are seated in an office at police headquarters. The sailors picked up on a charge of carrying contraband are being questioned by the police Lieutenant.

**SAILOR**

No, sir, Lieutenant, we weren't even able to drop anchor once ... the sea was too rough.

The Lieutenant motions for the sailor to come up to the desk, then points to a sheet of paper in front of him.

**LIEUTENANT**

Okay. Just sign here.  
(turning to a guard  
standing at the door)  
Have the next one come in. He's the last,  
isn't he?

Another sailor enters and timidly approaches the Lieutenant's desk. He is rather young, and his face is completely bronzed by the sun.

**LIEUTENANT**

They tell me you have a lot of trouble at home.  
Is that right?

**YOUNG SAILOR**

Yes, sir. My sister is sick... and my  
father, too.

**LIEUTENANT**

So that's why you've turned to smuggling, eh?  
You need the money. Now, I can help you. I can  
see that you get some assistance from the  
government. But first there's a little  
formality we've got to take care of. Just a  
few questions and then we can all go to  
lunch... Your friend tells me you dropped  
anchor three times...

The sailor starts, as though taken by surprise, then quickly answers.

**YOUNG SAILOR**

Yes, sir. Three times.

**LIEUTENANT**

(to Sandro and Anna's father)  
Now, we're getting somewhere! They're beginning  
to contradict each other.  
(then, facing the sailor again)  
Now look here, your friend just swore to me  
that you weren't able to do any fishing at all  
because the sea was too rough... And what about  
the other boat?

**YOUNG SAILOR**

What other boat?

**LIEUTENANT**

Now look, my men saw it and they also saw you  
men throwing those crates overboard. What have  
you got to say about that?

**YOUNG SAILOR**

(stuttering)  
I ... I ... wasn't feeling well ... I.. I was

sleeping... I don't know anything ... I ...  
I'm all mixed up and ...

Sandro is unable to control himself any longer. He gets up, walks over to the sailor and yells in his face.

**SANDRO**

But what are you saying?... What are you saying?

The Lieutenant motions to Sandro to be quiet, then calmly rises from his desk and continues.

**LIEUTENANT**

Now look here, I'm ready to forget the whole thing: the cigarettes, the contraband -- everything. If you would only tell me... you or your friends... whether the girl was aboard your boat and how far she went.

They all remain silent. The Lieutenant motions to the guard who then leads the sailors out of the office.

**LIEUTENANT**

(to Anna's father)

Just as I thought. Even if you caught them in the act, they'd deny it. They always deny everything. And then, in this case, if they were to admit having had the girl aboard, it would mean they'd be admitting to the charge of carrying contraband. Oh, it's easy to say: talk! But if they did talk, the following morning you'd find them cold dead in front of their doorstep.

**ANNA'S FATHER**

I think it would be worth my while to take a run over to Palermo. The Chief of Police there is a very good friend of mine and I'm sure he'll do whatever he can. I feel we're wasting our time here... Excuse me, Lieutenant. I hope we see each other again under better circumstances. And thanks for everything.

Bidding goodbye to the Lieutenant, Anna's father leaves, without looking at Sandro. A moment later, Sandro folds the newspaper he was reading, tucks it under his arm, and starts heading towards the door.

**LIEUTENANT**

At any rate, we'll continue investigating. I know that headquarters has sent out an alarm to all areas...

**SANDRO**

(showing the newspaper  
to the Lieutenant)

Tell me, Lieutenant, do you happen to know this

F.Z. who wrote this article here?

The Lieutenant takes a look at the paper which carries a two-column story headed: DISAPPEARANCE OF A ROMAN TOURIST AT LISCA BIANCA.

**LIEUTENANT**

That's Francesco Zuria. He's the news correspondent.

**SANDRO**

Where can we locate him? Don't you think that by offering a reward to anyone who can give us some information...

**LIEUTENANT**

Zuria is in Messina. You might try him. Shall we phone him?

From the opposite end of the corridor through which Sandro and the Lieutenant are walking, appears the Sergeant who was in charge of the patrol boat on which Claudia toured the islands in search of Anna. After saluting his superior, the Sergeant says:

**SERGEANT**

Have you any instructions for me, Lieutenant? May I return to Lipari?

**LIEUTENANT**

Yes. With whom did you leave the crate of cigarettes?

**SERGEANT**

I left it at the warehouse.

The Sergeant again salutes his superior, then continues on his way along the corridor. Sandro abruptly turns around and follows after him.

**SANDRO**

Pardon me, Sergeant, but when did you get back?

**SERGEANT**

About two hours ago.

**SANDRO**

And the young lady who was with you?

**SERGEANT**

I don't know... She said she had to catch a train.

Sandro remains a while, absorbed in his thoughts, then hurriedly leaves the building, and heads towards the station.

\*\*\*

On her way to the waiting room of the station, Claudia purchases a newspaper, then goes over to an empty bench and sits down. Turning to the local news section, she suddenly comes upon the article announcing Anna's disappearance.

A moment later, Sandro appears at the door. Claudia looks up at him but doesn't say a word. He walks over and sits down beside her.

**SANDRO**

Where are you going?... To Montaldo's?

**CLAUDIA**

Yes.

**SANDRO**

Then I'll go with you.

There is a moment of silence, then Claudia shows him the newspaper article.

**CLAUDIA**

Have you read it?... They're asking for anyone with information to get in touch with them.

**SANDRO**

Yes. I had also thought of going there to talk with them...

**CLAUDIA**

Yes, you should go.

**SANDRO**

But then when will we see each other?

Claudia looks at him imploringly, intent on making him understand, without having to tell him outright, that it is not a question of their seeing each other. Sandro, of course, does realize and suddenly springs to his feet and nervously begins pacing back and forth across the waiting room. Claudia, in turn, also rises and goes over to him.

**CLAUDIA**

I know it's difficult. But if you go on like this it will become even more difficult.

The bell announcing the train's arrival is sounded. Sandro turns around and faces Claudia, almost with a sense of helpless despair.

**CLAUDIA**

Please, don't look so solemn... And don't wait for the train to come in.

But Sandro doesn't move. And again Claudia insists, imploring him not to stay, although she realizes full well that this may mean a final goodbye.

**CLAUDIA**

Please, please leave. I don't want to look out of the window and wave to you with a handkerchief.

Sandro still doesn't move, and is about to say something, but Claudia looks at him so pleadingly and with such a determined expression, that he finally succumbs and starts walking towards the exit behind the train tracks.

The train has just pulled into the station. The platform is completely empty and Claudia is the only one to board the train. She climbs up the steps and the door is closed behind her. A second later, she appears at the window, looks out briefly, then disappears into her compartment. The station master raises the signal for the engine to start, a short whistle is heard, and soon the train gets under way.

Sandro dashes out across the tracks, swings open one of the doors, and boards the train as it picks up speed and pulls away from the station.

Claudia is seated in a corner near the window, looking out. She appears completely relaxed and totally drained of energy, fatigued after so much tension. After a few seconds, she turns around and is abruptly startled to see Sandro standing nearby in the corridor. He comes over to her compartment and takes a seat directly opposite to hers. Claudia is absolutely furious.

**CLAUDIA**

Go ahead, now say something! I want to know just what it is we have to say to each other.

Sandro remains silent, waiting for Claudia to settle down and calm herself. But she continues to reproach him.

**CLAUDIA**

Sandro, I don't want you to come with me, I don't want to see you... How can I make it clear to you?...Why did you come?

**SANDRO**

I don't know why. I just couldn't help it.

**CLAUDIA**

But sooner or later we've got to end this relationship. And it's better to do it right now.

**SANDRO**

I have no desire to sacrifice myself... It's idiotic to sacrifice oneself... Why?... For whom? If Anna were here I might understand your scruples. But she's not...

**CLAUDIA**

(deeply wounded)  
Oh, Sandro...

**SANDRO**

I'm sorry. I didn't want to sound cynical. But isn't it better to look things squarely in the eye?

**CLAUDIA**

For me they are exactly as they were when we

met three days ago -- just three days ago... don't you realize? And you and Anna... No, I guess they aren't like that any more. My God, is it possible to forget in such a short time, for things to change so quickly?

**SANDRO**

It takes even less.

**CLAUDIA**

But it's so sad. So terribly sad. I'm not used to it, I'm not ready for it... You know... I have never been so upset in my life. Sandro, why don't you help me?

**SANDRO**

I think the only way to help ourselves, Claudia, is for us to be together.

**CLAUDIA**

No, I'm sure it won't. Move over there. Let's make believe nothing happened. And when we get to the next station, get off.

**SANDRO**

And what about you?

**CLAUDIA**

Me... I... I... Please leave me alone.

Suddenly, she stands up and goes into the corridor. The car is of an old type -- one half is first class, the other second. Claudia stops in front of a second-class compartment from which the sound of two voices is heard. One is that of a woman -- sweet, very delicate and very feminine; the other is that of a man with a Sicilian accent. Sandro joins Claudia. Standing there together they hear the conversation.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

I work there but I'm really a stranger.

**MAN'S VOICE**

I tell you this acquaintance of mine knows you and she has often spoken to me about you.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

And who is she? Does she work in Catania?

**MAN'S VOICE**

Yes, she takes care of the garden.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Then it's impossible for her to know me. In the villa where I'm at, we have a male gardener.

**MAN'S VOICE**

So? That's logical. You see, both being gardeners, they spoke about you to one another.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

And what did they say about me?

**MAN'S VOICE**

They told me that you were a very nice girl,  
that you always mind your business... In other  
words, things of that sort.

There is a moment of silence. Then, the sound of music is heard coming from the compartment. Claudia and Sandro look at one another with a smile on their faces. Then Claudia leans over to peek into the compartment. The woman is young; she has thick, wavy brown hair. He is one of those typical seducers from the provinces, with black hair. There is a tiny radio between them. Sandro also takes a peek into the compartment. Then they withdraw as the two resume their conversation.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

We have a radio like this, too.

