

The table has on it coffee cups of all shapes, sizes and patterns and a large copper bowl with water in it.

As the curtain rises we hear shrill voices raised in argument outside some distance away. Standing by the table, washing coffee cups and placing them neatly on the table, is MARIA ROSARIA. She is a girl of about nineteen, dressed very plainly and taking no notice whatsoever of the commotion outside, which little by little becomes louder and louder and in which the voice of her mother, AMALIA, predominates.

AMEDEO enters from door left, scratching and yawning, having obviously just woken up. He is a young man in his early twenties, slim, dark-skinned, pleasant of manner and not too robust. He wears a faded, woollen, well-darned vest and carries a scrap of damp towel!

AMEDEO God, I could murder a coffee.

MARIA It's not ready yet.

AMEDEO Why not?

MARIA Because I'm waiting for the water to boil.
AMEDEO Oh, great. Terrific. You know I sometimes feel that one day – one day quite soon – there's an outside chance that I'll wake up feeling like a genuine, one hundred per cent human being. Is mother around?

MARIA She's out.

AMEDEO What about father?

MARIA He's still asleep.

(From the cubicle room we hear GENNARO's sleepy voice)

GENNARO *(off)* Asleep? Me asleep? Who's asleep? God almighty, when does anyone ever get chance to sleep in this mad house?

(In the alleyway outside the quarrel becomes louder. AMALIA's voice predominates.)

Listen to it. Will you listen to that din? Struth, it's like a bloody battlefield out there.

AMEDEO *(to MARIA)* What's it all about?

MARIA It's mother and Donna Vincenza at it again.

AMEDEO Oh God, say no more. Say no more.

MARIA They're only talking.

GENNARO *(off)* Talking? You call that talking? Ye Gods, they're ripping great hunks out of each other. They're gorging on each other's flesh. You can hear the blood flowing.

AMEDEO *(wearily)* Why do they always have to be having argie-bargies about something that happened weeks and weeks ago?

MARIA Simple. Because Donna Vincenza's a two-faced old bitch.

AMEDEO Aye, you're right there.

MARIA Course I am. Donna Vincenza! Greedy old crone. How many times does she come round here all sweetness and light, and mother makes her a nice cup of coffee and slips her little goodies for her daughter – a couple of eggs here, a drop of cream there, right? And then as soon as she finds out where we get our coffee from the old bitch is tear-arsing off to get some for herself. And then what happens? The punters all go round to her place for their coffee, don't they? Oh yes, it's a longer walk, but her coffee is half a lira cheaper than ours.

GENNARO *(off)* Bloody old ratbag.

MARIA And that's not all she's up to. The old bag's only going round now telling everyone we put chitcory in our coffee.

GENNARO *(off)* Oi, hold on. Hold your horses, eh? Not so much of the 'our' if you don't mind. This coffee you and your mother make has got bugger all to do with me. It's out of my province, is that coffee of yours. If the cops

come bursting in and catch you red-handed with it, then that's your business. Don't drag me into it.

MARIA If it was left to you, we'd all be starving.

GENNARO (*off*) Wrong, missy. Wrong. If it was left to me, we'd all be living like honest people.

MARIA And what's so dishonest about selling coffee?

AMEDEO Too bloody true. If we didn't do it, there'd be plenty of others bursting their boilers to jump on the bandwagon. You better believe it, mate. Look at Donna Vincenza.

GENNARO (*off*) Listen to me, son. Let me tell you something.

AMEDEO What?

GENNARO (*off*) Last week – only last week – someone round here threw himself out of a third floor window.

AMEDEO So what's that got to do with me?

GENNARO (*off*) Plenty. You want to try doing it yourself some time.

AMEDEO Ach, there's no point talking to you. You're pots for rags, you are. You don't understand nothing. Not a dicky bird. You're living on a different planet, you are.

(MARTA motions for him to ignore GENNARO. He shrugs his shoulders)

All right, all right. I suppose he might have a point.

GENNARO (*off*) Oh, might he? Well, well, you're changing your tune, aren't you? I shouldn't bother. I know your sister's told you to pay no attention to me. And she's right. Well, I'm just a simple old fogey, aren't I? I don't understand nothing. Poor old sod, you've got to feel sorry for him, haven't you? Well, listen to me, my little chucky eggs. You're the ones I feel sorry for. You lot. Dear God above, what a crazy, mixed-up generation. (*Pause*) Tell me something. Just tell me this. You know that coffee you

sell to the punters for three lire a cup? Well, has it occurred to you where the black marketeers get it from? I'll tell you. They get it from the clinics and the hospitals and the infirmaries and the children's wards and the . . .

AMEDEO Give over, father. Give it a rest. Talk about getting out of your depth. You're fifteen feet under, mate, and your mouth's full of shit. You're talking a load of old cobbler. What clinics? What infirmaries? They don't get a sniff of coffee. So how can they sell it, if they haven't got none? You've got to face facts, mate. Who was it came round here the other day offering mother five kilos of coffee at seventy lire a kilo? You know perfectly well who it was. Some big, fat, bloated Fascist high-up. Course it was. And the only reason mother didn't buy it was because she didn't know who it was. For all she knew it could have been a trap – a typical police fit-up. Course it could. We're talking about facts here. We're talking about the high-ups who should be setting a good example to poor, ignorant, starving scum like us. Good example my backside. All they are is a load of thieves and crooks. So you look at them in their smart suits and their swanky cars and you say to yourself – you know, mate, you've got the right idea. You're on top of the world, aren't you? You've got a wallet full of dosh and a great big, fat, groaning belly. And what about me? I'm dying of starvation. So what's the answer? Simple. What's good enough for you, is good enough for me. Right? Let's all steal. Right? What's yours is mine. Everyone for himself. Everyone steal. Right?

GENNARO (*off*) Oh no. Oh no, you don't, my son. As long as you live in this house you do not steal. Understand me? You never ever steal. You don't even think of stealing. You don't even mention the word.

AMEDEO All right, all right, keep your wool on. I was