



Saturn

The Cenci Case

Family tragedy in five acts

by Christian Lanciai (1989)

Dramatis Personae:

Count Francesco Cenci, rich libertine
Cardinal Camillo, diplomat
Andrea, inscrutable servant
Beatrice, the count's blonde and irresistible daughter
Monsignore Orsino Guerra, handsome priest
An old honest businessman
Guests at Count Cenci's banquet
Lucretia, the count's second and rather fat wife
Bernardo, the count's youngest son with hardly downs on his chin
Don Orsino's servant
Giacomo, the count's second son, a father himself
Cosetta, Giacomo's wife
Marzio, land worker
Olimpio, handsome former castellan at Petrella
Savella, papal legate
Servants at Petrella
Pope Clemens VIII
Judges of the papal court
Prosecutors of the same
Priests, clerks and audience at the same
Guards of the papal prison

The action takes place in Rome and at the castle of Petrella south thereof
during the years 1598-99.

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Family drama in five acts.

Act I scene 1. In the family palace.

Francesco The world bores me. Humanity disgusts me with its debility, stupidity and ignorance, and if I could cleanse all the rabble from our world, that's about nine tenths of all the world's population, I wouldn't hesitate one minute. But my only power is of my own life and death, and I can only torture my own, which of course I am eager at, since I can't bear with them for being human, subordinate and inferior to me.

Here's now one of those worms directly from the bottom of all snakepits in the world, the cardinal Camillo from the holiest father, the emperor of the church and Lucifer at the centre of the human hell of the world. What do you want, you cheeky bastard?

Camillo His holiness forgives you your unspeakable crime if you pay him fifty thousand.

Francesco Only fifty thousand? That's cheap! He seems to already have got used to my tricky amusing business. But it only honours him that he accepts it and turns a blind eye to it. That makes him as human as those eleven popes I bribed before him. No man can withstand corruption at length, and that is only the more valid the more holy the person is who is tempted. The popes are supreme. He shall have what he demands. My compliments to dad Clemens for his tolerance and common sense. I ask you to greet him and to remember me in his prayers so that I can be sure to obtain the forgiveness of heaven.

Camillo O count Cenci, your outrageous cynicism can't fool me. You blaspheme without mentioning God, you befoul the church without ever entering it, you can't approach anything sacred in your speech without every word you're saying being turned into covert knife thrusts into the heart of your mother the church! Still I could never give up hope about your soul. One day you will repent and return to your God's sacred blessing so that your sins will be forgiven and you desist from constantly repeating them in worse exaggerations!

Francesco By God, you puerile ass! Who do you think I am? An ordinary funk and childish idealist who believes in the Sunday school fairy tales of the church? I am a realist, and so are you, and we both know, that a man who sins can never cease to go on doing so since sinning is the only very blessed thing in life. If you once have discovered this supreme truth of life you can never abandon it. Don't be so naïve, my good cardinal, that you could believe that I could have a soul! I live for nothing but my own flesh and blood and its needs and desires, and that is probably the only safe and certain thing in life for my part.

Camillo Man of damnation, take care!

Francesco Of what? Of you and the pope in his rotten Vatican? You are paid. I have nothing to fear from the only blessing institution in the world. What have I left to fear? Death? It will be my share like everybody else's. There is nothing special about it. My own wife and children? I have them under my control. I don't fear anyone who fears me, and everyone fears me who knows me. And would I then maybe fear God? I challenge him to reach me if he can. As long as I am alive he has failed and proved to me that he does not exist, and when I am dead it doesn't matter any more.

Camillo Are you not miserable in the loneliness of your carnal unsound life?

Francesco What do I care about happiness? It is just a dream of vanity for fools. Unhappy or happy doesn't matter to me as long as my carnal appetite is satisfied. And as long as it still can be satisfied I am happy and can go on living. I feel no loneliness as long as I still have my own company, which probably is the only sensible one in the world.

Camillo Miserable egoist! I should arbitrarily forbid the pope to accept any more bribes from you for the maintenance of your vices.

Francesco You will not, since you are sensible and want to keep your own vices just like the pope wants to keep his. That's why he greedily accepts my money and pay you of it as well just to make you shut up as well. No grown-up man is without passions that is his only reason to live to cultivate, and you know that as well as the pope.

Camillo Nevertheless I shall never give up hope for your soul. I shall continue praying for you with an angel's patience, and one day you will repent. That I know, for I know that man is good from the start.

Francesco You can tell that to your nuns when you make them expect some eggs.

Camillo I decline your infamies.

Francesco I am only realistic, honest and intimate.

Camillo I will always refuse to believe you are evil. I can't take your wicked beastliness for serious. Only because of that, I can continue associate with you and pray for your redemption.

Francesco Do that, my dear friend, and perhaps you will have some reward in heaven for those efforts when you are dead and rotten. I am too much of a realist to bother about any profits that are not in ready money.

Camillo Again you blaspheme mischievously.

Francesco Your naïve simplicity provokes mischievous humour that cannot harm you nor reach your sacred church. I am just enjoying myself at the expense of your sanctimony.

Andrea (enters) My lord, a messenger from Salamanca requests an audience.

Francesco It's news about my incorrigible and dreadful sons. If ever I prayed to God, cardinal Camillo, it was for him to send my sons to paradise, so that I didn't have to pay for them any more. If those parasites are allowed to stay alive, my dear friend, it must lead to a struggle of life and death between me and them.

Camillo Still you are blessed with the most accomplished sons who deserve some encouragement and support from their affluent father.

Francesco They never gave me anything. Why should I then give them anything?

Camillo In mythology Saturn devoured his children to prevent their overthrow of him. That's why he was overthrown.

Francesco I would rather butcher, prepare and devour every child my late wife gave me. My new wife is wiser and has not given me any children, and that's why she has survived. – Let in the messenger, Andrea.

Camillo I beg to recommend myself.

Francesco See you later then, cardinal, when new victims of my lust have been fished out of the Tiber and your papal master wishes to soothe his sorrows for my sake with more money.

Camillo One day you will have taken the life of your last blond youth, count, so that you yourself will shed tears for the body of a ravished body.

Francesco Ha-ha! Shall we make a bet?

Camillo Is money all you can think of except the appetite of your belly and sex?

Francesco The one and only thing, I assure you, your eminence. For me it is the only true god, and he is no less mortal than myself.

Camillo You will see hell one day.

Francesco I do it every day, for it belongs to all mankind.

Camillo You are incorrigible.

Francesco You said that before, we both know it to well already, so we might as well accept it. Farwell, your eminence. Tell the pope to go on fishing along the banks of the Tiber.

Camillo I thank God that I can't take you seriously. (*leaves*)

Francesco There he went, that fool disguised as a priest, an idiot out of a world of such, who believe there could be some goodness and believe themselves to live for its existence. But we who enjoy life know that the only supreme good in life is its defloration, and the only true joy of it is the malicious joy, and that life's only actual redemption is the inescapable and unstoppable death. How it will reach you, where and when is as utterly uninteresting as all speculation in any life after this, which is only a dream which no one ever so far has seen come to any fulfilment.

Scene 2. In the palace garden.

Beatrice I beg of you, Monsignore, don't speak to me of love.

Orsino Guerra It's only two years since you explained to me that you held me at least as dear as I did you, and during these two years nothing has changed. I am more in love with you today than I was two years ago before I was a priest.

Beatrice You were then allowed to be in love and to declare your youthful love as nature demanded. But now you are a priest and are no more allowed to even speak the word.

Orsino I am only Monsignore and could at any moment be relieved of all my obligations to the church. I could go to the pope at any moment and in one day get licence for a marriage with you. Although I am still a priest I could in the name of honesty not repress the fact that you keep pursuing me in my thoughts wherever I go and whatever I do and wherever I am, and that's how it has been now for two years.

Beatrice My friend, if you could be relieved of your obligations and vocation, I have not the same possibility. A destiny hangs over my family which binds me to my duties especially to my small brother Bernardo but also to my stepmother and my elder brother Giacomo. I can't leave the house or my family until Bernardo has grown to be a man and free of his father. I am faithful to you in friendship, but the higher feelings I once may have felt towards you has by my destiny been turned to bitterness and pain that I cannot get rid of except by years of struggle and patience; and your temptations of me by not very appropriate reminders of our games of youth only exalts the pain, bitterness and melancholy. I can only love you as a devout and spiritual sister, and that love is yours for all my life. Please don't make any demands for anything more that I cannot give.

Orsino I only wish to help you, serve you and please you. The least thing I can do is to present to the pope the atrocious condition of your family situation. You must clearly present in writing the nature of the horrible oppression you suffer with your mother and your brothers under your eccentric father in the form of a public petition, so that the head of our church could use the fist of his authority, excommunicate the murderer Francesco Cenci, get your elder brothers their inheritance and make an end of this intolerable situation, so that you could find happiness as a woman and no longer suffer as a martyr under the unnatural vices of a beastly father.

Betraice Something tells me that something evil is happening, if it hasn't happened already. Our father is unnaturally gay. He has had some news today from Salamanca

about my elder brothers, and he is so pleased with this news that he has announced a banquet for this very evening. Our whole family will be there with all the most prominent representatives of the highest nobility, and I fear some infernal scheme and prank by my father. He is as you well know capable of anything and enjoys shocks by more than bearable surprises. I pray you to be present tonight at the banquet, and then you will have my petition. Perhaps you could then endorse it with your own testimony of my father's performance this evening. I have never before seen him so scarily elated with malicious joy.

Orsino I will serve you tonight as your witness and the redeemer of your family by clerical diplomacy, if that is God's will. Your petition will be delivered under the extreme measures of discretion.

Beatrice That is all I dare to desire of you, Monsignore. Welcome tonight.

Orsino I thank you, the only love of my life.

Beatrice Please: no compliments. (*leaves*)

Orsino I only state the truth: I could love no one else than her. That's why she must be mine, if even I have to bury the petition to never let it come before the pope. For if he is compelled to interfere again in the private affairs of this troubled family, Beatrice like her elder sister could be commanded to marry some petty distant cousin of hers. Add to that the fact that the pope would never release me of my vows to let me marry her. He could only release me if I had lain with her and made her pregnant, so that it no more could be concealed. That's the only way Beatrice could ever be mine, and it's the only way for me to ever have the hell of my love discharged. She must remain at home with her father until she one day brought to despair by her father's inhuman tyranny, she must give way to my insistence. And the petition could be another triumph on my hands, so that I could use it for an instrument to lull her into a sense of security of owning everything that ever a woman could want: the delusion of the fickle sense of imaginary safety.

Let's see what party of a scenery the old count intends to throw tonight. It will probably be just a harmless comedy, a disgusting satyr play with the old count himself as the only actor, a fool and phoney who only sparkles by faked excellence of denture.

Scene 3. The banquet.

Francesco Welcome to you all, my friends and relatives, children and princes of the church, cardinals and nobles, who have pleased to honour our small and humble party by your most worthy presence! I have too long lived like a hermit, and in my detachment from all festive communion with society my isolation has brought about some mean rumours, that I would be lost as a misanthropist and other such nonsense. When now I let you share with me my riches by this party of sumptuous food and dainties, wines and delicacies galore, and when you soon will learn what I have to celebrate this day, I pray of you to consider me as much of only flesh and meat and blood and humanity as you. I have a tender and sensitive heart under all these layers of sin and vice, and I beg you to receive my heart and for once piously disregard and forget my reputation as a hopelessly wicked atheist, a reputation as one-sided as all ignorance. You see me here as a true father who only wishes to care for his family, his friends, his children, his wife and for all friends of the church.

Camillo Noble count, I was certain that you one day in spite of all your sins would repent and become a sensible, good, human and ordinary gentle human being. My long patience is today at last rewarded by the realization of all my most anxious and sincerest

prayers. Dear guests, you all now witness with your own eyes that Francesco Cenci after all is a good man, as I always claimed. With these merry cups of good *Falerno* wine, which you now offer to all your friends, all unfavourable rumours about you shall be forgotten, drowned and vanished from Rome forever.

An old noble We are curious and excited about what could have happened to you that so suddenly has opened the dismal locks of your doors to such a joyful and generous banquet.

Francesco I will tell you about the strange event that has occurred which has brought me into such a solemn and agreeably generous state of mind. My two oldest sons recently travelled to Spain for some education in Salamanca, and as their father I then raised the most sincere and constructive thinkable prayer to God for their welfare, future and blessing. And all of a sudden my fatherly prayer has come true and been heeded, and I then feel the highest elation and joy which forces me to herald it to all the world by giving a festive banquet to all the members of the highest society in Rome.

Beatrice (to Lucretia) I have never seen father so unsoundly elated before. I fear the worst.

Lucretia Be not afraid, my child. Your father is too sincere to be able to mean any harm. He is only joyful.

Beatrice Only joyful? That's the worst of it and what makes me fearful.

Francesco Here is the letter I received today from Salamanca. In my sincerest gratitude and joy I now turn to you, my favourite daughter Beatrice, asking you to read the letter out aloud to all this honourable company.

Beatrice Father, please, I ask you to speak openly and explain what has happened.