**MAN'S VOICE**

No, not like this one.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

And why wouldn't we have one like this?

**MAN'S VOICE**

Because this is a Chinese radio.

Another pause. Sandro takes hold of Claudia's hand and presses it. She doesn't resist, but allows him to do it.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Certainly a radio this small is very practical.  
It's especially useful for... I don't know...  
for traveling.

**MAN'S VOICE**

But for you, what comes first: music or love?

Claudia presses up close to Sandro, amused and, at the same time, obviously moved.

**WOMAN'S VOICE**

Music, of course. To get a sweetheart, one has  
to look around, but to get a radio, all you  
have to do is buy one.

**MAN'S VOICE**

Ah, no... For me, love comes first. I'm a man,  
and I know what's what: first love, and then  
music.

Claudia laughs but she is still very upset. All of a sudden, she starts and looks out the little window. The train is coming into a station and is beginning to slow down. Claudia grabs Sandro by the sleeve and pulls him through the corridor. Sandro tries to resist.

**SANDRO**

Claudia, listen to me...

**CLAUDIA**

No, Sandro, please... I ask you as a favor...

She continues to drag him through the corridor, until they finally reach the platform. Then she opens the door. They are both highly emotional. Claudia is almost hysterical.

**CLAUDIA**

Promise that you won't try to look for me...  
you shouldn't try to look for me any more...

**SANDRO**

But why, Claudia?... Why?

Sandro tries to grab her in his arms, but Claudia pushes him away, almost with a sense of violence, as though she were afraid she might change her mind once in his arms. In the meantime, the train has come to a stop in the station. Sandro pauses to look at Claudia once more.

**SANDRO**

Even if you chase me away, I... Claudia, let's  
not wait any longer... After, it will be too  
late ... Come with me.

Claudia is visibly battling with herself. Then, in one last moment of decision, she pushes Sandro towards the door and goes back into the car.

Once on the ground, Sandro walks back and forth along the platform to see if he can find Claudia, hoping she might look out the window to wave goodbye. But she doesn't appear. The train starts to move, as Sandro desperately tries to catch a glimpse of Claudia. But she is not to be seen. Sandro starts running along the platform, but the train is now going too fast. He stops -- angry, disappointed and upset.

\*\*\*

At the entrance-way of a luxurious villa, Claudia, who has just arrived, is greeted by the Princess. She is an elderly woman, rather ordinary in appearance but very aristocratic in taste and manner.

**PRINCESS**

Did you have a good trip? It is such a  
magnificent day! I am very happy that Sicily is  
able to give you so warm a welcome. And you do  
deserve it. You're such a lovely blonde. Come,  
my dear.

Claudia smiles, and follows the Princess into the garden.

**PRINCESS**

And where are you from?

**CLAUDIA**

From Rome.

**PRINCESS**

Oh, how nice! So, you're from Rome... And would you happen to know of some intelligent clergyman in Rome who might be willing to come here and stay with us? We have our own private little chapel... It is a masterpiece, with seventeenth-century frescoes... and the remains of all our dead ancestors, a wonderful collection... He would find it very convenient there, and could say his own masses. Then he would have to spend a little time with my husband, who never sees anyone, to keep him occupied.

**CLAUDIA**

An intelligent clergyman, Princess? But I think the intelligent clergymen of today have so many other things to do.

**PRINCESS**

Well, perhaps one with a little physical handicap. One who is slightly lame, for example.

In the meantime, they have arrived at a shady alcove where, seated in various wicker lounge chairs, are Patrizia, Giulia and a young man dressed in simple, casual clothes. The first one to notice Claudia and to greet her with warm cordiality, is Giulia.

**GIULIA**

Well, finally! We were beginning to get worried about you, too.

Claudia plunks herself down in one of the lounge chairs next to Patrizia. The young man rises and bows slightly.

**PATRIZIA**

But where did you finally end up?

**CLAUDIA**

It was futile. We went all over.

There is a moment of silence; the thought of Anna returns to weigh on the group. Claudia pours herself an orange drink from a pitcher on the table beside her.

**CLAUDIA**

(referring to Anna)  
But why does she do these things?  
(she takes a sip from  
her glass, then rises)  
I can't stand it any more.

She takes a few steps, looks around at the villa, and at the other end of the

alcove sees Corrado and Ettore saying goodbye to a pair of elderly gentlemen.

**GIULIA**

(to Corrado and Ettore)

But how can you carry on a discussion in this heat?

**CORRADO**

When one approaches fifty, my dear, he is affected only by the cold.

**ETTORE**

(noticing Claudia)

And who is this?

**PATRIZIA**

This is Claudia, Anna's friend...

(to Claudia)

You've never met my husband, have you?

Ettore immediately recalls Claudia's name from a previous conversation that was apparently held before she arrived.

**ETTORE**

By the way, have you phoned him?

**CORRADO**

You mean Sandro? I told you already. He's not in. At least he's not at the hotel.

**ETTORE**

Now look what has to go and happen... At a time when I'll be needing him. How can we discuss things when we lack dates and figures?...

**PATRIZIA**

But didn't he say he was coming here...

Now, with all this talk about Sandro, the sense of relaxation Claudia had felt upon her arrival, has changed into a feeling of anxiety that becomes more and more noticeable.

**ETTORE**

Well, what are you all waiting for? Send a car out to get him. He can't be more than a couple of hundred miles away...

**GIULIA**

To me, the fact that hasn't shown up is a good sign. Do you want to bet that he's found Anna?

**ETTORE**

Maybe. But do you know that forty thousand persons a year disappear in Italy without leaving a single trace behind them. Forty thousand! Almost as much as the entire population of San Siro... Raimondo, will you go

and see if you can locate Sandro?

**RAIMONDO**

Okay.

A gong announcing lunch resounds throughout the garden.

**PATRIZIA**

First let the poor thing have something to eat.

**ETTORE**

It wouldn't really do you any harm to skip a meal.

**PRINCESS**

I've never met this Sandro. What kind of a person is he?... He couldn't have done her in himself, by any chance?

**ETTORE**

(breaking out into a loud laugh)  
Sandro?... Oh, sure... I can see Sandro calling Anna over to him and saying: Listen, Anna, I intend to get rid of you, but since it's so painful and complicated... and besides, I don't happen to have a gun on me... why don't you do me a favor and get rid of yourself on your own...

There is a moment of complete, dead silence, during which the same disturbing thought flashes across the minds of all those who are present like a sudden revelation.

**GIULIA**

My God, how could we joke over something like that! We should be ashamed of ourselves.

**PRINCESS**

(rising)  
Come on, let's go.

They all get up except Claudia. She is left so completely shaken by the conversation, by the thought, that it seems she no longer has the strength to move. Giulia, after giving Corrado a defiant look, turns and smiles at the young man who had stopped to wait for her.

**GIULIA**

(to Claudia, referring to the young man)  
Goffredo is the Princess' nephew. He's eighteen years old, the lucky boy. And, what do you know -- he paints.

**GOFFREDO**

Anybody can hold a brush in his hand. All you need is to buy some oils and start painting. Even Rembrandt did the same.

Giulia laughs with a strange sense of excitement, then takes Goffredo by the arm and leaves. Claudia remains alone. She watches the group heading towards the house, Giulia holding tight to Goffredo, Ettore to Patrizia. Their voices are heard, somewhat unclear.

**ETTORE**

But... where is the Prince?... Is he well?

**PRINCESS**

The last time I saw him, the day before yesterday, it seemed he was well.

**ETTORE**

Princess, why don't you sell this villa? I would turn it into a lovely psychiatric clinic.

**PRINCESS**

It's a little like that already.

Finally, even Claudia starts moving, slowly, behind the others; but she is still very much upset.

\*\*\*

A crowd of people that keeps growing and growing from one moment to the next, is gathered in one of the main streets of Messina, in front of a men's store with its shutters half-shut. The local police are unable to control the flow of traffic, which has been blocked as a result of the crowd. The cars are packed close to one another, raising a great din with their horns. The throng is composed chiefly of young men pushing and climbing over each other to get near the shop to see inside. Sandro tries to make his way through the crowd in an attempt to get up close himself, but the confusion is so great that he finds the going very difficult. Remarks and comments are heard above the noise.

**FIRST YOUNG MAN**

Who is it, Sophia Loren?

**SECOND YOUNG MAN**

Oh, no! It's some model from Turin with a low-cut dress.

**OTHER VOICES**

It's Queen Saroya... I saw her... So, who could it be?

**THIRD YOUNG MAN**

They've torn her dress... She's almost nude... She ran into the shop to hide herself...

A police siren is heard from afar, then before long it fills the air and dominates every other sound. An Alfa Romeo pulls up, followed by a police wagon full of policemen. Both vehicles maneuver their way through the crowd like snakes through a jungle, and stop right in front of the shop. Sandro takes advantage of the opening created by the two cars and thus finds himself

a few steps away from the door. Bending over in order to see through the small space left open by the half-drawn shutters, he notices several newspapermen and photographers.

**SANDRO**

(to one of the newspapermen)  
Which one of you is Zuria?

**NEWSPAPERMAN**

He's inside.

Meanwhile, the policemen have come out of the wagon and arrive at the door of the shop, with the Chief of Police leading the way. One of them raises the shutter, and the crowd, which has backed away slightly at the insistence of the police, begins pressing forward threateningly. Soon pandemonium breaks loose. In the confusion, Sandro manages to get inside the store along with the policemen and two photographers. The shutter is again lowered, just a few inches behind him.

