

She's quite capable of doing you a very nasty article... You really ought to see her!

SUPERINTENDENT: But what about your Inquiry?

MANIAC: It can wait. Haven't you realised yet that you and I are all in the same boat? And it's best to have people like that with us, not against us, believe me!

SUPERINTENDENT: Oh alright. (*Turning to the INSPECTOR IN THE SPORTS JACKET*) Have her sent up.

SPORTS JACKET: Send her up to my office.

He puts the phone down.

SUPERINTENDENT: Will you be leaving now?

MANIAC: Wouldn't dream of it... I'm not a man to abandon my friends. Specially not at times of danger!

SPORTS JACKET and SUPERINTENDENT: You're staying?

SUPERINTENDENT: Who are you going to say you are, though? If the journalist finds out who you really are, and why you're here in the first place, she's going to splash it all over the front page! Why don't you just come out with it – you're out to destroy us!

MANIAC: No, don't worry, I'm not out to destroy you at all. She won't have the first idea who I really am.

SPORTS JACKET: She won't?

MANIAC: No, of course not. I could just be someone else... It'd be child's play for me, believe me. Criminal psychopathologist... Head of Interpol... Head of forensic... Take your pick... Any time the journalist gets you in a tight corner with a particularly nasty question, you just give me a wink and I'll join in... The important thing is to keep you two in the clear.

SUPERINTENDENT: This is very good of you, your Honour...

He shakes his hand emotionally.

MANIAC: You'd better stop calling me 'your Honour'. As from this moment I am Captain Marcantonio Banzi Piccinni, from the Forensic Department... OK?

SPORTS JACKET: But there's a real Captain Banzi Piccinni... He works out of Rome...

MANIAC: Precisely. That way, if the journalist writes something we don't like, it'll be a cinch to show that she made it all up... We simply call in the real Captain Piccinni from Rome.

SPORTS JACKET: That's amazing... it's brilliant! Do you really think you can do the part of the Captain?

MANIAC: Have no fear – during the War I was an army chaplain with the bersaglieri.

He opens his bag and rummages around in it.

SUPERINTENDENT: Shush! Here she is! (*The JOURNALIST enters*) Ah, Miss Feletti, do come in.

JOURNALIST: Good morning. Which of you gentlemen is the Superintendent?

SUPERINTENDENT: I am. Pleased to meet you. What a shame we've only ever met on the phone...

JOURNALIST: How do you do. The officer at the front door was giving me a hard time...

SUPERINTENDENT: I'm sorry – all my fault – I forgot to tell him you were coming. May I introduce you to my colleagues here... Constable Pisani; the inspector in charge of this office...

JOURNALIST: Very pleased to meet you.

SPORTS JACKET: The pleasure is all mine... Miss.

He gives her a military handshake.

JOURNALIST: Ouch, that hurt!

SPORTS JACKET: I'm sorry...

SUPERINTENDENT: (*Pointing to the MANIAC who is busy fiddling around*) ...and finally Captain... Captain?!

MANIAC: ...A 'raptus'.

CONSTABLE: A 'raptus'?

MANIAC: Yes. They were trying to throw themselves out of the window.

CONSTABLE: Them too?

MANIAC: Yes, but not a word to the press, eh!

CONSTABLE: No, sir.

SPORTS JACKET: It's not true, though – it was you, your Honour, you were trying...

SUPERINTENDENT: Exactly.

CONSTABLE: You were trying to throw yourself out, your Honour?

SUPERINTENDENT: No, he was doing the pushing.

MANIAC: It's true, it's true: I drove them to it. And they were in such a desperate state that they were almost ready to go... When a person is desperate, it takes practically nothing...

CONSTABLE: I know, sir!

MANIAC: And now look at them, they're still in a panic... Ooh, look at those long faces!

CONSTABLE: (*Excited at being brought into the conversation by the JUDGE*) Yes, Sir, up shit creek without a paddle, you might say...

SUPERINTENDENT: Constable!

CONSTABLE: I'm sorry, I meant, er, down the pan...

MANIAC: So flush the chain, and away we go...! Cheer up, gentlemen!

SUPERINTENDENT: It's all very well for you... If you were in our position... Do you know what, there was a moment just then when... I was actually almost about to throw myself out!