Francesco My friend, my noble cardinal Camillo, you have today apprehended me in accusations of atheism and godlessness. Hear now how sincerely I thank God, your Father, for the gift full of grace he has bestowed on me! I thank you with all my heart, my Lord God, for having so favourably fulfilled my most urgent and anxious wishes concerning my sons Rocco and Cristoforo!

Beatrice (has opened the letter) They are dead! (*throws it away on the table with horror*)

Francesco Yes, stone dead, killed by their own carelessness, the hopeless good-for-nothings, the absolutely impossible disobedient rebels, who only demanded money of me and never gave me anything but hatred, worries, misery and ingratitude in return! They are dead, and I rejoice in the highest of joy! I shall never see them again! I will never again have to give them any money! God has killed them, liberated me from them; yes, he has relieved the world of two parasites, from two cancers, from two worthless and abominable creeps; and God himself rejoices with me for this opportunely blessed turn of fortune, which I ask you all to celebrate with me!

Lucretia (gets into a fit) It can't be true! You lie to make a scandal, Francesco Cenci! Such an unnatural father cannot exist!

Beatrice Mother, he is not lying, I regret to say.

Francesco I call for God himself as my witness! Rocco was praying on his knees in the cathedral in a holy mass, when a nave of the cathedral collapsed in cinders. He was crushed in the debris while everyone else came out alive and unhurt! Was it then not God himself who provided such a powerful act? What do you say now, my holy excellency and holiest cardinal? Read the letter yourself as Lucretia accounts for the details of the accident! The scoundrel Cristoforo was knifed to death by a jealous husband by mistake, since the betrayed husband's wife was in bed with the man which the husband had thought he had killed! It pleases God to crack a joke! God has a sense of humour! Ha-ha-ha! And both died at the same hour struck by God himself who only loves me, as he so graciously hearkens to my prayers and grants them! Ha-ha-ha!

Camillo I must ask you all to excuse our old host. He is not well.

Beatrice He has never felt better.

Lucretia He is mad of his grief! (*swoons definitely*)

The old noble I myself ask your leave and resign. I have had enough of this madhouse, and I must honestly deplore this afflicted family suffering from such a perverted fatherhood. (*throws his napkin on the table and leaves. Many guests follow suit.*)

Francesco No, stay, good friends, laugh and enjoy yourselves here with me! You would laugh yourselves and indulge in reckless orgies if you were in my shoes! You would never grieve yourselves if you had to bury your children! Like me you would only relish not to have to mention them in your will! The difference is just that I am open and honest in my malicious joy while you all are incorrigible hypocrites!

Camillo I still believe that you are just pulling our legs, count Cenci.

Francesco (*refilling his wineglass to make it brim over*) I am just enjoying myself, and I feel sorry for all who can't understand and share this only true joy of fatherhood: to have survived your own children! If this lusty red frothing and dainty wine was the blood of my sons instead, I would only with even the greater pleasure empty the cup – like this! (*empties the filled glass in one draught*) Ah! Delicious! Not even the holiest altar wine of the church could taste more lovely than a brimful chalice of the blood of my sons, and no sacrament in the world could be more sacred than such a divine potage of the truest vintage! Not even the true blood of Jesus himself could taste any better or be more refreshing and wonderful to taste! I hereby refill the chalice with the fresh blood of my own seed – and pray you all to taste thereof like a new covenant and testament more holy than all Christianity! Carry the chalice around for everyone to taste, my servants!

Camillo Francesco, go to bed. You should not drink any more today. I ask you all, poor guests, to forget this awkwardness and to leave this poor house of sorrow!

Francesco (*imitating*) --- and to leave this poor house of sorrow! He doesn't get it, the sanctimonious prelate, that this is only a house of mirth and professional as such! I have the whores all ready! Perhaps I had enough, but you have not! I bid you to drink, my dear guests! Share my toast for the death of my two worthless sons! Sing some drinking songs with it! That's part of the ceremony mood! I beg you: just get drunk! The count invites you! Drink, damn it! (*goes around throwing wine on his guests directly from the bottle*)

The guests (*in confusion*) He is out of his mind! Dear me! O horror! Out of the way! Fie! Let me out! I will never come here again! What a circus! This is preposterous! What an inconceivable scandal! (*They stumble on each other, are thronged, get their expensive arrays in disorder, the clothes in rags and sullied, while the count runs around having fun at their expense and splattering them all down with red wine.*)

Francesco Have fun now, damned guests! That's why you have come here! Don't dare to do anything else than laugh when I command you, for if anyone dares to spite my pleasure, the vengeance and retaliation of count Cenci is the most terrible, certain and definite in this world! I am not capable of sparing anyone! (*splashes them down with wine*)

Beatrice I beg of you, dear guests, forget this scene! You now see our father in his truest colours, and he now only has three children left, whom he has abused and harassed ever since they were born. Consider us, my gentle little brother and Giacomo, who still have to live with our stepmother under this daily and nightly torture and pain by this lecherous father who never leaves anyone in peace! We have to endure this beastly humiliation every moment of our lives as long as this infernal monster still is alive, for he refuses to have anyone of us released.

Francesco (*takes a break, surprised by his daughter's display*) I hope my dear guests are sensible enough to first consider well the lives of their own children and daughters before they take this possessed slut and her hysteria for serious. For they must be well aware of that strangely murdered youths tend to float up the Tiber?

Beatrice Does no one of you dare to answer him? You have seen the mad man rave in the reckless orgies of his wild malicious joy! Will you let him go on until he has taken the lives of all of us, like Saturn voluptuously consumed his progeny just to prevent them from spiting him?

Orsino Your father is mad from senility. Don't mind the mad jokes of his caprices. And if he threatens, consider that he is only like the monkey in his cage, being so weakened in his mind from sheer arteriosclerosis.

Beatrice Will then none of you do anything to save us?

Francesco Go to your room, you bitch! You shall never again be allowed to be up this late!

Beatrice I implore you, dear guests, to take me seriously! This is the way this fatherhood constantly acts, only much worse!

Father, go yourself for shame to hide yourself to the revenge of the two gallant and wonderful sons that one day must strike you for having died an unnatural death only because you prayed to God for it!

Francesco Listen to her ravings, the possessed daughter of a whore! Dear guests, I regret that she so has ruined the merry mood, joy, peace and order of our solemn festive banquet! She is not in her right mind, and I beg of you to forbear her worrying and nervous condition for the sake of your honest host and servant, who regrets her lack of discretion and the derailment of the entire party by her.

Camillo Sir, we don't believe in you any more, and you owe your daughter a public apology. The macabre display of this party will most certainly be discussed in front of the pope. *(leaves as the last one)*

Francesco Yes, go thou and fornicate with your pope and have fun with his holiness with suitable stories about us as an accompaniment for your anal sex! Just defame us! We can anyway never get as infamous, rotten and totally corrupt as your whole damned church always has been ever since it established its first lie about a resurrection of the meat from the dead! – He has left and can't hear me any more.

Now we are alone with each other, my daughter. What a mess you have made of it! I must give you hell for it! You have been disloyal!

Beatrice I am not responsible for you having lost your control

Francesco Yes, you are, and no one else! Gather up your swooned mother now and go to bed with her.

Beatrice And what about you?

Francesco I will stay here drinking.

Beatrice You have had enough.

Francesco I know. That's why I will drink some more, until I fall asleep.

Beatrice (pulling up Lucretia) Help me, Andrea. *(carries her out with Andrea)*

Francesco (alone) Two of my children are dead, but I have three left, who as long as they may live will surely wish me dead just to get my money for themselves. But I have them in my power, and if they dare any foul attempt against me they will have to accept the consequences. *(drinks)* Even if I die none of them will inherit me. I will rather let myself be plundered by some greedy pope than allow any ungrateful child to have any penny from me without having deserved it.

Act II scene 1.

Lucretia Don't cry, my little boy! He only hit me, who can bear with greater sorrows! In truth, if he had killed me, compared with what he earlier has done against me it would just have been a charitable blessing, and the scandal with which he insulted us all

yesterday was just a trifle. Don't cry, my boy. Leave the tears for me, who is crying over you like over my own children.

Bernardo O mother, no one could be more of a real mother to all the three of us than you, who alone can defend us and share our suffering with us here by our terrifying and cruel father! That he is my and Beatrice's father is more than reasons enough for me to cry all my life!

Lucretia Alas, my boy, the children are not responsible for their father. It's not even their fault that they are born and that they get a father of that kind!

Beatrice (enters) Has he passed by? No, he is not here. (*footsteps in the stairs*) There he is in the stairs! I can hear his relentless hard footsteps. He is coming here! Now he is at the door and already has his hand on the doorknob!

(*The door opens and Orsion's servant enters.*)

Oh! It's Orsino's servant!

Servant Pardon me! I have a message from Monsignore Guerra, whom I serve.

(*delivers a letter*)

Beatrice It's my petition to the pope, which is returned to me unopened. Why?

Servant Please, Miss, my lord deeply regrets that he did not succeed in obtaining the grace of an audience with the holy father of the Vatican, but he sends his greetings with the highest hopes and begs to soon be able to see you again.

Lucretia It will be convenient at the vesper.

Servant He asks you all to confidently carry on with the best courage. (*bows and leaves*)

Lucretia Our last hope has failed. There is not one who cares about us outside our prison. They just talk about us in some casual gossip and wash their hands and ask us to carry on with the best courage when the house tyrant keeps us all on the rack. But, my daughter, something is wrong with you. Are you quite all right? I don't recognize your cold frozen gaze. Have you seen a ghost?

Beatrice No, only what is so much worse.

Lucretia Whatever could that be?

Beatrice Father has not spoken with me today yet, but he has regarded me with such eyes, that if I were to behold the eyes of Satan, that look would not be as paralyzing and frightening as father's. But that wasn't all. At the same time he smiled at me, and that smile immediately petrified me into a statue of ice that nothing can melt. I am cold and frozen down into my very heart.

Lucretia You suspect then that he is planning something new that could be worse than anything we had to go through so far? Can any evil be worse than the malicious joy he so jubilantly expressed in front of the collected highest society of Rome: "God has heard my prayers and liberated me from my two oldest sons by killing them!" Only you dared to challenge him and accuse him, you were always the one who alone dared to speak against your father, but now you are altered to the core as if you were deep in shock. What has happened? What are you afraid of?

Beatrice Only that which is worse than death. He has trampled me, insulted me and abused all of us with such beastly brutality that we can't speak about it outside and under the sun, but never before have I doubted or wavered in my strong faith in some solution. But now I am speechless, for I am so benumbed by fear just because of his silence and a stealthy glance with a lewd smile. – But I must not neglect you. Your security is more important than my own.

Lucretia Beatrice, have courage. It's only the bad taste after yesterday's horrible banquet that has tuned your imagination ill. If he didn't say anything he also didn't mean anything. And the whole city is now aware of what a questionable man he is, and Monsignore Guerra thinks about us. All doors and exits are not yet locked. Just think

about your elder sister, whom our good pope compelled your father to give away in marriage, so that she got rid of that heinous oppression that we still have to suffer. You can still get away like her and become a happy mother for another family than this one, while I, unfortunately, must be laid at rest without children to disappear without a name.

Beatrice Mother, don't speak like that. I will never leave you until all four of us are free, me, you, Giacomo and little Bernardo. This ordeal is given us for us to endure, overcome and survive. As long as tyranny keeps us in thralldom, we will endure it together with a vengeance.

Bernardo Not even if the pope liberated me from father's supremacy and I was let out as a free man to the world I would separate from you one single step, my foster mother, my and Beatrice's mother, who was given by her for her successor when she no longer could stand count Cenci's terrorism. She died a martyr to father's bullying ruthlessness, and she gave us you instead for her inheritance. We shall never leave you, the only true mother we have.

Lucretia (tenderly and sincerely embracing them both) O dear, my dear, dear children! Forgive me that I cry, but I don't cry only from pain. Sometimes even love can be greater and stronger from sweetness and tenderness than from a lifetime of the deep-frozen ice of bitterness, which thereby must melt down by ordinary human warmth.

Francesco (suddenly throws up the door and enters brusquely) So, there you are, my daughter! Here you are soft indeed with the cow and the calf, that can't defend themselves from the debility of harmless innocence! Here you can carry on speaking against your father in front of the most powerless against his sovereignty! I gather you are afraid of me! And so you have reasons enough to be, especially Beatrice, after what she publicly said yesterday in front of all our guests! She will never get another invitation to a banquet! Not by me and not by anyone! Since she is a downright scandal!

Lucretia We have never thought such thoughts that only you alone can originate.

Francesco Speak for yourself, you tart! I know well enough what my own children are good for, for they have no other blood in their bodies than my own and of that creature who is now dead whose only function in life was filthiness and carnal pregnancy! Perhaps you didn't know, woman, instrument of copulation and of the corruption of men, that Beatrice had carefully prepared her speech to the guests and carefully planned her mean sabotage of the party! Perhaps you were all three privy to the coup!

Lucretia None of us had the least idea of any such thing before you praised the death that suddenly had stricken your sons. And what Beatrice then said was all improvised, wasn't it, my girl?

Beatrice Could I have said anything else than what was demanded of the moment of truth?

Francesco (hitting her) Shut up!