Standing in the middle of the shop is a most charming and provocative young brunette with tight-fitting pants and a blouse that is open almost from the neck to the waist. She is wearing nothing under her blouse, so that with every movement of her body, one cannot help catching a glimpse of her naked breasts. As the policemen come forward, she receives them with a smile. Sandro asks one of the journalists standing nearby if he can tell him which one of them is Zuria. The journalist points to a man who is only a few steps away -- a man not very old but who has a ravaged face, and whose hair is almost completely white.

**SANDRO**

Zuria?

**ZURIA**

Yes. Until proven otherwise.

**SANDRO**

I would like to ask you something.

**ZURIA**

Wait a moment. Can't you see I'm busy?

Everybody is gathered around the Chief of Police and the girl. The store clerks are looking at her admiringly. The manager, most upset, is explaining the situation to the Chief of Police.

**MANAGER**

I phoned you, Chief, because, in view of the situation... I thought it best...

The girl interrupts him. She has a very self-satisfied look on her face.

**GIRL**

I came down here to buy a foulard... Suddenly I realized that little by little, directly behind me, I was being followed by so many men, and more and more of them kept coming.

**CHIEF OF POLICE**

Well, I should think so... Dressed like that.

**GIRL**

But I have always gone around like this,  
everywhere in the world. Nothing like this has  
ever happened to me before.

Zuria turns to Sandro and clears his throat. Outside, the crowd becomes very  
noisy.

**ZURIA**

(to the girl)

How old are you?

**GIRL**

Nineteen. My name is Gloria Perkins. I'm  
married and a writer by profession. I write in  
a trance, almost always in contact with people  
who are dead. Tolstoi, for example, or  
Shakespeare. But the movies also interest me.

Zuria nods to Sandro as if to say: now watch this.

**ZURIA**

How do you find the men of Messina? Are you  
shocked by their warm display of friendliness?

**GIRL**

No, why should I be shocked? We're in Italy,  
not Finland.

**ZURIA**

And how were you received in Palermo?

The girl turns around and looks down at Zuria with contempt, but she manages  
to remain calm.

**GIRL**

In Palermo I was with my husband. Now I'm  
going to Capri to write an article for the  
Tourist Office.

Zuria clears his throat again and whispers to Sandro.

**ZURIA**

She did exactly the same thing in Palermo.

**CHIEF OF POLICE**

(to the girl)

If you want to go back to your hotel... we're  
ready to escort you.

**GIRL**

Oh, yes, thank you...

Photographer snaps a flash photo. The girl immediately strikes a pose. Other

flashes follow. The clerks ask for her autograph. One of the policemen raises the shutter; the girl comes forward smiling, and is greeted with a certain kind of roar from the crowd. The group leaves the shop. Sandro and Zuria also come out. The girl, ushered out by the policemen, climbs into the Alfa Romeo. The guard holds the crowd back. There are more camera flashes. More smiles from the pretty stranger. Finally the car pulls out, followed by the police wagon. Sandro and Zuria watch the car disappear through the crowd, which starts to disperse. The din, however, is still enormous, due to the unsnarling of the traffic jam.

**ZURIA**

Do you like her?

Sandro shrugs his shoulders, somewhat surprised by the journalist's question.

**ZURIA**

She costs a hundred thousand lire.

**SANDRO**

You're kidding!

**ZURIA**

No, I'm not. Why do you think she does all this? It's one of the many ways she can put herself on display. When you bait the trap, the mouse will snap. To tell you the truth, if it wasn't for the fact that one hundred thousand lire represents my whole month's salary, well... But you had something you wanted to ask me?

Sandro is still looking at the journalist with a sense of incredulity, almost as if he felt Zuria's conversation was something out of this world. But he is brought back to reality by Zuria's last remark, which is made as the journalist starts walking at a very hurried pace.

**SANDRO**

I read one of your articles regarding the disappearance of a girl. I'm that girl's fianc,.

**ZURIA**

Oh... I'm sorry I have to rush but I've got to write a story about this thing that just happened... Tell me exactly how it all turned out.

**SANDRO**

(impatiently)

Now listen, if I had any information, I wouldn't have come here to ask you. But I see that you, too, lack any information ...

The journalist casts a sideways glance at Sandro. He is a bitter and sarcastic man, one who is completely absorbed with his own little problems and his own daily routine. But for this very reason he is quite capable of taking any kind of insult, either big or small.

**ZURIA**

As a matter of fact, I've already had several phone calls on that article. One said they had seen the missing girl in an automobile somewhere in Rome. Another one said they saw her on the pier talking with some strange sailors... Could be she secretly left the island by boat...

**SANDRO**

Is that possible?

**ZURIA**

Who knows?... Another one has it that she entered a store in Troina. This information comes from the storekeeper himself who stated that such and such a girl had bought I don't know what in his store... at Troina.

**SANDRO**

Is that far from here?

**ZURIA**

About fifty miles or so. If you want, I'll give you the name of the storekeeper.

**SANDRO**

Yes... of course... But you should also print that in your paper... But right away, tomorrow morning... It's the local Palermo paper, isn't it?... I mean, it's widely read...

**ZURIA**

Yes, but why do you think our readers would be interested in such news now? Even if I sent it, the editors wouldn't print it.

**SANDRO**

You really must do me this one favor.

**ZURIA**

Pardon me, but why must I do you a favor?

**SANDRO**

Then let's call it a business proposition. Something to round out your salary.

The journalist clears his throat without answering. Then he grabs Sandro by the arm and takes him back to the other side of the street where a few people, left over from the crowd, are still discussing the incident that just took place as they gradually drift away from the scene. The traffic is now back to normal.

\*\*\*

At the Princess' villa, Claudia is in her room, applying some fresh make-up in front of a small dressing table. Although she appears thoroughly engrossed

in all the minute details of her make-up, nevertheless, she seems considerably interested in any sound that comes through her window.

The rumble of a motor is heard. Claudia runs to the window and looks out into the garden. A dark car pulls up in front of the service entrance. A uniformed chauffeur gets out of the car and enters the house carrying a package under his arm. There is an obvious look of disappointment on Claudia's face. She is about to return to the dressing table when she notices, there in the garden, Giulia heading towards the house accompanied by the young Prince, Goffredo. Claudia is profoundly shocked by Giulia's behavior as she laughs, jokes, bends over to pick up some flowers, and skips along unashamedly.

In the meantime, Patrizia has entered the room with two wigs, one of which she is wearing and the other in her hand. She also has on a cocktail dress, but one that is more elaborate than Claudia's. Patrizia immediately goes up to the mirror of the dressing table and, while she finishes arranging the wig on her head, says to her friend:

**PATRIZIA**

Are you ready? I'm not. That's all we needed --  
a cocktail party... The vitality some people  
have irritates me!

(indicating the wig on her head)

How does it look?

Claudia, who has meanwhile tried on the other wig and is looking at herself in the mirror, turns around to Patrizia.

**CLAUDIA**

(ironically)

It's divine!

**PATRIZIA**

You say that just to flatter me.

**CLAUDIA**

Do you consider that a compliment?

**PATRIZIA**

No.

The two of them burst out laughing and together they leave the room. Then after a few steps through the corridor, they separate with a friendly gesture towards each other. Patrizia goes into her room while Claudia prepares to descend the wide stairway. Coming up the same stairway are Giulia and the young Prince, Goffredo. There is something of an embarrassing moment between them. Then Giulia, aware of Claudia's presence, detaches herself from Goffredo and, as they reach the top of the stairs, she comes over to Claudia and takes her by the wrist in order to confide with her more intimately.

**GIULIA**

He wants to show me his paintings. He won't  
let go of me anymore. Poor thing, he must  
have a crush on me...

She laughs with an obvious sense of amusement, but she is also tickled by her own vanity. Claudia looks at her without knowing what to say to her.

**GIULIA**

(even more excited)

Please, you come too...

**CLAUDIA**

But for what reason should I come there?

**GIULIA**

Please, do come... Don't leave me alone with him. He's capable of... I don't know... Have you noticed his eyes?

Claudia resigns herself to escorting Giulia to the floor up above. The very top of the stairway leads to an attic, where Goffredo is leaning over the railing, looking down.

**GOFFREDO**

Giulia...

**GIULIA**

Here I am.

Seeing the two of them arriving together, the young Prince feels disappointed. But he knows he has to cover his intentions with a show of good manners. When the two women reach the top of the stairs, he bows to Claudia in a most respectful fashion. Then he leads them down a low and narrow corridor to a door they pass through.

The attic is bright and spacious, with slanted roof, and two huge windows. It is filled with paintings, easels, canvases, brushes and oils. As soon as Giulia enters the studio, she moves away from Claudia and attaches herself to the young Prince who is setting up one of his paintings on an easel beside one of the windows. Claudia looks around the room with a sense of indifference. Going over to the window, she looks out and sees a vast panorama of the countryside.

Giulia looks at the painting with a certain amount of surprise. It is a picture of a nude woman; a shapely figure, slightly plump, in the manner of Renoir.

**GIULIA**

Claudia, come and see. It's a nude.

Claudia is looking through the paintings that lean up against the wall face backwards. She turns one around: a nude woman. A second: another nude woman. A third: the same.

**CLAUDIA**

They're all nudes, if I'm not mistaken.

**GIULIA**

(to Goffredo)

But why all nudes?

**GOFFREDO**

Because there is no landscape as beautiful as a

woman.

**GIULIA**

And where do you find the models?

**GOFFREDO**

Oh, there are as many as one wants.

**GIULIA**

(turning to Claudia)

I thought the model was something obsolete nowadays. Didn't you, Claudia?

Claudia goes back to look out the window: a group of flying birds swoops down to land directly under the roof. The birds settle themselves in a little nest directly in front of the window. Claudia bends over to get a better look and is actually able to see the little nest, as she hears behind her the exchange of remarks between Giulia and the young Prince.