CONSTABLE: Throw yourself out, Sir? You yourself, personally?

SPORTS JACKET: Yes. Me too!

MANIAC: You see, you see, Superintendent – amazing, the effect of a 'raptus'! And whose fault would you say it was?

SUPERINTENDENT: Those bastards in the government... Who else? ...First they give you a free hand... 'Let's have a bit of repression, create a climate of subversion, the threat of social disorder...'

SPORTS JACKET: You bend over backwards for them, and then...

MANIAC: No, no, no... not at all... The fault would have been entirely mine!

SUPERINTENDENT: Yours? Why?

MANIAC: Because not a word of what I said was true! I made it all up!

SUPERINTENDENT: What do you mean? You mean to say that down in Rome they're not really out to get us?

MANIAC: Never even crossed their minds.

SUPERINTENDENT: And what about the 'stack of evidence' against us?

MANIAC: Doesn't exist.

SPORTS JACKET: And the business about the Ministry wanting our heads on the block?

MANIAC: All lies: they all love you, down in Rome. They think the sun shines out of your you-know-whats.

SUPERINTENDENT: You're not just having us on, are you?

MANIAC: Not at all! The government thinks you're entirely wonderful! And by the way, the English proverb about the lord killing his dogs? I made that up too. Whoever heard of a lord killing his dogs to satisfy a peasant? If anything, it'd be the other way round! And if a dog happened to die in the fray, the king would immediately send its owner a wreath and a telegram of condolence.

The INSPECTOR IN THE SPORTS JACKET goes to say

the pair of you. You're done for: the Ministry of Justice has decided that you must be made an example of, and that you must be dealt with with the full severity of the law, so as to restore the public's lost faith in the police.!

SUPERINTENDENT: What? I don't believe it!

SPORTS JACKET: How could they...?

MANIAC: It's true, I'm afraid: your careers are in tatters! Blame it on politics, friends! At the start you served a useful function: something had to be done to stop all the strikes... So they decided to start a witch-hunt against the Left. But now things have gone a bit too far... People have got very upset about the death of our defenestrated anarchist... they want someone's head on the block, and the government's going to give them – *yours!*

SUPERINTENDENT: Ours?!

SPORTS JACKET: That's right!

MANIAC: There's an old English proverb that says: 'The Lord of the Manor set his mastiffs on the peasants... The peasants complained to the King, so the Lord of the Manor went and killed his dogs, to make amends.'

SUPERINTENDENT: And you really think...

MANIAC: Well, who am I, if not your executioner?

SPORTS JACKET: What a poxy job!

SUPERINTENDENT: I've been set up... and I know who did it... Ha, he's going to pay for this!

MANIAC: I'd say a lot of people are going to be very happy to see you two get your come-uppance...

SPORTS JACKET: They'll make mincemeat of us! Can you imagine the headlines? The humiliation... the sniggering... the jokes behind our backs...

SUPERINTENDENT: Everyone turning their backs on us, pretending they don't know us... They won't even give us a job as car park attendants by the time we're finished!

SPORTS JACKET: What a bastard world!

MANIAC: No – what a bastard government!

SUPERINTENDENT: Your Honour, you're going to have to advise us. What do we do now?

MANIAC: How should I know?

SPORTS JACKET: Yes – what would *you* advise?

MANIAC: If I were in your shoes...

SUPERINTENDENT: Yes?

MANIAC: I'd throw myself out of the window!

SPORTS JACKET and SUPERINTENDENT: What?!

MANIAC: You asked my opinion... the way things are looking... rather than have to endure the humiliation... Take my advice, jump! Why wait? Wait for what? What's left for you in this lousy world? Call this living? Bastard world, bastard government... Bastard bloody everything! Jump!

He hauls them over to the window.

SUPERINTENDENT: No, your Honour, what are you doing? There's still hope!

MANIAC: There's *no* hope, you're done for... Understand...? Done for!! Jump!

SUPERINTENDENT and SPORTS JACKET: Help! No, stop...! Don't push!

MANIAC: I'm not pushing. You've been seized by a 'raptus'!