Bernardo Father! Don't hit Beatrice!

Lucretia This blow was too strong, Francesco.

Beatrice You have hit me for the last time.

Francesco Ha! Shall we bet? No, dear children and fornicating maid, you have yourselves insulted me for the last time! No Roman shall ever again hear any evil talk about me spread around by you, and never again shall you see any light of day or freedom! We shall change our residence to Petrella and at once! Pack your things! There you can complain to silent walls and to the black rotten water of the moat of Petrella, to its wilderness around and to the ever silent and unresponsive eternity! There no one shall care whatever you say! There we shall at last be at peace together with each other, inseparable forever, as the supremely happy family we are, that nothing can split or sunder, no matter how hard you try! Doesn't it sound good? Then we are established in

security for life, and you will never have to do without the splendid isolation of paradise! No one shall know what will be going on there behind the silent thick solid walls of Petrella. They shall be your common grave. There you will find peace and quiet forever, and I myself will join you in it.

Beatrice My mother and brother, come along. We have nothing more to do. We can only refuse to be in the same room with him.

Francesco Start packing, if you wish to bring anything of yours with you!

(Beatrice, Lucretia and Bernardo retire.)

I am just joking with them, but they always take me so bloody seriously. That's why it is so fun to pull some jokes on them. Yes, we shall now out to my castle Petrella out in the wilderness of nature, and there I shall be all alone at peace with my family. For I have plans. I can't love the old hag Lucretia any longer, but my daughter Beatrice is getting more attractive every day. All Rome is already talking about her, everyone praises her beauty and good graces, which her innocence just enhances and makes even more irresistible, and that fool Monsignore Guerra is far too silly in his idiocy and mad by desire. That prelate could sell the pope packed down in a barrel just to get rid of all his holiness and title to ensure his exclusive rights to my daughter's virginity. But no man shall have it. I will put it in a maiden's bower up there in Petrella, and there I will guard it as hard as the abbot the only nun in his monastery. Woe the man who touches Beatrice! If all men in the world were to lay siege to me for her sake, I would take the lives of all of them in the defence of my last daughter's honour, innocence, beauty and virginity. For no man can love any woman with such a heated fervour as the father gives his only daughter in the form of a protection higher than any manly love.

Scene 2.

Camillo The only clear law that could help you is old and outdated, and by that you could force your father to give you food and clothes but nothing more.

Giacomo Nothing more? Then the law like all things stupid and obsolete stands on the father's side, like all the world is ruled by almighty fatherhood, like the holy father of the Vatican himself, leaving the poor children no hope, as all the bias of the world stands one-sidedly uniformly on the father's side. God himself is a father, and woe any child who dares to stick up against the fatherhood! God the good father himself even let his own son be crucified!

Camillo Your harm is justified, Giacomo, if though not even the worst blasphemies will help.

Giacomo But you'll have to admit that it is hard. I have a wife of the highest breed and beautiful children with her, and in a moment of weakness I lent to my father by my warm heart her dowry when he was in difficulty. Unwisely enough the loan was not drawn in writing and without any witnesses, and I can't get it back. Still my wife or my poor children are not complaining although we are brought to beggary. Isn't such a case upsetting enough to warm and move even the heart of a holy pope?

Camillo I did try indeed, my friend, especially now after the deplorable banquet that your father gave which is spoken about all over Rome as a disastrous scandal. I entreated the head of our church to do something to put an end to count Cenci's outrageous iniquities against his children, but the pope would not be convinced. I will tell you exactly what the pope said:

"The disobedience of children provokes exaggerations and despair in a disillusioned father, and by thoughtlessness the children are not themselves aware of the arrows with

which they sting the hearts of their fathers. I feel sorry for count Cenci, he is already old and has been forced to what he undoubtedly never wanted himself, and one day the children will surely break him down. That will be their own affair. Myself I have to observe strict neutrality in the eternal conflict between age and youth, between grey experience and red passion, for I as the father of all fathers of the church, must be holy and not take part in such low matters as family trivialities." And he frowned his nose as a sign for me that I had nothing more to say to him. (*enter Monsignore Orsino Guerra*)

You, Orsino Guerra, were there yourself and heard what he said.

Orsino Heard what?

Giacomo Alas, dear cardinal, don't repeat the merciless words! Then there is no hope left for my sister and my smallest brother, who languish as locked up in the cruelty of the inhuman tyrant's fatherhood as it is confirmed and established by law!

Camillo All you can do is to write a petition. The pope will at least not neglect to have it treated.

Giacomo Such a petition has been written. You gave it to the pope, Monsignore. And what did the pope say?

Orsino It is true that I presented Beatrice Cenci's petition to the pope with my own sincere recommendations, but his holiness did not even please to break its seals.

Giacomo But how is it possible?

Orsino Giacomo my friend, I am afraid he has been appalled by the terrible rumours circulating about count Cenci, which have been passionately exaggerated by people's eagerness for sensations. The pope's wrath has been turned awry from Francesco Cenci himself to all those who aggrandize the count's vices and who wallow in their most revolting details.

Giacomo It's much simpler than that. It is the foremost friend and evil genius of power Gold that whispering has ordered silence above all in the pope's ear.

Camillo Gentlemen, I beg of you to excuse me. (*retires*)

Giacomo Look! Even the cardinal cowardly backs down when gold is mentioned, which is more worth than all the three and more gods of civilization ever have been. God is only almighty when he appears in the form of Gold, which all people always adored and nothing else.

Orsino Your blasphemies are not entirely unjust. Everything called by the name of Father in this word is impeccable as our law, but he who abuses his fatherhood is just by the impeccability of fatherhood the more to be condemned.

Giacomo At last a priest who dares to state the truth! Our next step will be to take the law into our hands and do something about it.

Orsino And he who takes the law into his own hands can only do it by force.

Giacomo You show us a dangerous road to take.

Orsino It's the only right one. Or else the law will protect tyranny until the last children have been devoured by Saturn.

Giacomo So you recommend – murder?

Orsino You said the word yourself.

Giacomo I quake to actually have spoken it. I beg of you, Monsignore, to let me step aside for a moment to be alone with completely new thoughts that never before have entered my mind. (*leaves*)

Orsino It takes courage, my friend, to really be able to consider the human problem complexities of death. Think well and bravely before, so that the action eventually will not suffer from hesitation. – He is gone. I have sowed the seed in his heart for the solution of the worries of us all – the father who will not allow his children to live. It's the life of the father or the children – the father is the only threat against the children's lives, and

therefore the children are a threat to the father. The struggle begins, and when it has started it must relentlessly be of life and death, for no one can take one step back any more when once the civil war has gone off, the most bitter of all conflicts, the family dissolution process, which is much worse than any vendetta, for there are no natural parents who will accept that the children they have given birth to one day will leave them, grow away from them and liberate themselves from the narrow chrysalis of parenthood. For that's all there is to parenthood – a frame to be broken, to the tragedy and destruction of that parenthood.

And only that way I can win Beatrice, for Francesco Cenci will never himself willingly give her to me. May I then keep outside and let the children take their father's life, for in a struggle of life and death within a family the tragic parenthood must always be the loser. May I forgive the children their necessarily but smoothly accomplished enterprise, and may I alone know about their secret and bury it deep in the abyss of my heart – if only I will get Beatrice.

Act III scene 1. In the castle of Petrella.

Bernardo Mother, tell me, how long do we have to remain in this bleak castle? Can't we go home to Rome where I at least could find playmates and friends of my age?

Lucretia My boy, I am afraid we have to remain here as long as your father wants it.

Bernardo Why?

Lucretia Only your father knows. He has told me that he wants to protect Beatrice against wicked and rude suitors, and there could be something in it, when your sister is as beautiful as she is, but I don't think that's the whole truth.

Bernardo I don't like it here, and neither does Beatrice.

Lucretia Neither do I.

Bernardo If we have to remain here for long we will all get sick.

Lucretia I do believe you are right. But tell it to your father. I can't do anything myself for our part. Your sister, I and you are all three your father's prisoners and powerless as such against the whole world and especially against him. (*enter Beatrice*)

Bernardo I can't understand my father's strange capriciousness. He is not quite logic, and neither is he consistent.

Beatrice My brother, all we can do is to remain here and quietly wonder about such a father's unexplainable and weird caprices. We have no key to get out of this castle since father has the only one, and he does not intend to let anyone out as long as we are here with him.

Bernardo That would mean that we shall never get out.

Beatrice Yes, that's what it very well could mean. But we still have our brother Giacomo out there and Monsignore Guerra and our father's friend cardinal Camillo, who probably all three would like to help us and certainly would not forget us. All we can do is to sincerely hope for them.

Lucretia My boy, I don't think we shall have to stay here until we all three get sick.

Beatrice If anyone is sick or will get sick it will only be our father.

(*enter Francesco as brutally brusquely as usual.*)

Lucretia My husband, you frighten us.

Francesco And am I not allowed to then? Perhaps it even is my intention? You are not afraid of me, are you?

Beatrice Nothing can frighten Francesco Cenci's children.

Francesco Thus speaks Beatrice Cenci, daughter of Francesco Cenci. But dear me how gloomy and intensively depressed you look! Have I turned up in the wrong moment?

Beatrice You can't turn up in any right moment.

Francesco Can't I? That was a true compliment forsooth! It pleases me, my daughter, that you are your father's daughter.

Beatrice Am I?

Francesco Or whose daughter would you be?

Beatrice Is it then so easy to be beyond every shadow of a doubt certain of who the father is of a newborn baby? Only the mother gives birth to it, and you can never have proof of the father's legitimacy, if it isn't palpably like the probable father.

Francesco Daughter, you are making innuendos.

Beatrice No, I just wish I could have any man for my real father except the one who claims to be.

Francesco Born spiteful, stubborn in disobedience like any sin and as dead long since already declared disinherited.

Lucretia Of whom are you speaking, my husband?

Francesco Of that bitch of course! (*points at her*)

Lucretia I ask you two not to quarrel. It's difficult enough as it is to live here isolated, closed up and buried alive in a heavy gloomy prison.

Francesco If you aren't happy you may leave.

Lucretia Where to, if I may ask?

Francesco Straight down into your grave, of course!

Lucretia (*bursting out in tears*) Inhuman unnatural tyrant! You have cut my vulnerable heart into profusely bleeding shreds before, and you never seem to tire of going on cutting them down harder still!

Francesco My dear, I already told you, that if you are not happy you may leave.

Lucretia Come with me, Bernardo! We will not remain in the same room with such a brute. Come with us, Beatrice. We should never even show ourselves to each other in that man's company.

Francesco Beatrice stays here.

(*silence*)

Beatrice Go, Lucretia and Bernardo. I will take care of him.

(*Lucretia and Bernardo leave.*)

I am not afraid of him. I have managed him before.

Francesco Do you know, my daughter, why you are here?

Beatrice Because that is your will.

Francesco Because all Rome admires you and watches you and desires you like a drain swarming with ruddy swine and rats!

Beatrice Have your say and then let me go.

Francesco They speak of you everywhere all over Rome! Your fairness turns every uncontrolled male pig mad from intolerable desire!

Beatrice How does that concern me, and what business is that of yours?

Francesco I am your father!

Beatrice I know that you think so, and I sincerely wish that you were not, for your blood has always turned me away from you with disgust and contempt.

Francesco Your provocative haughty pride has always ignited my anger.

Beatrice That is no fault of mine. Only you are responsible for your temper.

Francesco That haughtiness was your mother's, not mine!

Beatrice She always warned me against you. You were the one who finally caused her death, weren't you?

Francesco I loved your mother! I was not the one who wanted her to die.

Beatrice Why did she die then?

Francesco I fear that she nourished such a wish herself,

Beatrice ...since you never left her in peace. You were constantly on to her. She didn't want to give birth to any more children, and still you gave her several more miscarriages except my poor little brother Bernardo, who probably never wished to enter this world, and that he did, you have indeed given the poor boy reasons enough to deplore.

Francesco At least you admit that I have some legitimate children.

Beatrice I say no more than maybe. I only know that you mishandled my mother and the mother of my other brothers unto death by your utter ruthlessness.

Francesco Am I responsible for having been made that way by nature? I was conceived with an unusually strong potency, so that I successfully could rape anyone and never myself could resist my own urge. I admit that it became the ruin of a number of people, but that's now how I was made by nature. Complain of nature and of God but not of me. Most men are like that, and that is why you are here in safety under my protection.

Beatrice Bernardo just complained of that he has no playmates here and that he languishes and is getting sick just like mother and I. I beg you to allow us to go back home to Rome.

Francesco It's the dark wilderness of nature that covers your hearts with its healthy silence. It is only wholesome. In Rome the air is putrid with stenches and a hundred thousand other wicked people. Here the air is fresh like spring in its absolute purity of undisciplined freedom.

Beatrice We are all sick of the air you are breathing around us since we sense your eyes as the guard of a predator watching our imprisonment and every movement we make.

Francesco I am only protecting you against the evil of the world.

Beatrice The evil of the world is only you. All the world is in comparison with you only good. The evil you see in the world is only to be found in yourself.

Francesco My daughter, stop being rude to me.

Beatrice Only if you leave me alone.