**GOFFREDO**

It's strange how anxious women are to display themselves. It's almost a natural inclination.

**GIULIA**

But how could they pose like that? I couldn't.

**GOFFREDO**

(with a grave, youthful sensuality)

Why don't you try?

**GIULIA**

Me... Goffredo, you're mad!

(turning to Claudia)

He's mad.

**CLAUDIA**

Not really.

Claudia moves away from the window, and continues to look at Giulia and Goffredo with a deep sense of amazement. Giulia is euphoric, kittenish and trembling with excitement. Goffredo is firm, resolute and serious.

**GIULIA**

Don't you ever paint men?

**GOFFREDO**

Answer me, why don't you try posing? I'll paint you a beautiful portrait.

**GIULIA**

But why me?... Ask Claudia, she's much more beautiful than me.

**GOFFREDO**

(insistent)

But I want to paint you. You appeal to me more.

**GIULIA**

(timidly)

I appeal to you more?

Giulia glances over at Claudia, who is still preoccupied looking out of the window, then screws up her courage and boldly advances towards Goffredo, making her intentions clearly understood. Goffredo immediately responds to her invitation and draws himself close up against her. There is a moment of hesitation, then a kiss -- awkward but passionately violent. Giulia, on her part, is completely shameless. Claudia turns around exactly at that moment when the two of them are caught up in a feverish embrace. She looks at them, completely dumbfounded, then takes a few steps forward as though she doesn't believe her own eyes.

**CLAUDIA**

(almost unconsciously)

Giulia!

Giulia quickly turns around, her face is flushed with excitement but also with an expression that seems somewhat triumphant. Before anybody has a chance to say anything, she heads towards the door, swings it open and stands firmly on the threshold, obviously intent on telling Claudia to leave. In fact, Claudia doesn't wait to be told but immediately walks out into the hallway.

**GIULIA**

And tell Corrado, too, that I'm here... if he wants me. You can also tell him that my tiny little heart is beating like mad, and that at this moment, it's the only thing that interests me. Is that clear?

**CLAUDIA**

It couldn't be any clearer.

Giulia takes a few steps backward into the room, and seeing Claudia still there looking at her strangely, exclaims:

**GIULIA**

Now what do I have to do to be left in peace?

**CLAUDIA**

I think all you have to do, Giulia, is to close the door.

And with a violent bang that leaves Claudia startled, Giulia slams the door shut. Claudia remains standing there for a moment, still very much amazed. But she is aroused from her stupor by the sound of a car pulling into the courtyard. Then she rapidly starts descending the stairs.

Claudia has reached the hallway leading out to the garden and is anxiously waiting there, looking at the car that has just arrived. But she is not able to distinguish exactly who it is, and her view is also blocked by Ettore and Corrado who have just come out of the house and are now standing in front of the car. So she walks out to the garden and joins the group. A certain look of disappointment spreads over her face as she sees only Raimondo come out of the car. Evidently, Sandro has not been located.

**RAIMONDO**

He's not at the hotel... and he probably wasn't even in Milazzo. The room clerk said he rented a car...

Claudia moves away from the group, as though she has heard enough. She goes over to lean against an enormous vase standing there on the side. Her hands are trembling. In back of her she hears the sounds of the others' voices but cannot distinguish what they are saying. Then Patrizia arrives and calls out Claudia's name. But she has to repeat it a second time before Claudia realizes she is being called.

**PATRIZIA**

Claudia... Let's go.

Claudia turns around but doesn't move. Another car pulls up, driven by the same chauffeur who had evidently picked her up the other day, and in which the Princess is already seated.

**CLAUDIA**

I'm not coming.

**PATRIZIA**

But then why did you bother changing?

Patrizia remains puzzled for a moment as though searching for a motive behind Claudia's sudden decision, then discreetly turns away without insisting and goes over to the car. In the meantime, Giulia and Goffredo have come out through the hallway and head towards one of the two cars. Corrado looks at them with a cold and critical stare, then with a deliberate intent to prick Giulia's feelings, he says:

**CORRADO**

Giulia is like Oscar Wilde; give her the superfluous and she will do without the essential.

Ettore breaks out into a laugh as he helps Patrizia into the car.

**ETTORE**

That's him; he'd die if he didn't have somebody to quote. He comes up with quotations like that even at a board of directors meeting...

Claudia watches them getting into the car. She is beside herself, completely wrapped up in her own thoughts.

\*\*\*

In the rear of a general store, on the outskirts of a small Sicilian town, a woman is seated at the window. She is very young, thin and irascible. Up front, her husband is speaking with Sandro, and as she listens attentively to what he is saying, a sarcastic smile spreads over her face.

**HUSBAND**

Be patient, I can't remember everything.

**SANDRO**

(indicating the newspaper article)  
But it even says what she bought: a bar of soap!  
So there's no point in making believe you can't  
remember.

After waiting a few seconds to give her husband a chance to explain himself, the wife jumps up from where she is sitting, comes over to Sandro and yanks the paper from his hands. Then she starts reading the article in a jerky manner typical of one who is not too literate.

**WIFE**

"A young female stranger, whose description  
corresponds with that of the missing girl, came  
into my store..."

She suddenly stops reading and turns toward Sandro.

**WIFE**

She came and then she left. With him. But this  
one won't admit it.  
(turning upon her husband furiously)  
You think I wasn't aware of it...

The husband, a young man, tries to keep calm and carry on the conversation in a logical, persuasive manner.

**HUSBAND**

But if I was carrying on with the girl, why  
would I want to give any of this information to  
the newspaper?

**WIFE**

That's what I'd like to know myself.

**HUSBAND**

Fine, that makes two of us who want to know. In  
fact, three, with him.

He indicates Sandro. Then, seeing a fat, luscious female customer enter the store, he turns to her and continues:

**HUSBAND**

Ah, Lady Amalia, would you be interested in  
knowing why I told the newspapers about a  
certain girl who came here the other day and  
then disappeared?

The woman, anxious to learn about any new bit of gossip, becomes immediately interested.

**LADY AMALIA**

Disappeared? Who is she? ... Where? When?

**HUSBAND**

And that makes four. Anybody else?...

Sandro, a little sick and tired of the whole matter, and wanting to put an end to what has by now become farcical, intervenes.

**SANDRO**

You have to be precise. Did this girl enter your store or didn't she?

**WIFE**

(shouting)

Yes!

**SANDRO**

(ignoring her)

Was she blonde or brunette?

**HUSBAND**

(calmly)

Brunette.

**WIFE**

(contradicting him)

Blonde.

**SANDRO**

How was she dressed?

**HUSBAND**

I don't quite remember. Seems to me she wore a black dress.

**WIFE**

(intervening sarcastically)

He doesn't look at dresses, he looks at what's under them.

The husband turns around and looks at his wife menacingly.

**SANDRO**

Pardon me, but has anyone else been here asking about this girl?

**HUSBAND**

No ... I don't think so.

**SANDRO**

Thanks.

\*\*\*

Sandro leaves the store. He walks a few steps along the pavement, then sits down at a small outside table of a nearby caf,. He looks out over the square: a small Sicilian town, quiet and still in the hot afternoon sun. Every now and then, he glances up at the country road that winds around the town, as though he were waiting for someone.

A few moments later, in fact, a car comes into view and slows down as it reaches the square. The driver looks out for a place in which to park. Sandro rises to his feet. The car comes to a stop a few steps away from him. The driver rushes out of the car to open the door for the person inside: it is Claudia. Sandro immediately goes over to meet her, looking at her somewhat amazed. Not only does he see her more elegantly dressed than he has ever seen her before, wearing a smartly tailored polka-dot suit, but also as an entirely new person, as someone whose beauty he has discovered for the first time. For a moment they continue staring at each other, without even bothering to say hello.

**CLAUDIA**

Any news?

**SANDRO**

Yes... but it's all so conflicting... However, there is some slight indication...

Claudia drops her gaze, relieved by even that slight note of hope. Then she looks up at him again, as though inspired by another sudden thought: something which must have lingered in her mind from one of the Princess' humorous quips. Then, the owner of the general store appears on the scene. After having dealt his nagging wife a crushing verbal blow, he turns to Sandro, but not without first glancing at Claudia, for whom it soon becomes evident he has really come out on the street.

**HUSBAND**

Listen... In the paper they forgot to say that as soon as the girl left here she took the bus to Noto. The bus leaves from the square, over there. I saw her clearly... I came to the door to see her off... She was a beautiful girl. Lovely pair of legs!

While speaking, he continues to keep an eye on Claudia with the look of one who thinks his gaze is loaded with irresistible masculinity. All of a sudden, he pulls out a package of Nazionali cigarettes from his pocket and offers one to Claudia. She looks at him dumbfounded, then automatically declines with a shake of her head. In turn, he lights up a cigarette, inhaling the smoke voluptuously. Meanwhile, his wife has come upon the scene and looks at him suspiciously. Then, with a sad, wistful voice, she turns to Claudia.

**WIFE**

You're from Rome, aren't you? I knew right away because I'm from Viterbo... He was a soldier there and so...

(indicating her husband, and then quickly continuing)

I don't like it very much, here.

**HUSBAND**

(interrupting)

Then why don't you go back?

His wife turns and looks at him hatefully, exactly in the same manner he had looked at her.

**CLAUDIA**

How long have you been married?

**WIFE**

Three months.

Claudia and Sandro look at each other. There is a moment of embarrassment, then Sandro breaks the silence.

**SANDRO**

Well... Thanks for the information.

They exchange goodbyes, then Claudia and Sandro move away from the store and head towards Claudia's car. Suddenly, Sandro takes Claudia by the hand.

**SANDRO**

It's better if we present a happy picture, no?