He forces them both up onto the window ledge and pushes them, trying to get them to jump. Enter the CONSTABLE who had gone out at the start of the interrogation.

CONSTABLE: What's happening, Sir?

MANIAC: (*Letting go of them*) Ha, ha, nothing. Everything's fine... Isn't it, Inspector? Eh, Superintendent? Come on, put the officer's mind at rest.

SUPERINTENDENT: (*He comes down, from the window-sill, shaking*) It's...er... alright... relax... It was only...

the proceedings, Captain?

MANIAC: Not at all... Just humming. And if you'll allow me, I have a question for you too, Miss Feletti... What do you take us for – a TV ad for washing powder...? You're trying to suggest that we do the 'window test' with every anarchist we get our hands on?

JOURNALIST: No doubt about it, you have a wonderful way with words, Captain.

SPORTS JACKET: Thanks... You got me out of a tight spot, there...

He slaps the MANIAC on the back.

MANIAC: Go easy with the back-slapping, Inspector... I have a glass eye!!

He points to his black patch.

SPORTS JACKET: A glass eye?

MANIAC: And mind how you shake my hand. It's artificial.

JOURNALIST: While we're on the subject of windows, in among the papers handed over by the judge who adjourned the inquest there's no sign of the forensic report on the trajectory of the fall.

SUPERINTENDENT: What trajectory of what fall?

JOURNALIST: The trajectory of the fall of our alleged suicide.

SUPERINTENDENT: What use would that be?

JOURNALIST: It would enable us to tell whether the anarchist was alive or dead at the moment that he came out of the window. In other words, whether he came out with a bit of impetus, or whether he just slithered down the wall, as appears to have been the case... Also whether there were any broken bones in his arms and hands (which there were not – which suggests that the alleged suicide did not put his hands out in order to protect himself at the moment of impact – a gesture that, if he had been conscious, would have been normal and absolutely instinctive...)

SPORTS JACKET: Yes, but you're forgetting that we're dealing with someone who threw himself out because he *wanted* to die!

MANIAC: Doesn't mean a thing. Here, unfortunately, I have to say the lady is right... As you see, I am entirely objective. There have been many experiments done on this front: they've taken potential suicides, thrown them out of windows, and they found that right at the last moment all of them, zap... put their hands out to protect themselves!

SUPERINTENDENT: A fine support you're turning out to be... You're mad!

MANIAC: That's right. Who told you?

JOURNALIST: But the most disturbing detail, on which I would appreciate an explanation, is the fact that, again among the materials handed over by the judge who shelved the inquest, there is no sign of the cassette tape that recorded the precise time of the phone call that rang for the ambulance... a phone call which came from here, at Central Police Headquarters, and which, according to the people at the ambulance station, occurred at two minutes before midnight.

At the same time, the journalists who were present at the scene all stated that the fall happened at precisely three minutes past midnight... In other words, the ambulance was called five minutes before the anarchist went out of the window. Could any of you explain this curious discrepancy?

MANIAC: Well... we quite often call an ambulance in advance, just in case... Because one never knows, does one... And as you see, sometimes it turns out to be a good idea.

SPORTS JACKET: (*Slapping him on the back*) Well done!

MANIAC: The eye – watch out...!

SUPERINTENDENT: I don't quite see what you're accusing me of. Is it a crime all of a sudden, to plan ahead? A mere

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Your two hundred thousand lire was pretty spot-on too!

MANIAC: But Inspector, I had to... it was for his own good!

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Ah, for his own good, eh? So a big bill's part of the cure?

MANIAC: Sure! If I hadn't stung him for two hundred thousand, do you really think the poor bastard, and more particularly his family, would have been satisfied? If I'd asked for a mere fifty thousand, they'd have thought: 'He can't be a lot of use. Maybe he's not a real professor. Must be newly qualified...' But this way, it knocked them sideways and they thought: 'Who is this man? God Almighty?' And off they went, happy... They even kissed my hand... 'Thank you, Professor...' Kissy-kissy-kissy.

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: I'll say this – you run a good line in patter!

MANIAC: It's true, though, Inspector. Even Freud says: 'Be you sick, be you ill, the best cure is a big fat bill – for the patient *and* for the doctor!'