Francesco I can't leave you alone, for you are mine, my only daughter.

Beatrice Don't remind me of it any more! I will simply refuse to acknowledge even such a possibility.

Francesco If you deny me as your father, I must deny you as my daughter.

Beatrice Then do so! You have done worse things before!

Francesco Consider, my daughter. If you can bear that I deny you, then you also must bear with the consequences.

Beatrice I would gladly do without a loathsome fatherhood.

Francesco So be it, outrageously beautiful girl!

Beatrice Let me go!

Francesco You are not my daughter! You denied me yourself! Consequently I may do with you as I please! It can't be incest then whatever my pleasure may be!

Beatrice Let go of my arm!

Francesco I will never let go of anyone once caught by me. All Rome is in furore about your irresistible and wonderful beauty. No one can resist your virgin perfection and the blinding grace of your fairness! Not even a priest of the Vatican could resist getting mad about you! But I swore in Rome that no one would deprive you of your virginity, no man in all Rome! I have protected you against all, but your impertinence makes it impossible for me to be able to account for myself any more!

Beatrice (afraid) Let me go! I am your daughter!

Francesco I can't believe you any more. You have denied me.

Beatrice You must not! Anything but not that!

Francesco (forcing her down on the bed) It's too late. I can no longer check my nature, and no soul has ever been able to resist count Cenci. I cannot be overcome, my lovely girl. I can only prevail. Just be sensible and make no resistance, and it will all be simpler and less painful. *(The scene is darkened and you only hear the struggles and pantings of the couple, not without muffled cries from Beatrice of terror, despair and pain.)*

Scene 2. Another room.

Enter Beatrice alone in white linen, barefoot with her hair let loose and totally changed.

Darkness all around her.

Beatrice Everything in this life is but the constant darkness of eternal night. Everything is black that has anything to do with humanity. Dead, damned, lost and cursed is all humanity! Nevermore can any human being have any right to any human value. Humanity must be extirpated as an unnatural weed by nature! For what is man if not a morbid sickly doomed abscess on nature, contaminating all natural life that it touches with the cursed plague of his own rottenness? I don't want to live any more, and if I still am compelled to stay alive I will only be able to live to kill. Smother me, darkness, if you can with the supremacy of the malicious joy of the rapist, but revenge is more evil than even the malicious joy, and will triumph in even more horrific darkness than the infernal princess of rape and incest. There is nothing so evil and so black that it can't be made even blacker and more evil. *(bends her neck and totters)*

Lucretia (enters) Beatrice! What are you doing only half dressed in the middle of the night like this on the cold floor, and even on your naked feet!

Beatrice I pray you, my caretaker, don't speak to me, for I am not in my right mind.

Lucretia But what has happened then?

Beatrice Nothing has happened that could be explained, for words cannot express what has happened.

Lucretia Are you sleep-walking?

Beatrice I wish I were! If only everything was but a dream! But blood is not warm and sticky except in red bitter reality.

Lucretia Have you had a bad sleep? Obviously you have been affected by nightmares again.

Beatrice No, only one, but that nightmare was the worst, for it was unfortunately reality.

Lucretia You must have seen a ghost. Only thus could your ghostly appearance be explained.

Beatrice I am myself a ghost as you can see. My caretaker, lock me up in my cell, for this mental asylum must have rooms for such as I, for if they are not locked up I fear that I could do some harm to someone, like for example to my father.

Lucretia Has he done you any harm?

Beatrice No, he has not done me any harm. He has only dragged me along the stairs by my hair, chained me to his torture instruments and forced me to eat the cooked meat of my own elder brothers, served by him as a delicacy. He hasn't done me any harm at all. He has only done his duty as a man and besmirched all humanity, like all people do and especially the men.

Lucretia You are not well, my girl. You are not in your right mind. You seem totally out of any disposition.

Beatrice And is that so strange then with such a father, who will never let you go?

Lucretia Pull yourself together, girl. Sit down and take it easy. Your friend Orsino has just arrived here at this late hour with some greetings. The count doesn't know that he is here.

Beatrice A friend! Bring me to him at once!

Lucretia I shall be delighted. (*rises and opens a door*) Come in, Orsino! She is here and wishes to see you. She seems somewhat bewildered by some vision she has had.

Beatrice (aside) An avenger, like by order!

Orsino (worried) She looks wild. Has she had a fit?

Lucretia I don't know myself what is the matter with the sweet girl, but something has obviously disturbed her.

Orsino Beatrice, it is I.

Beatrice Welcome, friend. For once I welcome you with some warmth, for you have now an important mission to fulfil. Something is wrong, and you could help me to set it right.

Orsino What has happened? You are most unlike yourself.

Beatrice I am a dead body. That is what has happened. My soul is dead, and this body is just a naked ghost. Don't look at me as if I was mad. I know all too well that I am mad, but we can't do anything about that. We can only take revenge.

Orsino (to Lucretia) Here is some deep mystery.

Lucretia She spoke about Francesco dragging her up and down the stairs by her hair, that he tortured her and made her a cannibal, but at the same time she denied that he thereby had caused her any harm.

Orsino Very odd indeed! Obviously the father has been up to something though like some new weird caprices. Is that why you are the way you are, my Beatrice?

Beatrice (angry) I am not yours! I never will be! (*tired*) For I am no longer even my own. (*eager*) But you do want my father's gold, don't you? You do want my dowry? Go to the pope and accuse the progenitor of my life of the most difficult and horrible crimes you know, (*discouraged*) and still you will tell no lies but only understate and play down my father's woeful crimes. (*eager*) Give him his due, punish him with the most inhuman sentences of the worst of laws, mangle and break all his bones on the wheel, hang him in his hair or just by one arm or by his hands tied behind his back, (*tired*) but no such ordinary punishment would be enough. By such executions he would just escape what he really deserves.

Orsino I begin to fear, suspect and quaking in my inmost being to get a sense of what might have happened.

Beatrice (rising) All humanity is damned for the sake of my father! All Christianity is condemned for the sake of my father! All the papal church is damned for the sake of my father! But most accursed of all am I, who has to live with the deepest disgrace of my father stamped, branded and inflicted on my already hopelessly dying, doomed and with all the rottenness of humanity infested body.

Lucretia By all the gods of heaven! What is she saying!

Orsino I don't think the case can be made more explicitly clear. A name has been stained so thoroughly that all the Vatican must shake in its very foundations from this harm by iniquity. Here is something now for the pope to consume which is not very agreeable and least of all to him, who has received so much gold from count Cenci, and who therefore has had all his sins and future sins pardoned in advance, among which this one no one could ever dream about though. – How are you, dear girl?

Beatrice Don't touch me! I am no one's dear girl! I am dead! Just let me sleep in peace forever, for I will anyway never be able to sleep again in my mortal life, no matter how short it will be, or ever again get any peace. (*walks aside like in her sleep*)

Lucretia What shall we do?

Orsino A crime like this beatifies all other crimes in the world, and we are blessed only if we are revenged.

Lucretia Should we then kill the count?

Beatrice Could you live and watch him live by your side? Could you go to bed with him while he is still alive? Could you look into his eyes any more before their sight has broken? Then you would be as lewd, cursed and corrupt as himself.

Orsino We have no choice. But the difficulty is, that while no one can punish him for what he has done in his capacity of a father, we could all three be punished with death for presuming to punish him. The most important thing of all on this terribly precarious and difficult way is now to be cautious.

Lucretia How could we poor miserable mortals take the life of a devil and vampire?

Orsino I know two reliable and stalwart murderers. They could easily enough arrange some accident on the way for the count, when he rides to and from Petrella, without raising any suspicion or enquiry.

Lucretia Could it be arranged so easily? To me it sounds almost too simple.

Beatrice The servants of the Vatican are scorpions who don't bite except to kill and that efficiently and instantly without any trace.

Orsino Unfortunately necessity has no law. Poisoning would have no effect on Cenci, but some force by nature could. Listen! I hear a man's footsteps in the parlour!

Lucretia It's the count! And he is coming here!

Beatrice Our Monsignore will encounter him, so that he may measure the body for his grave. Come, mother, let's not breathe the same air as our wrecker any more. (*Beatrice and Lucretia leave.*)

Orsino And what about me? How shall I explain to the terrible count that I happen to be here? I can't hide any longer. Now he is at the door! Let there be a duel, if things will come to the worst. (*lays his hand on his sword. Enter Giacomo.*) Giacomo!

Giacomo Orsino! What are you doing here, and how did you manage to get in?

Orsino I crossed the walls...

Giacomo So did I. Tell me, is anyone still alive here among the victims of count Cenci?

Orsino They are all three living dead, and we must avenge them before they all three are turned to corpses.

Giacomo I could only break my way in as father isn't here. He rode out into the woods in the moonlight, but he could show up here again at any moment.

Orsino So you risked your life to visit your family.

Giacomo When I heard they had been abducted here I had enough. Now all that remains is the final battle between man and man of life and death. He is no more my father, and if we don't kill him, he will take the lives of all three of us, the few of his many children that so far succeeded in surviving.

Orsino One of them is almost lost.

Giacomo Who?

Orsino Your sister.

Giacomo What has happened?

Orsino He did more than just take her life. He brought her here so that no one who was in love with her would take her virginity. Now no one can take her virginity.

Giacomo My friend, my father has thwarted you.

Orsino So it seems.

Giacomo And you want revenge?

Orsino Yes, with a vengeance.

Giacomo Apparently we have both now every right and reason to together tear the fatherhood apart in all its particulars and scatter all his intestines all over the landscape.

Orsino We are united like brothers in an indissoluble purpose and mission, which is all we have to live for until Beatrice's father is dead and unblessed forever without a grave.

Giacomo My sister! The purest and most sacred of temples desecrated and turned into the most terrible disgrace humanity has known! I was always worried about you just because you were the highest beauty of all and in connection with a gentleness and wisdom without equal! Now trampled down by a sodomite in the most horrible crime that can be committed, compelling three children to bereave their own father of his life! O God, how could you allow this to happen?

Beatrice (enters) My brother, don't you know that God is dead? He died when he allowed his only begotten son to be sacrificed on a cross. Such an act can God not commit without going to perdition himself in total moral bankruptcy. All the church and all its popes rely on a lie about a virgin birth, three divinities in one, the resurrection of mortal flesh and other nonsense like that, but we can discard all that drivel now, for reality is so much worse. The knife that you cut my father's throat with, dear brother and my good priest, will import the end to the vain falsity of all established Christendom, which in our time mostly has been directed by my father's gold, by which he has smeared the pope's arse for bribery to enable father to continue cultivate his worst habits among which I am now the latest. What about that?

Giacomo I shudder! Sister, your horrible figure and aspect fills me with terror!

Beatrice Only because I am unfortunately true in my unblessed and shocking apparition, which by its mere undeniable presence only preaches and conjures revenge for its self-defence! It's a matter of our life, Giacomo, your own, mine and little brother Bernardo's, or our famous father's. If we don't sacrifice him he will sacrifice us all and that enthusiastically with laughing joy.

Orsino Giacomo, we must leave this castle before he comes home and finds us here. In Rome we can make careful plans so that the murder easily can be made perfect and the count's body made to vanish without a trace out of the mundane world.

Giacomo I believe you are right, Orsino. We cannot remain here.

Beatrice Hurry on your way, then! Leave the women to their continuity of being trampled down and abused to silence in the meanwhile! The women have been qualified for constantly enduring that ever since the days of Eve. We are used to it, as it never was any news. We still survive better than the poor men, who can stand anything except to be without their dependence on woman. Plan the murder well enough so that it cannot fail. Live just to kill, and you have my fullest benediction, more potent than God's. For here in Rome there is no other god than the sadistic Saturn, who gave all fathers too much power, so that they all became like Saturn: murderers and ravishers of their own children, only for the sake of blocking them from succeeding them in the absolute power of saturnalian inhumanity. Begone, and return with death as the supreme gift for our father.

(Giacomo and Orsino quickly depart.)

So now I am all alone with only death, which in comparison with the company of humanity is preferable indeed.

Scene 3. Rome. Giacomo's poor quarters.

Giacomo It is midnight, and I am expecting Orsino, while my wife and children turn around in their beds in subconscious worries and nightmares, like in painful delirium of fevers and opium and morbid coma. I have scared them all day by my haunted looks, which can't conceal the terrible expectations of the soul, for in this very stormy night my father shall be killed, and my own brain is monitoring the terrible deed. (*Thunder and lightning and storm winds outside.*) There! All the universe rise in terror against what is enacted in my own family! Will further on in twenty years' time my own son in the same way have to go through the same agony about having been obliged to take the life of his old thoroughly rotten father? The most regrettable deformities, vices and illnesses are generally more certain to be inherited than all the better qualities of the family, for we cannot love. We can only rape, harm and ruin each other since we are a rich family. But hark! I hear Orsino coming.

Orsino (enters wet and exhausted) He got away.

Giacomo How come that he got away?

Orsino He is at home in Petrella. He passed our ambush far too early before we were ready and prepared. The devil can ride fast and faster than we can react.

Giacomo What you are saying is plain disaster. Even the storm is laughing at our bad luck and lack of skill. And I almost already regretted that I had made myself the architect of his destruction! From now on nothing will be regretted no matter what beastly methods we must use to crush the fatherly devilry.