Claudia is about to withdraw her hand but she is taken aback by Sandro's phrase, which also fills her with a warm and tender feeling after the squalid situation with the young storekeeper and his wife. Now Sandro opens the door of the car, looks at Claudia as if to ask her consent for what he is about to do, and since Claudia says nothing but just stands there trying to figure out which one of the feelings struggling within her will win, he removes Claudia's valise and closes the door.

**SANDRO**

(to the driver)

Tell the Signora Patrizia that we are continuing the search...and that the Signorina Claudia will manage to survive somehow...

The driver bows slightly, then he climbs into the car and departs. Sandro and Claudia remain there, watching the car disappear out of view. Now Sandro turns to look at Claudia, and smiles at her. Claudia is visibly upset. She doesn't smile back but merely turns away and heads towards Sandro's car.

\*\*\*

Claudia is intent on looking at Sandro who is doing the driving. The car is traveling on a country road but Claudia shows no interest in the landscape. She continues to stare at Sandro as if she wants to know his most secret thoughts. Suddenly, feeling himself being stared at, Sandro turns towards Claudia. She quickly drops her gaze. Then Sandro turns his eyes back to the road, and Claudia looks up at him again.

From a bend in the road up ahead, preceded by the loud and penetrating blast of a horn, the bus mentioned earlier by the storekeeper appears. Sandro barely manages to stop the car in time off to one side of the road. He gets out and places himself in the middle of the road where he starts signaling for the bus to stop. With a loud screech of its brakes, the bus comes to a stop almost directly in front of him. The bus driver opens the window and leans out.

**DRIVER**

Did your car break down?

**SANDRO**

No. I only want some information.

Meanwhile, the driver's assistant gets down from the bus and the passengers lean out of the windows. Claudia has also gotten out of the car and appears on the scene.

**SANDRO**

We're searching for a girl of about twenty-five... Seems she boarded this bus two days ago, in the afternoon... You should remember her because she was a stranger around here...

The driver gets down from the bus and comes over to Sandro, scratching his head.

**DRIVER**

She was a little nervous... dark-haired ... with a kerchief around her head?

He turns to his assistant for verification, who, in turn, searches his memory and then adds:

**ASSISTANT**

Two days ago... wasn't there that midwife on the bus, too? Sure, that's right, and she was talking to some young woman ...

**SANDRO**

Can you tell me where she got off?

**ASSISTANT**

All I can tell you is that the midwife is from  
**X...**

**SANDRO**

Okay, thanks.

Sandro turns and goes back to his car while the others climb back on the bus which begins to leave. Claudia and Sandro remain standing near the car, watching the bus disappear. Then Claudia turns and looks out over the fields. She sees a dry riverbed filled with stones that sparkle in the sun, beside it a high rocky bank. Sandro stands next to her and she becomes vividly aware of his presence. As she glances at him, he turns around, then she quickly starts up a conversation as though she were anxious not to have any romantic mood develop between them.

**CLAUDIA**

My God ... Let's hope it was her.

Then, still feeling Sandro's eyes fixed upon her, she turns and starts heading towards the car. Sandro catches up with her and takes her hand. Before they climb into the car they look at each other intensely. A moment later, the car takes off at full speed.

\*\*\*

In a courtyard of the midwife's house, Sandro and Claudia are questioning a middle-aged woman.

**MIDWIFE**

I only exchanged a few casual words with her,  
as one would ordinarily do on a public bus...

**SANDRO**

And do you remember where she got off?

**MIDWIFE**

Well...probably at the last stop, which is Noto.

**CLAUDIA**

After that, you didn't see her anymore?

The woman pauses for a few seconds and looks at Claudia as though she had detected some hidden motive behind the question. And when she resumes speaking, what she has to say is in sharp contrast to the way she says it. They are words of protest but spoken condescendingly, almost sweetly, yet leaving no doubt as to their meaning.

**MIDWIFE**

What are you trying to insinuate, young lady?  
Why should I have seen her again? I don't do  
anything that's illegitimate.

**CLAUDIA**

Oh, no... What are you saying? I'm not  
insinuating anything...

**MIDWIFE**

And furthermore, my dear young lady... because  
you really are a dear, you know ...if the story  
of that girl is merely a pretext, let us say,  
to get in touch with her, then I feel it is my  
duty to warn her. These things are very, very  
dangerous, especially in a neighborhood like  
this where people occupy themselves more with  
other people's affairs than their own.

Seeing Claudia being put into an uncomfortable position, Sandro, who had been following the midwife's discussion with a cagey attitude, intervenes.

**SANDRO**

Then you should also be able to tell me where a  
young girl might stay in Noto; are there any  
hotels or rooming houses?

**MIDWIFE**

There's the Trinacria Hotel... or the Regina,  
near the municipal building. As for rooming  
houses, I don't know...

**SANDRO**

Thank you.

**MIDWIFE**

Don't mention it... Pleased to be of service  
any time.

Claudia starts moving hurriedly out of the courtyard, followed by Sandro.

\*\*\*

Sandro's car is speeding across a harsh, sun-baked landscape, bypassing long lines of peasants returning from the fields: the women seated on donkeys, the men on foot. The more fortunate among them have horse drawn carts.

Claudia is looking at the surrounding countryside and spies an iron bridge that is all rusty and obviously no longer in use.

**CLAUDIA**

Look at that bridge! Who knows why they even  
bothered to make it...

The car continues onward, passing an abandoned factory, then a railroad station, also abandoned, its tracks covered by weeds, the ticket office haphazardly boarded up with old wooden planks.

**CLAUDIA**

Look at that: a factory... a station... and  
look at those tracks, all full of weeds... But  
why?

Sandro shrugs his shoulders and continues driving without saying a word. Up ahead a small town comes into view, with monotonous rows of newly constructed homes lined up along the side of the road. The car enters the town and stops. Sandro gets out and goes over to a fountain nearby, but the fountain is dry. Somewhat surprised, he begins to look around. And only then do Sandro and Claudia become aware that the silence around them is an unnatural one, that the doors and the windows of all the houses in the town are tightly shut. There is no sign of life anywhere, except for the weeds growing between the cracks in the walls, invading and suffocating everything in sight.

Claudia gets out of the car, joins Sandro, and together they start walking along the streets. The sun beats furiously down upon the crumbling houses, upon the church, upon the useless monument in the square on which a dedication is inscribed: "To The Agricultural Worker."

Sandro looks around in absolute silence. Claudia is also silent, somewhat dismayed. Instinctively, she presses up close to Sandro who leads her to a shady spot where the ground is overgrown with weeds.

Sandro and Claudia are lying next to each other on the grass. Sandro appears calm but is actually looking at Claudia as though he were about to embrace her with his eyes. Then he takes her hand. Claudia offers no resistance; in fact, she entwines her fingers around his, almost with a sense of desperation. Sandro tries to kiss her. She makes a feeble attempt to resist,

looks around, and sees the deserted town, the barren fields, the crumbling, sun-baked walls. She turns and looks at Sandro again, and now it is she who kisses him. When they break apart, they stretch themselves out upon the grass.

Sandro kisses her violently, again and again and again...

\*\*\*

The early twilight shadows are beginning to fall. The sky is still clear but the sun is fading. There is a deep silence and the air is absolutely still. In a certain sense, Sandro's car, standing there in the middle of the deserted street, is the only thing alive in that desolate town.

Huddled close to each other, Claudia and Sandro are asleep on the grass. Lazily, Claudia awakens, and then Sandro also opens his eyes. They are both somewhat disheveled.

**CLAUDIA**

(faintly audible)

It's late... We should be going.

Little by little, she leaves behind the drowsiness of her deep and peaceful sleep, purring languorously in a typically feminine fashion. Sandro smiles and gently embraces her. A moment later, Claudia releases herself from Sandro's arms, sits up and realizes that the countryside and the town itself are as black and motionless as death. A cold shiver runs down her back and she quickly comes to her feet.

**CLAUDIA**

Let's get out of here, fast... This is not a town, it's a cemetery.

**SANDRO**

Who knows why they all left...

Claudia starts to move but her legs are still numb from her sound sleep and she hobbles along comically, laughing at the same time. Sandro also gets up and finds that his legs are cramped. Hobbling and laughing himself, he follows Claudia towards the car. But the car, baked by the sun, is like an oven. They both make boisterous and playful exclamations, then another embrace, another kiss. Finally, they climb into the car and drive off with a loud roar that echoes up and down the abandoned town.

\*\*\*

Sandro and Claudia arrive in the town of Noto and pull up on the opposite side of the street from the Trinacria Hotel. As they climb out of the car, Claudia turns to Sandro:

**CLAUDIA**

Sandro ... maybe it's best that you go in alone.

**SANDRO**

Are you joking?

**CLAUDIA**

Don't think that I want to save myself from any embarrassment, from the awkwardness of meeting Anna... It's not that; it's that you can say certain things easier if you're alone. Please, Sandro, do try to understand me... It would look like I was trying to influence you, to force you, to control you... and that makes me feel uncomfortable...

Sandro agrees by a nod of his head and indicates that he understands very well. Nevertheless, he doesn't move. Several agonizing moments go by in which they both remain silent and still, looking at the hotel across the way. Then, tossing away his cigarette, Sandro finally walks off and goes into the hotel.

