

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 fiancé.

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 café. 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.  
THE END.