Orsino Listen carefully. Raving from wild disappointment with the failure of the attempt I have been thinking all the way here. The pale and bleached, wounded and outrageously desecrated soul of Beatrice has spurred my fanatic despair and released the most reckless resources of my imagination. Do you remember two men called Marzio and Olimpio?

Giacomo Olimpio was the former castellan of Petrella whom father discharged because he didn't really like him. Olimpio, who was rather good-looking, actually refused to spend the night in common bed with the count. Thrown out in the dark without income he soon came into trouble, and one of his children I believe died of starvation. Is he our man?

Orsino You will find no man more resentful and revengeful in all Latium.

Giacomo But who is Marzio?

Orsino A wild rascal who has been equally unjustly treated by the tyrant with the same brutal recklessness. If he is the action and power that is needed here, Olimpio will be the cold calculating brain and common sense.

Giacomo Such a couple ought to be irresistible.

Orsini I have not been lazy when the attempt went wrong. I already spoke with Olimpio and Marzio, and they should now be with Beatrice and Lucretia in secret to discuss the strategy. I only fear that the hard-boiled Olimpio will demand too much for payment.

Giacomo Cenci's gold can fill all holes of emptiness.

Orsini Except the virginity of Beatrice.

Giacomo That's why it's only just and fair of me to murder the progenitor of my life.

Orsini That's why it is the right thing for me to do as a priest to partake in the murder by some tortured children of their own father.

Giacomo Let's shake hands on it!

(*A woman in white with swollen eyes suddenly appear behind them.*)

Orsini (frightened) Ugh!

Giacomo Cosetta! What a shock you gave us!

Cosetta I couldn't sleep, and I heard voices. The night is heavy and tight with the scariest dreams, and here you sit like one of them making unfathomably dark plans to realize what must be named the most horrendous nightmare of all times. Isn't it enough, Giacomo, that your children and your wife are starving? Do you also have to deprive us of our future and provider?

Giacomo Cosetta, you have been dreaming.

Cosetta I know, but the dream threatens to come true.

Giacomo (to Orsino) It is my wife.

Orsino I understand. I first thought it was another Beatrice.

Cosetta And what is that priest doing here with a sword and all wet with sweat like after some nightly action of war? He brings no communion or salvation. He has a hungry appearance as if he only was looking for women.

Giacomo My wife, go to bed. I will soon follow you. We are finished.

Orsino (rising) I will leave.

Cosetta I hope you will not show yourself here again to my husband. I don't want to lose him. Our children cannot afford it. They would die.

Orsino I beg your leave. (*bows and leaves*)

Giacomo Come now, my dearest. Let us sleep no matter how difficult it is.

(*leads her out with tenderness.*)

Scene 4. Petrella.

Beatrice You are certain no one saw you enter?

Marzio We know since of old the climbing passage across the wall, which Orsino, the priest, and your brother Giacomo also have used.

Beatrice If my father may see you here my whole family will be lost and you as well.

Marzio He has not seen us, and we are since of old accustomed to never letting him see us.

Olimpio We are perhaps the only two persons he fears. That's why he shall never know where we are, to make certain that his fear of us will always remain constant. We only live to undermine the existence of the inhuman Francesco Cenci – until one day his life will collapse and be finished. By your mediation, that very day has now arrived standing by our door, and we will gladly open it wide to execute the necessary surgical operation.

Beatrice It all depends on secrecy. No one must ever know the truth except those responsible – myself, my elder brother and the two of you. If you reveal anything to anyone else we must also do away with both of you, which we would rather not.

Marzio We will gain nothing by telling tales. We can only lose by not keeping our mouths shut, isn't it so, Olimpio?

Olimpio Of course. You must not underestimate us, my sweet lady. If we could not hold our silence, we would not be true and reliable assassins.

Beatrice Then we only have to agree on what time and price.

Marzio If we first get agreed on the price, we could then easier devote ourselves to the practical details of the crime.

Beatrice State your price.

Marzio I will be content with enough support for me and my family for the rest of my life. I honestly deserved that already by my dealings and service with the count, but so far he has given me nothing.

Beatrice It is a modest, humble and welcome price. You will have it without further, and I will add more to it. And what about you, Olimpio? Would you like the same price?

Olimpio The ordeals I suffered from the count are considerably worse than Marzio's. I must therefore demand a higher price. I request the same privilege as Marzio and an extra bonus, which I beg to propose in private.

Beatrice Marzio, what do you say? Any objections?

Marzio No.

Beatrice Then we are agreed. You may leave.

Marzio I recommend myself in the meantime.

Beatrice Olimpio will then inform you about the details of the great murder like how and where.

Marzio Then I give my thanks and depart. (*leaves. When he opens the door, Lucretia is standing there keeping guard. To Lucretia:*) Is the coast clear?

Lucretia You can go home. His grace the count is sleeping off his drunkenness and can at the moment only use his life for snoring. But tread carefully and keep watch. (*The door is closed.*)

Beatrice Well, your price?

Olimpio My lady, I have a wife of my own and a good family, but she is worn and torn and only works as a shrew, and I can no longer love her.

Beatrice And what has that got to do with our project?

Olimpio All Latium speaks openly and warmly about your beauty. No one can see you without falling in love with you, and I always loved you since you became ripe as a virgin. What your father has done has only enhanced your maturity and gilded your high front with an even worthier majesty. I love you and ask for an extra favour to give you my love.

Beatrice Young man, it is not fit or wise to blend love with business, and especially not when the business is about murder.

Olimpio Then there will be no murder.

Beatrice What should I call this? An attempt at extortion? My honour as payment for what is vital for my family to be able to survive?

Olimpio Extortion, but by the holiest means, since my love is sincere. And I assure you, that your honour is far more sacred now than when it was violated by your father.

Beatrice Don't mention it, although you have the sense to talk beautifully about what is to me the foulest thing of all.

Olimpio And this extreme foulness has only managed to heighten, perfect and underscore the irresistible grace and beauty of the fragrant moonshine of your personality.

Beatrice At least you know how to put your words so that I cannot even feel insulted. That is soothing balm to me after my lord father's coarser way of handling me. And do I have any choice? Of course you refuse to cooperate if I don't give in to you?

Olimpio That is unfortunately, if you pardon me, my alternative.

Beatrice Then you really love me.

Olimpio Can you doubt it?

Beatrice (*stretches her arms towards him*) Come then, my lover, and take me, since it doesn't anyway matter any more what happens to my body. Your love could perhaps make the wounds heal with scars that my father gave me, and you are young and handsome and not at all repulsive. I hope your consort can forgive you that you allow yourself such liberties with a lady of noble birth.

Olimpio She is only happy if she is allowed to be left in peace by me. I love you, divine and young dainty woman!

Beatrice Take it easy. But I have nothing against leaving you perhaps with a child for a memory of me.

Olimpio Such a child will in that case be highly blessed and loved, adored by me like no other child begotten earlier by me.

Beatrice Just remember well that this is a binding affair and transaction. When I give myself to you, the murder simply has to be carried through.

Olimpio And with relish and lust.

Beatrice If you only stick to that agreement, I am yours.

Olimpio For ten months I have gone sucking and longing for this moment, which I never for a moment thought could become real. But because my highest dreams now suddenly have come true, I promise you that you will never have to regret or forget one moment of all the love I intend to bestow on you.

(Without delay they immediately go to get busy in bed. All lights go out.)

Scene 5.

Francesco Why doesn't Beatrice come? I did command her here! And she knows how I can punish disobedience! Has she then still got some will of her own? Didn't I break it for good and with a vengeance by force? Still the slut dares to spite me and annoy me and impertinently challenge me, as if she dared to still not consider me her father! Every woman is an adder whose teeth must be torn out by determined force, but she, my own daughter, has more poison teeth in her jaws than a crocodile, and I will never get finished with such a poison tooth garniture, which must be something singular for the family Cenci. *(enter Lucretia)* Isn't Beatrice coming?

Lucretia My husband, pull yourself together! You are an old man, and going so constantly to extremes in self-indulgence cannot be good for you! Your recklessness could result in a heart failure! Don't you fear God and a terrible violent death that would send you directly down to hell?

Francesco Ha-ha! That old hag tries to be funny! You old scarecrow are a prey to the contrived fairy tales of the catholic church, like all pious holy weak and submissive catholics are! Don't you know then, that one single word of piety expressed on your death bed just before death sends you directly to heaven whatever you have done! Every priest can warrant that! It doesn't matter the least how wickedly you live since it all depends on your life's last thought, and that last good thought, which will be the first of its kind in my life, I will save until I descry death, so that I will be sent to paradise with all the blessings of the church, for that's the standard procedure; and only to scorn everything holy, Christian, sacramental and unbearably pious I will use this praxis and with my life's only pious word die laughing with scorn to God and all humanity! But you come without Beatrice! Fetch her!

Lucretia Spare her, if there is anything human left in you! Spare her, if you are the least natural! For whatever wild animals treat their children far better than what you have done. You can still atone for everything. Give her away in marriage to some noble, like the pope asked you to do earlier on, and which you did with that angel's elder sister.

Francesco Ha! You are in a joking mood today, you old tart! I gave her sister away in marriage only because the pope forced me to! I will never give away my last daughter even if the pope would force me! If the pope tries anything like that I will simply reveal all his irregularities against the law and moral blunders. I know more about him and his vices than he does himself. I have a list of those boys whom he very well knows that his lackeys and cardinals, archbishops and monsignors have abused and fucked almost to death, so

that they now voluntarily pay altar service for life as episcopal bugger boys, with the appropriate papal benediction, which kindly smiles and piously forgives the cardinals that they turn the altar boys into incurable buggers and eunuchs. I have all the pope's most scabrous irregularities carefully documented in imperishable evidence!

Lucretia (shocked) My husband, you don't know what you are saying!

Francesco And you only make yourself ridiculous with inane naivety, you poor stupid and wasted fat old tart! I have the pope in my power. I know for example everything about that family Lanciai who eight popes now methodically have ruined until that name hardly dares to exist any more except in the only sensible Italian republic in the far north, Venice, where you respond to the pope's ridiculous excommunications by calmly excommunicating the pope himself, since there is obviously missing a Friday for his holiness. Go and fetch Beatrice! Or else I will have to fetch her myself!

Lucretia She refuses to come to you any more. Whenever you are mentioned to her she becomes completely absent and says like in a trance: "My father must die! May he confess his sins before it is too late, for he is already dying although he is not aware of it himself." Prophetically she envisions a terrible accident expecting you, and she is rather scary in her too convincing positive certainty thereof.

Francesco She is only mad like me from presumption and the overfed pride of the Cenci family. If she stupidly curses me I can with the same right curse her just as efficiently. Mark well! I wished for the deaths of Cristoforo and Rocco, I cursed them sincerely with all my heart, and they died almost in the same moment, for if there is a God he only obeys and listens to me. My daughter's life is more in my hands than my life is in hers. Fetch her quickly! Or else I will have to rape her! (*wants to pass Lucretia. She stops him.*)

Lucretia Wait! She has not prophesied your death. I was only joking. I didn't want to anger you, I just wished to warn you.

Francesco You blaspheme then as vigorously as myself then, you old beldam! But you only bore me, and I am tired of you now. Out of my way! I want my Beatrice!

Lucretia Listen to me just for a moment.

Francesco You crazy bitch! That's exactly what I don't want to do! You are hopeless like an old whore who is too worn out to be able to have any more orgasm! But you try anyway although you know very well yourself, that love cannot give you satisfaction any more. (*enter Andrea*)

What do you want, you ridiculous apparition and arch fool? Can't you see that your clothes are too small for you?

Andrea I admit that they sit too tight, but you don't want to pay for any better, and my salary is not enough to buy me cloth for a lackey's costume.

Francesco Sew your clothes yourself, you idiot! What does the cloth matter as long as you are not naked? Only the size is of any importance! You can't walk around in clothes that are too small! You only look ridiculous!

Andrea I come from my young lady.

Francesco I am on my way there, if she doesn't come herself.

Andrea She wonders what you wish with her.

Francesco Can't she guess? I want her with me! She happens to be my daughter, if you didn't know! Is it so strange that a father wishes to be with his own daughter?

Andrea She doesn't want to be violated by you any more.

Francesco Violated? She knows nothing about life! All life is a violation, which only consists of godless violations, which you are exposed to yourself and no one else, for you only feel violations that afflict yourself and not all those that afflict others, but all are violated and afflicted equally much in the same manner! Her "violation" is but a small tickle and a foretaste of what life has to offer. You have to start sometime.

Lucretia I can't bear staying here and listening to you any longer. I go out to speak with our Beatrice. (*leaves*)

Francesco Do so, old crone! Well, where were we, ridiculous bastard? Button up your pouch or at least your fly! You will hardly make an impression on any women in your absurd condition.

Andrea My lord, what you have done to Beatrice will be your destruction and perdition.

Francesco The fool tries to act a croaker and calamity-howler as well! Who has asked you to gabble like some duck? You haven't even got a feather! You are naked like a newborn pig!