Left alone, Claudia strolls along for a few steps. She sees a letter box up against a building and deposits a postcard she had been carrying with her. She remains there for a moment, watching a parade of ants crawling along the wall, ending up who knows where. They come and go, scurrying up and down in vast numbers, incredibly busy. Then Claudia turns away and starts pacing back and forth, stopping from time to time behind townspeople who mill about in the streets; she pays them no heed. Several young men pass by and turn around to look at her. They are obviously the town's dandies. Circling around her, they exchange suggestive comments to one another. Even among the women Claudia arouses a certain curiosity. But she remains totally unaware of it; such is the intensity with which she concentrates her gaze upon the hotel entrance. Suddenly the sound of a shutter being lowered directly behind her causes her to start and turn around. It is a shop being closed. Other shops, further down the street, are also closing for the day. The people in the streets begin thinning out and it is not long before Claudia is left entirely by herself. In that total solitude, the doorway of the hotel emerges like the mouth of some dark and fearful cavern, so much so that Claudia is unable to keep her eyes fixed upon that spot. She turns her head away, but her attention is immediately drawn back again. From the darkness of the hotel's hallway, she spies Sandro coming out. Claudia doesn't wait to see if he is alone or not, for she has only one thought in mind: not to let herself be seen. But she doesn't know what to do since there is practically no one else in the streets and all the shops are closed. Then she notices a tobacco shop still open and she quickly dashes into it. She goes up to the counter as she opens her purse and starts looking for some change.

**CLAUDIA**

Some cigarettes, please... Do you have any?...  
Nazionali with filters ...

Her hands tremble as she searches for the money. Finally, she pays the storekeeper and immediately lights up a cigarette. Suddenly, she wheels about, having heard Sandro enter. He is alone. Throwing away his cigarette, he comes up to her, all nervous and excited, and they both step out into the street.

As soon as she is outside, Claudia leans up against the wall as if she has no strength left. She lets her cigarette fall to the ground and shuts her eyes.

**SANDRO**

What is it, Claudia?

**CLAUDIA**

Oh, Sandro... I'm so ashamed of myself, so ashamed...I tried to hide myself...I feel so small... I hate myself ...

**SANDRO**

Does it please you to say such things?

**CLAUDIA**

Oh no... It doesn't please me at all...

**SANDRO**

Then why do you say them?

**CLAUDIA**

Because what I'm doing is so ugly ... Because if you told me right now: "Claudia, I love you," I would believe you...

Sandro is about to say the phrase, somewhat jokingly in the hope that it might calm her, but also with a certain amount of seriousness. But as soon as he opens his mouth to say "Claudia," she places her hand over his lips.

**CLAUDIA**

No... Because then I'd force you to swear it, I'd force you to tell me an infinite amount of things... and that wouldn't be right, it couldn't be right... It would be absurd.

Sandro tries to calm her with an embrace.

**SANDRO**

Good. It's better if it were absurd. That would mean nothing much can be done about it.

**CLAUDIA**

But just think -- the very same things you had said to her who knows how many times... maybe even just before we left, while I was waiting outside your place...

**SANDRO**

So, even if I did say them, I was sincere with her, as I am now with you.

Moved by Sandro's remark, Claudia lifts her head and looks deeply into his eyes. The statement reveals him as being someone quite different from the person she had imagined him to be, and at the same time, it opens up for her a new way of looking at things. Shaking his head, and with much tenderness, he says:

**SANDRO**

I have never seen a woman like you, who needs to see everything so clearly.

At the sound of a man's voice coming from behind him, Sandro turns and sees a gentleman with two large packages under his arms, pointing to a bell-cord

dangling on the side of a door nearby.

**MAN**

Excuse me, but would you mind pulling that cord for me?

Sandro pulls the bell-cord and the sound of a bell is heard inside.

**MAN**

Thank you.

The door opens and the gentleman quickly steps inside. Sandro looks up at the building.

**SANDRO**

At one time, all these houses were convents.

He takes Claudia by the arm and pulls her away towards the square, then looks attentively around the area. Bathed in the soft twilight, the buildings and the churches bordering the square reveal themselves in all their beauty. Sandro and Claudia climb up the steps of a church building and from there gaze at the scene. Gradually he allows himself to be overcome with enthusiasm.

**SANDRO**

Look! What a fantastic scene! What movement, what disorder! They were very much concerned with scenographic effects... an extraordinary sense of liberty...

There is a moment of silence during which he continues to look at the scene before him. Then, giving voice to a sincere thought, he exclaims:

**SANDRO**

Really, I've got to stop this business with Ettore... I would like to go back and start working on my own projects again. You know, I had many ideas...

**CLAUDIA**

And why did you drop them?

**SANDRO**

Once they gave me a job to draw up an estimate for the construction of a school. It took me only a day and a half to finish it, and I got paid six million lire. Ever since then I've been doing estimates for other people's designs.

Claudia looks at him as if she were about to render judgment, and Sandro becomes aware of it.

**SANDRO**

Why are you looking at me like that?

**CLAUDIA**

I'm sure you'd be able to design some very lovely things.

**SANDRO**

I don't know about that. And then, who's interested in beautiful things nowadays?

The last words are spoken with a deep sense of sadness, Sandro avoiding Claudia's glance. He laughs to himself and for a while remains silent. He takes another look up at the dark outlines of the buildings, then turns to Claudia.

**SANDRO**

Claudia, let's get married?

**CLAUDIA**

(astonished)  
What! Get married?

**SANDRO**

Yes. We'll get married. You and I. What do you say?

**CLAUDIA**

What do I say? What can I say? No. At least, not yet. I don't know... I can't even think of it... at a time like this... Oh, but why did you have to ask me?

**SANDRO**

You look at me as though I had said something foolish...

**CLAUDIA**

And are you sure you want to marry me? Are you really sure...that you want to marry... me?

**SANDRO**

That's why I asked you...

**CLAUDIA**

So... Oh, how I wish that everything were so much simpler... that people could just come together by the color of their hair or the size of their shoes. What size shoe do you wear? Size 9. That's a very lovely size. But I'm sorry, I wear size 8.

Sandro smiles and playfully ruffles Claudia's hair. She also smiles, then slowly they both head towards the hotel.

\*\*\*

It is morning inside the Hotel Trinacria. Claudia has just had breakfast in her room and is almost finished dressing. It is a rather large room, set out with old pieces of furniture. The place is in a state of disarray, and the

door leading into Sandro's room is wide open. Because of the general disorder, Claudia is unable to find her stockings. But instead of being angered by this, she appears quite jovial and laughs gaily. As she continues to look for her stockings, Sandro appears in the doorway.

**SANDRO**

Are you ready?

Claudia comes up to Sandro and gazes upon him with a look of adoration.

**CLAUDIA**

(ironically)

But why am I so infatuated with you?

**SANDRO**

(smiling)

Hurry up now, or it'll begin to get hot outside...

**CLAUDIA**

Yes, yes, yes, yes... Right away...

She starts looking hurriedly around the room again but is still unable to locate her stockings. Suddenly, up from the street comes the sound of music. It is a popular tune, wild and rhythmic, emanating from a publicity truck as part of some local advertising stunt. Claudia is overtaken by the music and cannot resist the temptation to do a little dance for Sandro. Little by little, she starts swaying back and forth to the music. Then, kicking off her shoes, she begins to dance around the room in her bare feet. Sandro looks at her, amused but also somewhat impatient.

**SANDRO**

(leaving)

Okay. I understand. See you later.

Claudia rushes up to the door, and feigning an exaggerated attitude of despair, says:

**CLAUDIA**

And you leave me here all alone... in this hotel room...

**SANDRO**

As soon as you're ready, you can come down and catch up with me. I'll be waiting for you right outside on the square.

Claudia is in a playful mood and she is anxious to demonstrate her exuberance.

**CLAUDIA**

(teasingly)

Very well. But you must first tell me that when you go out without me it's like going out without one of your legs. Go ahead, have a look around the town all by yourself, but you'll have to hobble along on only one leg. And you

must also tell me that you are filled with a great desire to embrace my shadow on the walls... Then you must tell me...

(suddenly her tone of voice changes and she becomes quite serious)

You must tell me that you love me.

Sandro replies with the same good-natured tolerance with which he had been watching Claudia as she danced her coquettish dance.

**SANDRO**

But you know it already. Why must I tell you?

**CLAUDIA**

So, you wonder why?

Without waiting for him to answer, she goes back towards the center of the room and once again starts looking around for her stockings. Sandro begins to leave.

**SANDRO**

Then I'll see you later.

**CLAUDIA**

Okay. In a few minutes.

Sandro goes out the door. Claudia finally locates her stockings and proceeds to finish dressing.

\*\*\*

Sandro comes out of the hotel and crosses over to the sunny square. He starts strolling down along a street which leads to a baroque church that opens up to a wide flight of stone steps. Beyond these steps is a small dead-end street that runs up against the facade of a large and magnificent old building. A few feet away from the facade, seated on a bench in the shade, is an old coachman whose horse is standing beside him with its head deep in a sack of hay.

Sandro goes down the flight of steps and approaches the door of the old building which is closed. He rings the bell but there is no answer. Then he notices a time schedule posted on the door indicating visiting hours. After glancing at it, he walks over to the seated coachman.

**SANDRO**

It's closed. Isn't there any custodian or caretaker inside?

**COACHMAN**

(apathetically)

Nobody there.

**SANDRO**

But it says it's open from 9:30 to 10:30., and it's ten o'clock now... That's a fine way to

greet tourists.

**COACHMAN**

Tourists? Last year a few Frenchmen came here and they all walked around in their bathing suits. So they were made to understand that it was better if they didn't come at all.

Sandro shakes his head and is about to say something but he sees the door opening and a man appears. Sandro goes over to him.

**SANDRO**

Are you the custodian?

**CUSTODIAN**

Yes, come right in.

Sandro enters and finds himself inside a large courtyard of noteworthy architectural design, though somewhat in a state of decay. The custodian goes on his way and Sandro walks further into the courtyard where two young men are studying the architecture. On hearing Sandro's footsteps, they turn around for a moment, then resume their observation. They are, in fact, young architectural students busily engaged in taking notes and copying certain architectural details. They do this with an extraordinary interest, almost with a sense of religious zeal. Sandro continues to stroll through the courtyard. His footsteps are the only sounds to be heard disturbing the otherwise absolute silence. The two young students exchange words between each other but they speak in faint whispers, almost as though they were inside a church.