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Now, let's take a look at your visiting card... (*He shows the card*) If I'm not mistaken, it says here: Professor Antonio Rabbi, psychiatrist. Formerly lecturer at the University of Padova... Come on, now, talk your way out of that one...!

MANIAC: First of all, I really am a lecturer... I teach drawing, actually... Decorative, free-hand, I do evening classes at the Church of the Holy Redeemer...

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: I'm impressed, my compliments! But it says here: 'Psychiatrist'!

MANIAC: Well done – but after the full stop! Are you familiar with the rules of grammar and punctuation? Read it properly: Professor Antonio Rabbi. Full stop. Then there's a capital P. Psychiatrist! Now look, you can't tell me it's going under false pretences to say: 'psychiatrist.' I presume you're familiar with the grammar of the Italian language? Yes? Well in that case you should know that if a

person writes 'archaeologist' it doesn't mean he's studied – it's like saying 'stamp collector', 'vegetarian', 'chronic arthritic'...

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Yes, but what about this: 'Formerly lecturer at the University of Padova'?

MANIAC: I'm sorry, now *you're* the one trading under false pretences: you just told me that you knew the rules of grammar and punctuation, and now it turns out that you can't even read properly...

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: I can't even *what...?*!

MANIAC: Didn't you see the comma after the 'formerly'?

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Oh yes... You're right. I didn't notice it.

MANIAC: So you didn't notice it! You didn't notice it, and just for that you'd send an innocent man to prison?

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: You're really mental, you know... What's a comma got to do with anything?

MANIAC: Nothing, for someone who knows nothing about grammar...! I think you should come clean – I want to see your school reports... Who was responsible for promoting you... (*The INSPECTOR tries to interrupt him*) Let me finish...! Remember, the comma is the key to everything! If there's a comma after the 'formerly', the whole meaning of the phrase changes.

The comma indicates a pause for breath... a brief hiatus... because 'the comma always indicates a change of intentionality.' So it goes like this: 'Formerly', and here we could do with a sarcastic sneer, and if you want to add an ironic chuckle, all the better! 'Formerly...' (*He grimaces and gives a high-pitched laugh*) 'Lecturer at the University, another comma, of Padova...' It's like it's saying: 'Come on, what do you take me for... Pull the other one... Only an idiot would fall for that!

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: So I'm an idiot, am I?

MANIAC: No, you're just a bit short on grammar... I could

ACT ONE

Scene One

An ordinary room at central police headquarters. A desk, a filing cabinet, a cupboard, a few chairs and a coat-stand on which are hanging a dark overcoat and a black hat. There are also a typewriter, a telephone, a window, and a door on either side of the stage. On-stage, INSPECTOR BERTOZZO and a POLICE CONSTABLE are engaged in interrogating a man: the MANIAC. [1]

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: *(As he flicks through a pile of paperwork, he turns to the MANIAC, who is seated, calm and relaxed)* Ha, so this isn't the first time you've passed yourself off as someone else! Here it says that you've been caught twice posing as a surgeon, once as a captain in the bersaglieri... three times as a bishop... once as a marine engineer... in all you've been arrested... let's see... two plus three, five... one, two... three... eleven times in all... So this makes the twelfth.

MANIAC: Correct. Arrested twelve times... But I must point out, Inspector, arrested, but never found guilty... My record is clean!

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Well... I can't imagine how you've managed to duck out of it every time... But I can assure you you're going to get a dirty record *this time*: you can count on it!

MANIAC: I know how you feel, Inspector: a spotless record just waiting to be sullied – it would make anyone's mouth water.

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Very funny... According to your charge sheet, you were arrested while passing yourself off as a psychiatrist, a lecturer, formerly teaching at the University of Padova... Trading under false pretences... You do realise that you could go to prison for that?

MANIAC: Certainly – false pretences perpetrated by a *sane* person. But I'm mad, Inspector: certified mad! Look, I've got my medical record, here: sixteen times in the nuthouse... and always for the same reason. I have a thing about dreaming up characters and then acting them out. It's called 'histrionomania' – comes from the Latin *histriones*, meaning 'actor'. I'm a sort of amateur performance artist. With the difference that I go for 'Théâtre Vérité' – my fellow performers need to be real people, but people who don't realise that they're in my plays. Which is just as well, 'cos I've got no money and couldn't pay them anyway... I applied to the Arts Council for a grant, but since I don't have political backing...