Andrea There are witnesses to your way of living and your oppression here in Petrella. The matter is already spread around the country, and soon the pope himself will be likely to condemn you and punish you by the complete expropriation of all your property.

Francesco Ha-ha! That was the greatest fun of all! (*laughs hard and violently*)

Andrea What is so funny?

Francesco Don't you know that I am a father? A Father rules the entire world, and a Holy Father is the ruler of all Rome. All law protects the fatherhood, and that law is the highest law. No man can speak against it and least of all such a small fry as you, who against a fatherhood like me is like a cockroach, which you trample down on the floor into a wet disgusting and slimy stain. (*enter Lucretia*) Evidently every cockroach is coming here. Yes, what do you want, miserable matron?

Lucretia Beatrice sends her greetings that she doesn't feel very well and therefore can't be of pleasing service.

Francesco Why isn't she feeling well? Is she perhaps pregnant and can't take fish?

Lucretia How can you think and how can you even express such unspeakably horrible thoughts?

Francesco The girl is with child! That's how it must be! She blushes so sweetly and is so neatly ashamed of what she has done and her condition! She tries to keep her incest a secret! What a ninny! May the child be a son, and may he engender many descendants to the horrible tribe of vampires and monsters of the Cenci family! There you have the future for all humanity – Cenci leads the way! Live for your children, for they are the future of all humanity! The virgin apparently quite suddenly got pregnant! May that son be divine since she was a virgin, and may also the entire world know that the father of that child is also its grandfather! Now I understand why the church never dared to mention what father it really was in reality who allowed a virgin like Mary to give life to such a divine baby! On that scandal the world has built its church and its civilization! All the world relies on a lie and a foul scabrosity! Only jeering scorn will last for all eternity! Now someone of you will get me Beatrice. Or else I will go there and kill her.

Andrea I will speak with the poor lady. (*leaves*)

Francesco Close your fly first! Or pouch or whatever it is. I am eventually getting thirsty by this endless tiresome waiting for the whore who acts like from a maiden's bower.

Lucretia (*takes a decanter and a glass from the table*) Here you are, some wine.

Francesco That would be needed. (*drinks*) Who is not constantly drunk is not worthy of this life. All that's boring in life is sober, while all that isn't sober is the only joy of life. Drink with me, my lady!

Lucretia I am not thirsty.

Francesco Then I will consume the bottle myself. (*empties it*) Now Beatrice must come. Or else I will get angry and start tearing down my own castle with my bare hands!

Lucretia Patience, my friend. Your daughter will soon be here.

Francesco So certain so suddenly, and so calm?
Lucretia You will soon be even calmer.
Francesco I don't understand this. You were so upset a moment ago.
Lucretia Hear! Beatrice is coming. (*enter Beatrice with Andrea*)
 He is drunk.
Beatrice Yes, that is why I am coming now.
Francesco What kind of collusion is this?
Beatrice Father, your hour will soon be struck. Take it easy.
Francesco She talks like the popess herself, the pope of the tenth century, who suddenly was pregnant and gave birth to a child without anyone having suspected that she was a woman. It was the pope whose name was Joanna. It's a true story since only the Vatican has dared to claim it is false. But all the world knows that only the Vatican and its church is all false and rotten from the inside out.
Beatrice Stop gibbering, father. You don't have many hours left.
Francesco What's the matter with you? Why are you all so suddenly transformed into cold sinister characters like inquisitors?
Beatrice You have emptied a bottle of wine.
Francesco It was the second today. So what?
Beatrice The wine was poisoned.
Francesco Daughter, what kind of a bad joke is this?
Beatrice It's no joke. You will soon get drowsy by opium sleep and will fall asleep like a child, and when you sleep it will be to never wake up again.
Francesco You are serious! Are you in on this, my wife?
Lucretia I am outside but see and hear.
Francesco In other words, you give your consent by silence? What about you then, ridiculous lackey, deplorable Andrea, whose flesh hangs outside his trousers, are you in on this?
Andrea I know nothing but follow Miss Beatrice's wishes and commands.
Francesco Then it's your pedantry that kills me! But you, my Beatrice? Why this hatred? Did I not love you?
Beatrice And that, my father, you can ask, who wished to make me with child by you?
Andrea (aside) Now I leave, for I want nothing more to do with the strange liaisons of this family to be able to bear witness of. (*leaves*)
Francesco Have you been outside listening?
Beatrice All the time, until you emptied the bottle.
Francesco You are infernal in your careful method.
Beatrice You still have time to apologize, but you will die anyway.
Francesco Should I apologize for having given you your life with all my love?
Beatrice My life was no life, and your love was worse than that of a wild animal.
Francesco (suddenly sentimental and tired, falls down on his knees in his drunken condition)

Sweet daughter, you were beautiful. I was weak. I fell. I admit it. I didn't want to from the beginning. All I wanted was to protect you, for many men were after you and especially priests. But you were too beautiful. Your virginity and innocence were too overwhelming and irresistible. I couldn't control myself. Pardon my weakness. I am just an old man, an old wicked man, an old worthless fool, a drinking old devil, an ugly satyr, who pretends to be young although he is old. Forbear my horrible weakness, but please understand, that you were beautiful. Your golden angel locks, your divine long pretty hair let out, your proud light being, your charm and your magic emanation, I was just a weak and wasted old man. How could I resist you? You were too young and beautiful,

and I was too old and weak, and unfortunately I had you in my power... *(suddenly falls asleep and falls to the ground where he immediately starts snoring loudly.)*

Beatrice (calling) Olimpio! Marzio! *(They enter.)* Take over.

Marzio Is he already dead?

Beatrice He is asleep. Put him on the bed. That's the right place for him. May the bed of his incest be the best place for his death and his grave. Make sure to have it done before he wakes up and can hit back. *(The men lift Francesco up on the bed.)*

Marzio But how shall we do it?

Beatrice That's for you to decide. That's what you have been paid for.

Marzio I can't handle this. Look how old and grey he is! He is too much like my own father. Suppose he wakes up while we are at it?

Olimpio Are you a coward?

Marzio What do you think? Do you have no human feelings yourself for the dignity of age?

Olimpio That man had no dignity. Just listen how vulgarly he snores.

Marzio Then murder him yourself, if you are that bold.

Olimpio How should it be done?

Marzio There you are!

Beatrice What have you been paid for? Just for standing there acting like in a comedy like drunken fools, who can't make up their minds, just fooling around talking nonsense and can't get your thumbs out of your arse?

Marzio Madam, pardon us, but we lack the courage. He is an old man, and he could actually wake up.

Beatrice Just try and see. *(goes to Francesco on the bed and hits him on his cheek.)*

Francesco (in his sleep) O God! Listen to the father's curse of the entire human race! Go to hell, you maudlin madonna with your illegitimate son! You have contaminated all humanity by your trickery and your piteous conceit! Your deception was all self-abuse and pornographic wallowing in violence! Umph! Glumph! *(loses articulation in mumbling and recommences his loud snore.)*

Beatrice He keeps blaspheming even in his sleep. Who is afraid of such a jester? Not me. If you, who were paid and are men, don't dare to touch the rotten wreck, I have myself a dagger with which to let out his spirit from a contaminated flesh, and then you two will hardly be able to survive him very long!

Olimpio Marzio, don't be such a coward now. Man's greatest weakness is superstition, and you are a victim of it. The least thing to have any reason to fear in existence is the unknown. Come on now! Hold him tight, and I will try to strangle him.

Marzio (takes a firm grip of the sleeper) The old man is moving! He is waking up!

Francesco (drowsily) All the whores in town are crawling on me! What's the matter now? I don't have the strength to fuck now! Hem, mumble. *(mumbles again and starts snoring.)*

Olimpio I am afraid we have to resort to more drastic measures. His body will get no peace unless we dispose of it like with a vampire.

Marzio You tremble and are as afraid and pale as I.

Olimpio A life is not easy kill when you never did it before! But it has to be done! *Beatrice!* Do you have a hammer and nails?

Lucretia I know where to find it and will get it.

Olimpio The longest spike you can find! And several if possible! *(Lucretia leaves.)*

Marzio Will you drive in spikes in his heart? Real vampires must need poles.

Olimpio Don't be silly now. It's enough if we crush his skull.

Lucretia (returns with the instruments) I hope you know now what you are doing.

Marzio That's what we haven't the slightest idea of.

Olimpio Shut up now, you blunderer! I am rather sure of my business, and this is the only safe way. The old man is too tough and awakes too easily. Give me some help now, *Marzio*! Put the spike to his eye, and I will strike it in with the hammer!

Marzio You make it sound very easy. (*hesitates*)

Olimpio Give me the spike then, you incompetent lurch! (*Olimpio takes the spike, presses it into Francesco's eye, by which the old man awakes screaming, but Olimpio manages to hammer in the pike with several strikes.*)

Francesco (*bellows*) Damn all the devils in hell! God damn my unblessed soul! (*fighting hard from pure animal instinct*)

Olimpio Hand me some more spikes! (*Marzio gives another one, and Olimpio drives it into the count's throat.*) I think he now has spoken his last word.

Beatrice It didn't sound very repentant.

Lucretia But boys, look how you have splattered the whole place down! He is spurting blood all over the bed!

Marzio Is that so strange?

Olimpio Our next step will be to conceal the crime.

Marzio How could that be done?

Lucretia Was it then necessary to let all the old man's angry blood out? Now it will cry out your crime and brandish it all over the world!

Olimpio Don't get hysterical now, madam. We must make it look like a natural accident.

Beatrice I seem to have engaged the clumsiest bunglers in the world.

Olimpio Don't despair, lady *Beatrice*. We will surely get some order on this peculiar matter. Go and open the window to the balcony, *Marzio*! (*Marzio obeys.*)

Let's carry out the body there and tip it down into the bushes. In time the body will be discovered, and then everybody will start bemoaning the deplorable accident. He intended to go to the toilet, but in his drunken state he went wrong and out on his balcony, where he fell across the railing. It could happen to anyone. I heard about another far worse family murder where the family easily got away from far ghastlier traces of blood with an accident for an explanation. Let's carry out this bleeding splatter bag, this squirting fountain, this leaking tub of tomato sauce, *Marzio*, out in the fresh air of the balcony to there tip his excellency over into nature. *Marzio*! Get on with it now and let's get it over with! The sooner we have done with its riddance, the better! (*They succeed in carrying out the blood-spurting body to the window and balcony with much panting effort and finally getting it toppled over the rail of the balcony.*)

That's that! Now we can go home to sleep!

Lucretia But what a mess we have made! All this can never be cleaned up!

Marzio That's your job, girls. We have done our bit and got paid for the murder, so we are out in the clear. The rest you'll have to handle yourselves. (*hurries out*)

Beatrice *Olimpio*, the payment of your salary has only been introduced.

Olimpio You can always trust me. But I must get home now. Or else my wife will start wondering, and we must not cause any stir or wonder, must we? (*leaves in haste*)

Lucretia Well, my daughter, so now it is done.

Beatrice Yes. The party is over, the guests have left, and only the women remain who have to clean it up, wash the dishes and work until all looks normal again. But, mother, our wash will not be easy, for the guests were not housetrained.

Lucretia We will never get that blood out of that bed.

Beatrice We must try though. The sheets can be washed, and we can scrub the floor. And we must do this now.

Lucretia I say, never again a man in this house who is so afraid of killing that he must spread the blood all over! That blood will be the death of me, and I fear it will be the seal on my husband's family's damnation forever.

Beatrice Everything depends on the pope.

Lucretia Are you getting the pope mixed up in this?

Beatrice He was bribed by my father. If he now allows our father to be dead, all curse of the world on us is powerless. But if he starts rummaging in the problem, his papal chair will be just as stained and contaminated as the importance he attaches to the crime. Therefore, dear foster mother, I think we could take it easy. We are free now, and Giacomo and little brother Bernardo don't have to suffer any more.

Lucretia Your malicious joy is frighteningly like your father's.

Beatrice Have I then no right to be triumphant in my malicious joy? Our Father, God Father himself is dead, and I am the one who killed him myself!

(Suddenly a sharp bell.)

There is some boring guest at the gate.

Lucretia Now? At this hour? It couldn't be anything pleasant.

Beatrice No, that's what I said. It's a disturbance in our triumph and nothing further.

Andrea (enters) His excellency the papal legate Signor Savella wishes to see count Cenci.

(He completely ignores the blood and the disorder of the scene and the ladies.)

Beatrice The count is asleep and can't receive any visitors.

Andrea The legate insists.

Beatrice That's worse. Has he mentioned his business?

Andrea He has brought a warrant of arrest for Francesco Cenci for embezzlement, murder and sodomy.

Lucretia Too late! *(swoons)*

Beatrice Andrea, when you go to let in the papal legate, bring these two sheets with you on the way. As you see they are somewhat bloody and need some washing.

Andrea Have you butchered some animal in bed?

Beatrice Such a stupid question does not deserve any answer. Tell the washer-women that I have had a difficult menstruation. And then show the legate in here.

Andrea As you wish, madam. *(leaves)*

Beatrice Lucretia! Wake up! *(wakes her up)* We must not pass out now when life begins! Help me roll out this carpet here, so that the legate will not see any blood!