Sandro gazes up at the arcades, the columns, the windows. He is obviously filled with a painful sense of regret, resentful and bitter. He turns to look at the two young students who are deep in their studies and ignore his presence. But he is unable to ignore them; they plainly annoy him. In a certain sense, they humiliate him. He turns away and heads towards the exit, walking on the tip of his toes so as not to make any noise. Then he goes out, quietly closing the door behind him.

\*\*\*

In the hotel lobby, a maid is cleaning and dusting, and at the same time, singing little snatches from a popular romantic tune. The hotel manager, who is busy writing something in the register behind the desk, looks up and says:

**HOTEL MANAGER**

Go ahead, keep right on singing...

Disappointed, the maid immediately stops singing, and the manager resumes writing. But she quickly looks up again as she hears footsteps coming down the stairs. It is Claudia.

**HOTEL MANAGER**

(to Claudia)

Excuse me for interfering, but I've heard about that girl... Here in this place one gets to know about everything... That girl you're

looking for... Why don't you try asking at the youth hostel in Pergusa? Almost all the young girls traveling through here end up there.

Claudia is immediately interested to hear this bit of news and is about to ask for additional information. But she is suddenly distracted by Sandro who enters the lobby at that very moment.

**CLAUDIA**

I was just coming out to meet you. How come you're back so soon?

Sandro doesn't answer but merely shrugs his shoulders. Then he takes Claudia by the arm and gently leads her towards the stairway. He has a worried expression on his face and remains absolutely silent as he starts climbing the stairs. As they walk through the corridor, Claudia looks at him anxiously, wondering what is wrong.

**CLAUDIA**

Sandro ...What's the matter?

**SANDRO**

Nothing.

He opens the door to his room and ushers Claudia in. As soon as he enters, he takes off his jacket and throws it on a chair. Then he walks over to the window and closes the shutters. Then, without saying a word, he turns to Claudia, grabs her in his arms and squeezes her. Claudia smiles, and playfully yells "Ouch!" Then he goes to kiss her but Claudia tries to resist but doesn't succeed. This little struggle stimulates Sandro and is enough to make him forget all reserve. He drags Claudia on to the bed and forces her to lie down.

**CLAUDIA**

No, Sandro... Please...

**SANDRO**

Why?

**CLAUDIA**

No reason why...

But Sandro hugs her and kisses her again. This time, Claudia lets herself be kissed.

**CLAUDIA**

What's the matter with you?

Sandro only responds by kissing her again. Then Claudia yields. Sandro is angry and excited, as though he wanted to take his resentment out on Claudia.

**CLAUDIA**

Sandro, wait a moment, just one moment... You seem like an entirely different person ...

**SANDRO**

And aren't you pleased?... That way you'll have

a new kind of adventure.

Wounded, Claudia pushes him away with all her might, and exclaims:

**CLAUDIA**

What are you saying?

**SANDRO**

I was only joking, really... Can't I make a joke? And now you've got to tell me why you don't want to.

**CLAUDIA**

Oh, Sandro... I want everything you do. But...

She stops short, then turns aside and reaches out to touch his jacket on the chair, looking into the pockets, not with curiosity but with a sense of love. Sandro grabs her by the shoulders and forces her to turn around.

**SANDRO**

But what?

Claudia remains silent, then gets up from the bed, and in a subdued tone of voice, says:

**CLAUDIA**

Did the hotel manager speak to you about that place nearby?

**SANDRO**

Yes, she started to but I didn't feel like staying to listen to what she had to say. If we had to listen to everybody...

**CLAUDIA**

No, Sandro... We should go. Besides, we haven't been in touch with anybody. Not even with Anna's father. We should have at least sent a wire or telephoned... let's be fair, he must be feeling awfully lonely.

**SANDRO**

I don't doubt it. But at a time like this we're the least suitable persons to be with him. And as far as telephoning him... Who knows where he is?

There is a moment of silence, then Claudia starts heading towards the door.

**CLAUDIA**

Come, let's go. Pack your things, and I'll get mine ready too.

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It is evening. Sandro's car is pulling into the town of Taormina on its way to the San Domenico. It comes to a small square and passes by a group of men and women seated on the steps of an ancient ruin. They are dressed in evening clothes and are laughing and giggling. The car turns into the street of the San Domenico and stops in front of the hotel. A porter immediately comes out and opens the door. Claudia and Sandro get out and head towards the small courtyard that leads into the foyer.

The lobby is full of activity and alive with people dressed in formal attire. Claudia is clearly intrigued by everything she sees: the surroundings, the people, etc. Sandro approaches the reception desk as Claudia walks slightly ahead, anxious to see what is going on. The sound of music is heard coming from one of the halls at the other end of the lobby. There is obviously a party underway: further on, through a glass partition, couples are seen dancing. Suddenly, Claudia stops. Directly up ahead, she notices Patrizia. As soon as she see Claudia, Patrizia comes to greet her, smiling.

**PATRIZIA**

Well, I'm looking for somebody else and who do I find but you.

Claudia smiles and they both kiss each other on the cheek.

**CLAUDIA**

How are you?

Instead of answering, Patrizia takes Claudia by the hand and leads her over to a bench along the side of the wall and sits down. Claudia remains standing, somewhat annoyed by the crowd of people around her.

**CLAUDIA**

Shouldn't we try to find a quieter place?

**PATRIZIA**

Quieter? Oh, yes, of course.

Patrizia rises and leads Claudia out to a terrace that overlooks the entire bay which is dotted with lights. Claudia takes in the view but her attention is still focused on Patrizia. She waits from one moment to the next to have questions thrown at her, but Patrizia remains silent. So Claudia turns around and looks at her as though to say: Come on, say what you have to say and let's get it over with. But Patrizia smiles at her sweetly and only murmurs:

**PATRIZIA**

You look so wonderfully tanned.

Claudia feels relieved and presses Patrizia's hand, almost with a sense of renewed friendship. Sandro appears from behind the glass partition and comes out on the terrace to greet Patrizia.

**PATRIZIA**

And here's Sandro.

(he kisses her hand)

Why don't you two go upstairs and change?

**SANDRO**

Yes, we will.

They leave the terrace and go through one of the halls towards the corridor that leads to the rooms. Claudia walks ahead, with Patrizia and Sandro following slightly behind. The hall is still packed with people.

**PATRIZIA**

Did you manage to find good rooms?

**SANDRO**

They didn't seem too good.

**PATRIZIA**

You should have told Ettore. He always manages to get what he wants.

**SANDRO**

Ettore must be fed up with me by now.

**PATRIZIA**

Oh, no, not at all. And then you know very well that he'll forgive you anything; just as long as you admit to him that you're a worse driver than he is...

Claudia looks at Sandro, assured by Patrizia's reply. She remains thoughtful for a moment, then asks Patrizia:

**CLAUDIA**

How do you manage to put up with all this confusion? You always said people bore you.

**PATRIZIA**

You shouldn't always take me seriously. Actually, I'm used to it by now. First my mother and now my husband; both of them are like dynamos.

**SANDRO**

Your mother?

**PATRIZIA**

Yes, even I had a mother. She was part Austrian, but she was still my mother. My childhood was like a tennis match; they bounced me back and forth, here and there...

**CLAUDIA**

My childhood, instead, was a very sensible one.

**PATRIZIA**

What do you mean by sensible?

**CLAUDIA**

It means being without money.

Patrizia and Sandro burst out laughing, and Sandro reaches out and ruffles Claudia's hair. They have arrived in front of a room that is situated on the

ground floor, and are greeted by a hotel clerk who is waiting for them with keys in hand. The door is already open and Claudia is about to enter.

**PATRIZIA**

See you soon, then.

Sandro nods yes and Claudia waves so long, as Patrizia takes her leave. Claudia enters the room behind the clerk, and Sandro follows. Claudia stops in the middle of the room, as the clerk goes through his various duties with professional exactitude: he turns on the lights, draws the window curtains, checks to see if there are enough hangers in the wardrobe, then finally opens the door to the adjoining room, into which he disappears. All his movements seem completely automatic.

**SANDRO**

(commenting under his breath)

You see? Just like a robot.

Then Sandro enters the adjoining room, where the clerk has in the meantime turned on all the lamps and performed all the other little duties. Sandro starts to undo his tie. Claudia remains standing in the middle of the room, listening to all of Sandro's movements in the other room. A knock is heard at the door of Sandro's room and Sandro is heard saying:

**SANDRO**

Come in.

A few seconds later, the porter also enters Claudia's room with her baggage. She opens the valise and starts taking out her nightgown and other necessities. Her gestures are slow and imprecise because fatigue has overcome her. Several moments pass, and Sandro appears at the door in his pajamas.

**CLAUDIA**

Sandro, listen... Try not to get yourself too involved tomorrow.

**SANDRO**

Aren't you going to change?

**CLAUDIA**

You said you wanted to quit working for Ettore.

Sandro shrugs his shoulders without, apparently, giving much thought to Claudia's statement. He goes into the bathroom saying:

**SANDRO**

Sure, that's what I said...

The sound of the shower running is heard.

**SANDRO**

Wow, it's ice cold...

Claudia goes up to the door adjoining the two rooms and stops at the doorway of the bathroom that is situated between the two rooms.

**CLAUDIA**

Sandro, I'm not coming down.

**SANDRO**

Why?

**CLAUDIA**

I'm too sleepy.

**SANDRO**

Sleep is something one must learn to overcome. I learned how to do it when I was a child. I never slept. And I had friends who even slept less than I did. The one who went to bed first, paid a penalty. And we really didn't do anything. After seeing a movie, we'd go to a cafe and discuss things for a while... then we'd sit down on a bench somewhere... listen to some drunkard... watch them putting up posters or manifestoes...or look at the sheep passing by... or go for a stroll around the market place... Or else we'd go and wake up some girl in the neighborhood by standing in front of her window and calling out her name...