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: You had the nerve to charge two hundred thousand lire for a single consultation...

CONSTABLE: *(Standing behind the MANIAC)* Jesus!

MANIAC: A reasonable rate for any self-respecting psychiatrist... Sixteen years studying before you qualify!

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO: Sure, but when did *you* ever study psychiatry?

MANIAC: Sixteen years I've studied... Thousands of lunatics like myself... day after day... And at night too! Because, unlike your normal psychiatrist, I slept with them... Often as not, three to a bed, because there's always a shortage of beds these days.

Anyway, feel free to check. I think you'll find that my diagnosis for the poor schizophrenic I was arrested for was spot-on.

MANIAC: Here we are... (*When he stands up, we see that he is wearing a false moustache, a black patch over one eye, and a brown leather glove on one hand. The SUPERINTENDENT is momentarily lost for words, so the MANIAC does his own introductions*) Captain Marcantonio Banzi Piccinni, of the Central Forensic Department. Please excuse the stiff handshake... Wooden, don't you know... Souvenir of the Nicaragua campaign – ex-parachutist with the Contras, working with the CIA... Make yourself at home, Miss.

SUPERINTENDENT: Would you like something to drink?

JOURNALIST: No thank you... If you don't mind, I'd like to start right away... I'm afraid I'm in a bit of a rush. Unfortunately my article has to be in tonight in time for the morning edition.

SUPERINTENDENT: Fine, as you like. We're ready, so let's get started.

JOURNALIST: I have a few questions I'd like to ask. (*She reads from her notebook*) The first is to you, Inspector, and you'll have to excuse me if it's a bit provocative... If you don't mind, I use a tape-recorder... unless you object, that is...

She takes a tape-recorder from her handbag.

SPORTS JACKET: Well, actually... we don't...

MANIAC: Absolutely no problem – go ahead... (*To the INSPECTOR IN THE SPORTS JACKET*) Rule Number Two: Never say no.

SPORTS JACKET: But supposing something slips out... If we want to deny it, she'll have the proof...

JOURNALIST: Excuse me, gents, is there a problem?

MANIAC: (*As if everything is fine*) No, no, not at all... The Inspector was just telling me what a remarkable woman you are – brave, fearless, progressive, dedicated to the cause of truth and justice... come what may!

JOURNALIST: The Inspector is too generous...

SPORTS JACKET: So, fire away.

JOURNALIST: Why is it that you're known as 'The Window-Straddler'?

SPORTS JACKET: The Window-Straddler? Me?

JOURNALIST: Yes. 'Inspector Window-Straddler'.

SPORTS JACKET: And who, might I ask, calls me that?

JOURNALIST: I have here a photocopy of a letter from a young anarchist in San Vittore prison. He was remanded in custody the same week that the anarchist fell to his death, and he says some interesting things about you, Inspector... And about this very room.

SPORTS JACKET: Oh yes? And what does he have to say?

JOURNALIST: (*Reading*) 'The Inspector on the fourth floor forced me to sit on the window-sill with my legs hanging over the edge, and then he started provoking me: "Go on, throw yourself out," and insulting me... "Why don't you jump...? Too scared, eh? Go on, get it over with! What are you waiting for?" I had to grit my teeth and hold on tight, because I really was on the point of jumping...'

MANIAC: Excellent. It reads like something out of a Hitchcock film.

JOURNALIST: Please, Captain... my question was directed to the Inspector, not to you... How do you reply to that?

She reaches the microphone in the direction of the INSPECTOR IN THE SPORTS JACKET.

MANIAC: (*Sotto voce, to the INSPECTOR*) Cool, calm and collected!

SPORTS JACKET: I have nothing to say to that... And in fact I would like to ask *you* a question: in all sincerity, do you really think that I had the railwayman sitting across the window too?

MANIAC: Sssh – don't fall for it. (*He hums to himself*) Here she goes, swinging low, bye, bye... vulture...

JOURNALIST: Am I right in thinking you're trying to disrupt