Lucretia My girl! If we hadn't punished the house tyrant ourselves, God himself would have done it for us! Wouldn't that have been simpler to be preferred?

Beatrice Mother, if we can't stand for what we have done, we might as well kill ourselves at once. Even if the murder now is discovered, it is Olimpio and Marzio who have committed it and no one else, and they are free on the run and can't be caught up with very easily, and none of them would ever inform on us! Pull yourself together, mother, and be sure to keep your hysteria at bay when the legate comes.

There! No blood is showing any more. Now even the pope could join us.

Andrea (enters with the legate) His excellency the papal legate signor Savella.

Beatrice Excellency, you come too late to deserve any greeting of welcome.

Savella I deeply regret my improper intrusion and am sincerely aware of the extreme awkwardness I thereby against my own will have to cause you, but I have no choice, since I am sent by the holy father himself.

Beatrice The count is already asleep and will be furious if someone wakes him up.

Savella We still have to wake him up. He is summoned to some hearing in the Vatican and that instantly.

Beatrice I warn you. No one will escort you to the count's chamber.

Savella Then I have no choice. I have to go there on my own.

Beatrice Be prepared then that he might scourge you directly.

Savella I thank you for the warning and will keep my hand on the shaft of my sword.
(*leaves. Andrea follows him.*)

Beatrice Now, Lucretia, is the moment of truth for some convincing theatre. Father's body can not be concealed to a pedantic priest who comes here on duty, and then we must act as we would have done if he really had died by some shocking accident. Are you ready?

Lucretia I will try.

Savella (behind the stage) He is not in his room! His bed is empty!

Andrea (behind the stage) Then he has gone to the toilet.

Beatrice Now they go out on the balcony. Fortunately Marzio broke some rotten boards on the rails of the balcony! Although an oaf, he is not stupid in practical inventoriness.

Savella (behind the stage) He is not in the toilet. The window here is open.

Andrea Is he then out on the balcony?

Savella No. The balcony is all empty. But look! A part of the railing has collapsed here! The railing has given way! (*calls*) Count Cenci!

Andrea If he has fallen down he has had it, for it is a long way down to the ground.

Savella Get some torches! Send some servants to light up the terrain! I am beginning to fear some annoying accident. If the count now is dead the pope will get angry for not getting any more money because God himself has anticipated him.

Andrea Here is a torch.

Savella Look! What is hanging there in the bushes? A corpse!

Andrea O horror!

Savella Servants! Get that corpse down from that tree! It's the count, or was, for this is a wreck of a man and not someone who has fallen down in perfect health.

Beatrice Now it begins.

Lucretia How shall we make it?

Beatrice Mother, just trust me. Savella is only a man and must be fully aware of how much we have suffered.

Savella (returns with Andrea) There has been a terrible accident! My lord the count has been found dead straight under his balcony! Has he then been sleepwalking? Do you know if he was capable of that?

Lucretia O horror! Dead! My husband! Is it possible? It must not be true! My beloved Francesco! Dead!

Beatrice It must not be true! What an accident! It's too horrible! Woe betide us! We are fatherless!

Savella Save your tears for the funeral. They do not go well with the hatred which everyone knows that especially all his family strongly nourished against him with every right.

Beatrice Pardon us, but this comes like a shock.

Savella Yes, I can understand that it does. That count was well known for boasting that he would survive all his children. They will bring in the body presently.
(*Some servants bring in the body wrapped up in a clean sheet.*)

Here is the victim of a nightly visit to the toilet. Let me see his face.
(*A piece of the sheet is turned back which reveals a totally battered face.*)

My ladies, this is indeed a most remarkable accident. He fell from his balcony and got stuck on the way down in some branches of a tree. In that fall his head has been massacred. Do you know something that you didn't tell me?

Beatrice We stand dumbfounded to an inexplicable mystery.

Savella Look carefully at this damage. One eye is gone, and around that wound all his skull is smashed, as if at least an iron branch had found its way into the count's brain. And look at his throat. It is equally violently pierced. What kind of a tree are you keeping in your garden? Can plum branches so brutally destroy vertebrae and skeleton?

Lucretia Excuse me, but this is more than I can bear. I must get out and vomit. (*hurries out.*)

Savella (to Beatrice) What do you say, my lady?

Beatrice What do you expect of me?

Savella Either a confession, explanation or accusation of murder.

Beatrice Against whom?

Savella Against anyone. All humanity had reasons to hate him. Everything is possible except suicide, for such drastic and terrible damages you can't inflict on yourself voluntarily. Do you have no trace of any suspicion against anyone? Has no one in this house noticed anything going on that wasn't quite regular? You, servants, has no one suspected anything? (*All servants shake their heads.*) You, Andrea. Have you noticed anything suspicious?

Andrea Only two sheets that were bloody.

Savella Aha! A trace! Where are those sheets?

Andrea I left them to be washed.

Savella What kind of sheets?

Andrea Beatrice Cenci gave them to me. She said she had had more difficult menstruation problems than usual.

Beatrice That is correct.

Savella (sighs) It is late, and I am only a priest. The authorities of Naples will have to make further enquiries. I am tired and beg your pardon for having disturbed and for happening to barge in on such a tragedy. And I assure you that I had no intention to. I came here quite happy about being able to at last bring count Cenci to justice for numerous atrocious and convicted crimes but have to retire back home with the resigned conclusion that he has got away. And I can only hope that no one will be punished for having committed a crime which must be considered the least of what count Cenci deserved. *Buona notte*, dear friends. (*He leaves. All remain standing and wondering. Finally Beatrice turns her back to the servants and leaves the other way. Only after that the servants start eagerly discussing with each other.*)

One servant (pointing at the corpse) Look, he smiles.

Andrea Yes, he is still jeeringly scorning us but now even more than before. Now he is an immortal scorn of all life and of all humanity. Now the tragedy may begin while only Saturn is laughing. (*leaves. Also the other servants leave.*)

Act IV Scene 1. The pope's palace in Rome.

Camillo Pardon me, your holiness, that we have to disturb you.

Clemens Yes, it is quite impertinent, Camillo! Have I no right to sleep at night?

Camillo Yes, but now it's morning, and if I don't reach you now I will never again get hold of you, as you are so extremely busy in the days...

Clemens Have I then no right to sleep out as I choose although it is morning?

Camillo Your Holiness, I would never have had the courage to disturb you if it wasn't eleven o'clock when you were still asleep.

Clemens My sleep is the most important in the whole world! Remember that I rest my head every night on a crown of thorns of all the world's problems, troubles and worries, for which I alone am directly responsible to God!

Camillo I have most humbly asked your pardon, your holiness. But now the time is almost noon, there are only five minutes left, and we haven't even succeeded in getting to the point yet.

Clemens But get then at last to the point! It's of course just one of your ordinary trivialities.

Camillo It concerns the tragic murder of count Francesco Cenci.

Clemens He only got a trifle of what he deserved! Can't you let that villain rest in peace in his grave?

Camillo There have been investigations...

Clemens Yes, I heard all those messy gory details long ago already. He fell from the balcony when he had to go for a pee in the night when he was drunk and wobbly, and his careless plummet along rocks and trees messed him up to total unrecognizability.

Camillo Allow me to complete the picture, holy father. The case of the fall proved more complicated than anyone could have imagined.

Clemens If anyone battered him to death he had reasons enough to do so, and that murderer's sins should in that case be forgiven.

Camillo Unfortunately it was not that simple.

Clemens Well, get on then with the results of all pedantic enquiries! This day was not made solely for that scoundrel Cenci, although he is dead, to completely ruin it for me! I have my breakfast to think of and my walk and siesta and all those daily hopelessly tedious and inescapable holy services! Do you think then I have time for vulgar gossip of nonsense and scabrosities? – Tell me, is there anything in that his daughter was the mistress of the plot?

Camillo Your holiness, what has been discovered is so serious that I am obliged to present the case detail by detail. The most important fact is that those physical damages of the count were not incurred by his fall to the ground. He got stuck in some branches of some trees, that mercifully softened his fall. His head and throat were completely pierced by what is believed to have been long spikes of iron.

Clemens Then it was someone who hit count Cenci with consequences. (*tries to be funny*)

Camillo He was already completely without life when he fell from the balcony, and to reach and get stuck in those green branches of the tree that received him he can't just have fallen. He must have been flung from the balcony with some force.

Clemens So it was someone in the castle who got rid of that knave. Who could it have been? There were at least twenty men who had more than enough reasons for it.

Camillo All the personnel at the castle were arrested. The only suspicious matter that the enquiries brought forth was that Beatrice, his daughter, had given over two bloody sheets for washing. She claimed she had had a difficult menstruation.

Clemens That happens to the noblest ladies.

Camillo But these sheets were quite drenched with blood. If a woman can bleed that much by only one menstruation she cannot survive that menstruation. Also menstruation blood is not so clear and red as these two sheets were in their drenched condition.

Clemens This is now beginning to be interesting.

Camillo Someone must have murdered the count, and none of the servants had any idea of it. They were all absolutely stupid as logs, dumbfounded in ignorance and all question marks of wonder.

Clemens That leaves us the children. That blackguard had three children.

Camillo They have not been questioned or arrested. Instead there has been investigations carried around them. It appeared that the noble and virtuous daughter, the admired beauty praised by all, the most perfect and beautiful incarnation of innocence and virginity Beatrice, had given an expensive cloak with golden embroideries to the former castellan Olimpio, which earlier had belonged to the murdered father.

Clemens A bribe or a reward? It doesn't really matter much and makes no evidence, but what do you think?

Camillo It is out of the question that any of the children could have committed the murder. Bernardo is too young and green, and his elder brother Giacomo was not present. Only men could have crushed the skull of the murdered count with such excessive brutality. Beatrice could not have taken part in it. But, as you suggested, your holiness, she could have made plans and given bribes, rewards and thanks.

Clemens It sounds more and more like a well directed theatre play.

Camillo When the authorities arrived to question Olimpio more thoroughly, they came too late. When they finally came home to him, he had been assassinated.

Clemens That's normal. Assassins of no further use are usually assassinated.

Camillo He had been in close association though lately with a certain signor Marzio, who like Olimpio suddenly had a fortune to dispose of. They succeeded in catching Marzio, and he has confessed.

Clemens That idiot! What has he confessed?

Camillo Too much.

Clemens Tell me!

Camillo That he committed the murder with poor Olimpio while the wife and the daughter watched it. Beatrice paid for the job which was ordered, organized and first planned by Giacomo, the oldest living son, here in Rome. But all this is just harmless details in comparison with the worst.

Clemens Which is?

Camillo We found a letter in Petrella, which was written by the one who employed the two assassins and who himself sent them with the letter to Beatrice.

Clemens Is it some intriguing lover of Beatrice? That's how it usually is.

Camillo Here is the incredible letter. (*gives a slip to the pope, who unfolds it and reads:*)

Clemens "To my own lady Beatrice.

As my reward like my body so unendurably desires soon to be mine, I here send you by your brother's recommendation those who gladly will execute what cannot be expressed in writing

by your most faithful friend

Monsignore Orsino Guerra."

Dear me!

Camillo But that is not the worst of it.

Clemens Is it not the worst that here a Monsignore and priest has taken active part in a reckless murder of a nobleman?

Camillo The one who had Olimpio murdered was not a Cenci. It was our brother and colleague Orsino who arranged for the murder of the man because Beatrice was pregnant.

Camillo Pregnant?

Camillo Yes, Beatrice is pregnant, not by our poor brother Orsino but by her lover, her life's redeemer and highly appreciated favourite Olimpio. Orsino agreed to the plot hoping to win Beatrice, but this Olimpio, who was already married, came between, anticipated him and was therefore murdered by the upset Orsino, our honourable prelate, Monsignore and future bishop and cardinal Guerra.

Clemens Now I see the seriousness of the case. The church and my own Papal Chair are involved and compromised. We must in other words take on the case and act accordingly with rigour.

Camillo And what are we to do?

Clemens There is only one thing to do. Arrest them all, the whole mixed up gang, Bernardo, Lucretia, Giacomo and Beatrice, and also of course Don Orsino.

Camillo The last one is the one thing we cannot do.

Clemens Why?

Camillo He has escaped abroad and entered the service of his majesty the king of France in the French army.

Clemens There the church lost its most gallant priest.

Camillo We should be grateful though that he could get away.

Clemens Why?

Camillo Thereby we don't have to prosecute a priest. That compromise of the Vatican and the entire hierarchy we have luckily escaped.

Clemens My friend, you are right. The harder then we can get at those who enticed Orsino into sin. That we must not neglect to do. It's time now to establish a strong example! You must not seduce the infallible and inviolable priests of the holy church! At least not without punishment! Set the mills of justice to spin, Camillo, and arrest every family member and accomplice. Put them under thumb screws and any torture until everything is confessed! We have the paternal authority of the world order to defend against undisciplined and disobedient children, who seem to believe that you may go and execute the patriarchy and challenge the pontificate without punishment!

Scene 2. The papal court.

Judge Bring on the first accused! (*Marzio is brought in.*)

Read the accusation act!

Prosecutor Are you Marzio, citizen of Petrella, earlier in the service of count Francesco Cenci?