Claudia has been listening to Sandro with her head leaning against the door jamb, her eyes closed. As soon as Sandro stops, she goes back to her bed and starts undressing. Sandro comes out of the bathroom, wearing a bathrobe, and going over to Claudia, says in an affectionate tone:

**SANDRO**

You're that sleepy, eh? What time do expect to get up tomorrow?

**CLAUDIA**

Late, very late.

Claudia disappears into her bathroom, and Sandro returns to his room. After a while, his voice is heard.

**SANDRO**

Did you know that when I was a boy I wanted to be a diplomat? Can you imagine that! Me, a diplomat? It's strange but I never thought I'd be rich. I saw myself living in a rooming house, full of geniuses...

Claudia has slipped into her nightgown and returned to her room. Sandro is heard clearing his throat, and then continuing.

**SANDRO**

Instead, I have two apartments, one in Rome and one in Milan. As far as genius goes, it's a habit I've never formed. What do you think of that?

Sandro reappears at the doorway, already half dressed. Claudia slides into bed and stretches herself out under the covers.

**CLAUDIA**

I look at things differently... But maybe it's best we talk about it some other time. Do you mind turning off that light over there?

Sandro turns out the lamp on the table while Claudia closes the main switch. The room is enveloped in darkness. Sandro approaches the bed and bends over Claudia to kiss her.

**SANDRO**

Good night, my love.

**CLAUDIA**

Good night. Tell me that you love me.

**SANDRO**

I love you.

**CLAUDIA**

Tell me once more.

**SANDRO**

I don't love you.

**CLAUDIA**

(smiling)

I deserve it.

Sandro goes towards the door, then turns and smiles.

**SANDRO**

That's not true. I love you.

He returns to his room, closing the door behind him. He seems somewhat meditative, as though the little discourse he has just delivered has in some way touched him deeply. He also seems a little sad. Then he puts on his tie and jacket, lights up a cigarette, and goes to the door.

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Sandro comes out of his room and walks along through the corridors, heading towards the reception halls down at the other end. Other persons are walking up and down the corridor in both directions.

Sandro's attention is attracted by the figure of a woman who is coming his way at a rather quick pace. She is wrapped in a tight-fitting evening dress that emphasizes the various harmonious parts of her body. Sandro looks at her. He seems to recognize her but isn't quite sure who it is. The girl passes alongside of him and apparently she too has the same impression, for she gives him a look that lasts much longer than it normally would between two complete strangers. She stops in front of a door but before entering, she casts another glance at Sandro, who suddenly recalls that she is the same woman who had almost provoked a riot in the streets of Messina and who was forced to take refuge in a men's shop. There is a moment of hesitation, then the girl opens the door and disappears into the room. Sandro continues on

ahead until he reaches the bar, which is still very crowded.

Evening clothes of all kinds. Shiny silks. Jewels dangling from wrists, necks and ears that are either white or bronzed by the sun. Shoes of silver or lustrous black. Headdresses of many women -- high, cropped or short and bobbed. Men with hair well groomed but also frequently mussed. A vast, tumultuous wave of people, all wealthy and respectable, talking, laughing and carrying on as though the whole wide world was right there and everybody in it was like them.

Snatches of witticisms. Faces of passing people. Hands reaching out for glasses. The expressions on the face of the barman, smiling and indifferent. The sad, sullen face of the cloakroom attendant. The dumbfounded look on the face of a thirteen-year-old elevator boy.

Sandro feels very much at home in this milieu. One thinks so little, forgets so easily. And things are so conveniently ignored, beginning with one's own self. Sandro moves through the crowd, here and there. Standing next to the orchestra is a girl in black pants, singing strange songs in a soft, suggestive voice.

Sandro encounters Ettore. As soon as he sees Sandro, Ettore comes over and places an arm around his shoulder, almost in the form of an embrace.

**ETTORE**

Well, finally... Come, I'll introduce you to my friends.

**SANDRO**

I want to take a look around first... I'll join you later.

**ETTORE**

Say, I hope it's understood that starting tomorrow morning, I'll need to have you around. If you don't give me some figures to work with, how can I proceed?

Sandro agrees with a nod of his head. But he is thoughtful and somewhat saddened. As Ettore returns to his friends with whom he had been speaking and laughing, Sandro looks at him almost with a sense of rage.

Then he goes back to the bar and orders something to drink. He is not aware that the girl from Messina is just a few yards away and is watching him. She is extremely tanned, extremely voluptuous, and extremely beautiful.

Sandro moves away from the bar with the glass in his hand. He passes in front of a semi-dark room and takes a peek inside: a television set is turned on but nobody is watching it. Sandro is restless. He comes to a terrace and stops to look down at the illuminated docks below. The headlights of cars passing by fan out across the road that runs along the shore of the sea. With an angry gesture, Sandro finishes his drink, gulping the whiskey down in one fast swallow. He squeezes the empty glass in his hand as though he had wanted to crush it.

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The early rays of dawn are faintly seen coming through a window at the far end of the corridor. Claudia comes rushing out of her room and runs over to Patrizia's door. She knocks, then without waiting for a response, she enters.

**CLAUDIA**

Patrizia... Patrizia ... Where's Ettore?

**PATRIZIA**

I imagine he must be inside sleeping.

**CLAUDIA**

Would you please see if Sandro is with him?  
He's not in his room. I'm sorry to disturb you.

Patrizia gets up out of bed and goes into the adjoining room.

**PATRIZIA**

Ettore...

**ETTORE**

What is it?

**PATRIZIA**

Nothing, nothing at all. I was just looking for Sandro.

**ETTORE**

And you expect to find him in here? Go and ask Claudia.

**PATRIZIA**

Yes, yes, of course.

She returns to her room.

**CLAUDIA**

Patrizia, I'm afraid.

**PATRIZIA**

More or less, we are all afraid. Especially at night.

**CLAUDIA**

I'm afraid that Anna has come back. I feel she's back, and that they're together.

**PATRIZIA**

But what's gotten into you?... We would have known. Sandro must be out in the garden somewhere, taking a breath of fresh air, or watching the break of dawn. It would be a lovely surprise indeed if he turned out to be the sentimental type.

Claudia sinks down into a chair, weak and exhausted.

**PATRIZIA**

Now, listen. For God's sake, try not to let yourself become obsessed with that idea. Go to your room and get back into bed.

**CLAUDIA**

Just several days ago, the thought of Anna being dead would have made me sick. And now, I don't even cry, I'm afraid she might be alive. Everything is becoming so damned simple and easy, even to deprive one's self of pain and suffering.

**PATRIZIA**

You should never wish to get melodramatic over anything.

**CLAUDIA**

Yes, you're right. I'm sick and tired of being like that.

Claudia gets up and leaves the room. She continues walking down along the corridor, checking here and there. But the hotel is deserted. There are still a few lights on in the reception hall but not enough to illuminate the place adequately. Finally, she reaches the main hall and stops. The only signs of last night's party is a certain disorder in the placement of the armchairs and ashtrays filled with cigarette butts. Even the main hall seems completely deserted. But all of a sudden, Claudia becomes aware of something moving on a sofa at the far end of the room. She takes a few steps, walking silently over the thick carpet, so as to get a better look. There seems to be a slight movement among what appears to be a jumbled pile of male and female clothes, partly hidden from view by the back of the sofa. Claudia goes up still closer because she is not able to see clearly what or who it is. Only that she has the impression of having seen that suit before... A man's suit. She is now able to distinguish what it is: a couple embracing and kissing.

Claudia approaches still closer. She is now just a few steps away. Little by little, as she advances, her face takes on such a painful look of astonishment that she appears almost petrified. She hesitates and bumps up against a little table that makes a small noise. The couple on the sofa come out of their embrace and look up. The man is Sandro; the woman is the girl from Messina. Sandro looks at Claudia as though he were filled with terror. The girl, instead, seems quite amused. Claudia remains for a moment, staring at them as if she can't believe her own eyes, and is incapable of making any move. Then, she abruptly turns away and starts running. She runs through the main hall, the reception room, the courtyard, and out into the street.

There is not a soul to be seen. No sound. The day is breaking clear and serene.

Claudia comes over to a bench with its paint all peeling off, but she doesn't sit down. Transfixed, and with her eyes almost wide open, she stares out at the sea, and at the waves which are also a mystery unto themselves.

Footsteps are heard approaching from behind, but Claudia doesn't even bother to turn. It seems that nothing could distract her from that painful state of shock which is written all over her face. A young laborer in overalls,

carrying a small bundle under his arm, passes by, glancing at her with a look of curiosity. He walks a few paces ahead, then turns around to look at her again as though she were some kind of strange creature.

The sound of footsteps dies down in the distance, and everything is silent once more. There is only the gentle lapping of the waves as they roll up against the shore. Claudia is completely oblivious to the scene. Several birds swoop down emitting their small cries. A sudden but almost imperceptible sea breeze ripples Claudia's hair.

Other footsteps are heard approaching: slow, heavy. Claudia is still not stirred from her thoughtful, trance-like state. The footsteps come to a halt directly behind her. It is Sandro. He appears thoroughly crestfallen. He doesn't even have enough courage to look at Claudia. His face is worn and disfigured, like that of a tired old man. And he lets himself fall limp onto the bench. They both remain completely motionless, without looking at each other. And detached: Claudia standing, Sandro seated. Behind them, the skeleton of cement. Further off, the sea.

Gradually, Claudia turns her head towards Sandro. Her eyes are filled with tears. She looks down upon him as though he were something that greatly pained her. She moves up closer to the bench. Sandro doesn't budge an inch. Claudia reaches out to him with her hand, then slowly, gently, and with an overwhelming sense of desperation, she caresses his hair.