

isn't. I mean to say, it's . . . it's . . . (Silence. He changes the subject) Having a shave, are you, Don Gennaro?

GENNARO Having a shave? Me? Good God, no. I'm having a crap, aren't I?

FEDERICO Sorry. I seem to have said the wrong thing.

GENNARO Look, mate, instead of asking bloody stupid questions, why not save your breath and speak when you're spoken to?

FEDERICO Yes. Right. (Pause) What do you think of the war then, Don Gennaro? How do you think things are going?

GENNARO Don't try that on with me, son. I know what you're up to. You're trying to take a rise out of me, aren't you?

FEDERICO No, I'm not.

GENNARO Yes, you are. Well, you just pin back your lugholes and listen to me. All I'll say about the war is this — as far as I'm concerned, if it was left to me and I was the Minister of Whatshisname in charge, I'd have the whole bloody lot sorted out tomorrow.

FEDERICO (leading him on) Course you would, Don Gennaro. No doubt about it. I mean, look at all these shortages. You'd soon get shut of them, wouldn't you?

GENNARO Shortages, shortages? What shortages? There aren't any shortages. There's an ample sufficiency for everyone. Flour, oil, butter, cheese, clothes and sundry clobber like that — it's the same old story all over again ad infinitum.

FEDERICO What old story, Don Gennaro?

GENNARO (continuing to shove) Ach, you're too young to remember. But we had exactly the same set up in the last war. Exactly the same — things in short supply, prices going through the roof, everything disappearing under

the counter. And why? Why do you think people start wars in the first place?

FEDERICO I don't know.

GENNARO To make everything disappear, cloth ears.

(They laugh, half in agreement, half in mockery. GENNARO stops shoving as he gets carried away by his argument)

It's true, it's true. They make everything disappear, and then what do they do? They slap on your price control. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Blindingly obvious. 'Price control — that's the answer, lads,' they say. Bollocks. Price control always has been, always will be the ruin of mankind. It's easy to talk about it. Course it is. 'I know what we'll do,' they say. 'We'll slap on price control, and we're home and dry.' Well, just you listen to me, my friends, price control is the root of all evil. The minute you bring it in, what do you do? You play straight into the hands of the shopkeepers and wholesalers. Oh yes, right into their sticky, greedy, grasping hands. It's an open invitation for them to line their pockets. It's like a conjuring trick. Now you see it, now you don't. So what's the ordinary man in the street left with? I'll tell you. He's got three choices — die of starvation, go on the parish or end up in prison. Do you know what I'd do, if I had any say in the matter? I'd bring in an edict. That's right. I'd bring in an edict with immediate — and I do mean immediate — an edict with immediate effect.

(He is interrupted by the arrival from the street of ERICO and PEPE. They are taxi drivers who are out of work because of traffic restrictions. ERICO is strikingly handsome in a Neapolitan sort of way. He is in his mid thirties, dark-skinned and wavy-haired. He is strong and well-built with alert eyes. He's a likeable wide boy, good-humoured and rather patronisingly self-