Marzio Who else would I be?

Prosecutor Answer the question! Yes or no!

Marzio In that case I should be what's left of him, the way you tortured me and almost tore out my intestines.

Prosecutor Sit down, you dog! You only had what you deserved, the way you massacred count Francesco Cenci, a highborn nobleman!

Judge My lord prosecutor, you forget yourself. Just read the accusation act.

Prosecutor Hrm! (*throws angry glances at Marzio as if he still had much to vent, then reads:*)

Citizen Marzio of Petrella is hereby accused of premeditated murder of count Francesco Cenci on the eve of the ninth of September 1598, which he himself has confessed that he committed together with a certain Olimpio, earlier castellan of Petrella, later assassinated. He has further openly confessed that the murder was committed by order of Giacomo and Beatrice Cenci, son and daughter of the late count Cenci. For the murder an amount of one thousand piastres was received in cash with a promise of further rewards in future with interest. In his confession is included that his later assassinated accomplice Don Olimpio received a similar reward and a cloak with embroideries in gold worth a fortune that earlier belonged to the count. This cloak now belongs to Don Marzio, who bought it from him. These two thousand piastres, this gold embroidered cloak and the diamond ring, which belonged to count Francesco Cenci and

which his daughter gave to Don Olimpio for a well executed murder, devolve to the disposition of the Vatican as blood gifts that only bring damnation if they are not used for the welfare of the poor. Does the accused have anything to say?

Marzio Everything I said so far was forced out of me by torture, I will not say any more.

Judge Bring on the next accused. (*Giacomo is brought in.*)

Read the accusation act.

Prosecutor Are you Giacomo Cenci, son of count Francesco Cenci?

Giacomo Yes.

Prosecutor (reads) Giacomo Cenci, son of count Francesco Cenci, is hereby accused of plotting the murder of his own father according to Don Marzio's revelations.

Giacomo (upset, to Marzio) Have you betrayed us, you villain?

Marzio (with an exculpating gesture) Under torture you are made to confess anything.

Giacomo You villain!

Marzio That's nothing against what your Monsignore Guerra is, who let us all down.

Judge Order!

Prosecutor Don Giacomo Cenci, sit down. (*Giacomo tries to calm down.*)

Judge Bring on the next accused. (*Bernardo is brought in.*)

Read the accusation act.

Prosecutor Are you Bernardo Cenci, youngest son of count Francesco Cenci?

Bernardo Yes.

Prosecutor (reads) Bernardo Cenci, son of Francesco Cenci, is hereby accused of implication in the murder of his father.

Giacomo (rushes up) He is innocent!

Prosecutor Sit down!

Giacomo He is innocent! He is just a child! He knew nothing! You accuse him just to make no one inherit the count, so that the Vatican can consume the entire house of Cenci with all its flesh and matter!

Prosecutor Sit down, parricide! Don Bernardo Cenci's guilt or innocence shall be tried impartially like that of all the others.

Judge Bring on the next accused. (*Lucretia is brought in.*)

Read the accusation act.

Prosecutor Are you Lucretia Cenci, widow of the late count Francesco Cenci?

Lucretia Alas, yes, woe to me!

Prosecutor Lucretia Cenci, widow of the late count Francesco Cenci, is hereby accused of implication in the murder of count Francesco Cenci, since she according to Don Marzio's confessions was present when the murder was committed.

Lucretia Alas, we did not know what we were doing! We were desperate after years of abuse by the count! He tortured us day and night! He never left any woman in peace and not even his own daughter!

Prosecutor (to the judge) According to signora Lucretia Cenci's confessions in prison, she was the one who made the count drink the poisoned wine.

Lucretia Alas! We did not know what we were doing! We were driven to despair!

Judge Countess Cenci, please sit.

Bring on the next accused. (*Beatrice is brought in, emaciated and pale but prouder than ever.*)

Read the accusation act.

Prosecutor Are you Beatrice Cenci, daughter of count Francesco Cenci?

Beatrice No one knows that. Not even my father himself was sure. I pray to God that I am not.

Prosecutor Answer yes or no! Are you Beatrice Cenci?

Beatrice Yes.

Prosecutor (reads) You are accused of plotting the murder of your own father *in the flesh* together with your own brother, according to Don Marzio's voluntary confessions. Sit down!

Beatrice Marzio, did you confess under torture?

Marzio Who doesn't confess to anything under torture?

Beatrice Damned inquisitors, all Italy knows, as Marzio here confesses himself, that under torture you will confess any lies! Hundreds of witches are burnt every week at the stake all over Europe just because they confessed under torture that they fornicated with the devil! What sensible man could believe that anyone could fornicate with the devil? Everything confessed under torture is worthless!

Prosecutor Miss Beatrice, didn't I ask you to sit down?

Marzio (rising) She is right! All I confessed under torture was only lies to get away from torture! No man confesses anything under torture except lies for only human reasons!

Judge (to Marzio) Do you retract your testimony?

Marzio I retract every word! All I said was only lies!

Judge Then you could be subjected to torture again.

Marzio Then I will confess to the same lies again, which I then will retract in court again.

Camillo (rising) Children, as your father's friend I must advise you not to try to wriggle out of this. Your case is hopeless whatever this poor Marzio says and doesn't say and whatever he retracts. All the world knows that you murdered your father without your own hands touching him. Stand up for the truth of your crime, and perhaps you could be pardoned. That is your only chance.

Giacomo It's no use, Beatrice. They know everything, they have us caught, and they will not let us get away. They will not stop until they have bereft us of all our family fortune. That's the only reason why the pope agreed to our arrest. As nobles we should have enjoyed the same legal immunity as our father always did no matter what beastly crimes he committed.

Camillo Count Cenci was three times thrown into prison by the pope.

Giacomo To make him pay. Now you have the chance to get everything we own, and that's why you gladly send us to the scaffold.

Beatrice Cardinal Camillo, if you are our only defendant it's your duty to defend us. The accusations against us depend entirely on a miserable man's confessions under torture. How was it really, cardinal? How did your nephew die? If you were tortured yourself and they asked you to at last confess that you poisoned him yourself, the apple of your eye and life, what would you answer? By pain of violence anyone can be brought to any action and confession of madness. Consider, and you will not deny that you under torture in the same way would have confessed to the poisoning of your own nephew, although it would ruin your entire career in the Vatican.

Camillo Girl, how can you defend parricide? How can you deny that he is dead with spikes through his throat and skull? That his murder has been paid by wonderful magnanimity towards simple people? That his murderer Olimpio received thanks for his trouble by becoming your lover, with whom you had a child? There are eye witnesses to your secret childbirth in a holy convent protected by your father's money and that you told Olimpio yourself: "Thank heavens! The face of a newborn child cannot lie: you are the father!"

Beatrice Here we stand accused, an entire family with only one sole servant who dared to remain loyal and take a stand for the oppressed against the oppressor and rapist, who was given licence to ravage freely as long as he lived without anyone interfering, who was aware of all the crimes of the greatest criminal of the country! The most

informed of all father's vices was the holy father himself, his holiness of the Vatican, the godfather of all mafiosi! The pope did not cross two fingers to give any of my father's many victims any jot of justice, but when someone dares any revenge and to defend himself against the monster of lust, then immediately all suspected must be decapitated and even a child! (*points at Bernardo*)

Judge My lady Beatrice, no sentence has yet been pronounced.

Beatrice Hasn't it? Don't playact, master judge, with such cynical scorn! We were all condemned already when the worthy pope himself made sure we were brought to trial. We have no chance against the established uncompromising prejudices of the papal state. Cardinal Camillo knows that, or else he would never have dared to stand up for our defence.

Camillo Confess, my girl, and we will try to appeal and have mercy. That's the only thing that could help us.

Beatrice I haven't finished speaking yet, cardinal Camillo. There was one loyal and solidaric servant more except Marzio here. He was my father's former castellan who was dismissed and ruined, but he is not here among us the accused, although he was the only one who was brave enough to himself hammer the nail into the rapist's eye, which became that villain's death. And why isn't he here? Because he is dead. He was effectively disposed of, he was murdered in broad daylight publicly here in a street in Rome, and the body was left in the street to bleed to death. Everybody knows that the one who organised the murder of Olimpio was a renegade priest who not only turned himself into a murderer but also to a traitor, since he shortly before going abroad made sure that Giacomo, my brother, was arrested on a charge by this priest. I can tell you more about that priest. He wanted me and would have desired to be in my father's stead when the disgusting and lewd old man raped me. My father anticipated him though, but it was the fault of that priest, because it was to protect me against that priest that our father isolated us inside Petrella. I was protected there against everyone except one: my father was too weak to be able to protect me against his own uncontrolled private nature. I can tell you more about that priest. Giacomo, my brother, can reveal that that priest was the first one to present the idea that father could be murdered. Isn't it right, my brother, that you would never have entered on that idea yourself until our friend Orsino, Monsignore Guerra, hatched it and dressed in words?

Giacomo My sister, that is true, and God knows it.

Beatrice Still that priest is not among us the accused. He was allowed to leave the country without anyone even trying to stop him. If you, gentlemen priests by the pope's holy authority, accuse us for the murder of Francesco Cenci, we must answer, that you are more responsible and guilty thereof than we and with you the entire Vatican!

Prosecutor Outrageous! I have never heard anything more vile!

(*general uproar, much commotion and upsets especially among all the priests.*)

Camillo (louder than everyone) The parricide has spoken!

Judge Order! Silence at court! Or else the court will be cleared! The court is adjourned anyway! Today's proceedings are hereby concluded!

(*strikes the table with his mallet and quickly leaves the court.*)

Giacomo Are we free now perchance?

Beatrice Hardly. We are stuck from the beginning. (*to Camillo*) Weren't you supposed to defend us? Wasn't it your duty according to the practice of law to act to our defence?

Camillo Don't tell me that I didn't try! You have completely ruined your own cause yourselves!

Prosecutor (to Camillo) What happens now?

Camillo The pope will probably have to change judge. He must have a judge that doesn't hesitate in condemning them.

Marzio (in despair) I am the only guilty one! Please, listen to me! The Cenci children have absolutely no guilt! I am alone responsible! It was only me and Ser Olimpio who alone took the life of the tyrant! (*No one cares about him.*)

Prosecutor You poor misguided knave will probably be the only one to be spared. Go away and vanish, no one listens to anyone any more, and you demonstrate your sacrificial offer too late, for the priests are angry now. (*leaves. The court dissolves.*)

Act V scene 1. In prison.
(*Beatrice sleeps. Bernardo sits by her.*)

Bernardo How sweet and adorable is sleep when it can make such a divine and lovable beauty even more soft and mild and beautiful by such heavenly smiling grace! She must be dreaming about inconceivable paradises and their joys and bliss, when she can smile in her sleep to even outshine the sun by so angelic and supernatural beatitude of wonderful splendour! I could never disturb such adorable dreams of purest virginity. When she sleeps she still has her childhood and her virginity and can never have them violated, for in her dreams her better ego shines forth, which nothing can impede or shut down in the same way that it was bereft of her in the mundane reality. But I must wake her up with softest care, or else others will wake her up with rude brutality. Wake up, my dear elder sister!

Beatrice (wakes up) What? Who wakes me up so brusquely in the middle of the night?

Bernardo It is not night, but we are still in darkness.

Beatrice I understand. It's only by dreams you sometimes can get out of this prison of hopeless lack of comfort. But I needed to sleep. I have been hanging in my hair for two hours without those infernal inquisitors having obtained the slightest information that they didn't know already, and after such a headache any sleep at any place at all was a paradise. I actually dreamed that I was promised a safe victorious passage to paradise. Still we are in paradise already.

Bernardo What do you mean, sister?

Beatrice Compared with our life with father's constant oppression around us, even a prison in the cellar of the Vatican is a paradise.

Bernardo My sister, we deserved such a dream. We needed such a revelation, and I must believe it was true. A passage of victory to paradise is what we need and deserve.

Beatrice You know more than I about reality. Why was such a dream so well deserved? Has anything happened while I was asleep?

Bernardo Our cardinal Camillo was here a moment ago. He didn't have the heart to wake you up, for he was so moved by your smile of innocence in your sleep. But he said a great deal that bodes no good for us.

Beatrice Like what?

Bernardo They have tortured Marzio to death. He can no longer help us by his self-contradictory testimonies.

Beatrice Then he died a martyr. Have they also tortured Giacomo and mother Lucretia?

Bernardo Yes, and they have both confessed.

Beatrice Confessed? What have they confessed?

Bernardo Our stepmother told them everything about us, how you ordered the murder and pushed the murderers on. And Giacomo has accepted all responsibility and guilt. You

are now the only one to insist on your innocence and who hasn't been broken by the Vatican hoodlums. Only you can still defend yourself and have not been subjugated.

Beatrice What cowards they are, mother Lucretia and Giacomo! I never thought that of them! They have then forfeited their honour and good name and haven't even any false pride left. Were they then such mean and infamous poltroons to be so easily violated and unfrocked of the nobility of their unassailable souls?

(Enter the prosecutor with Lucretia, Giacomo and cardinal Camillo)

There you are, you lousy Vatican lackeys, rats and inquisitors who dare not show yourselves in daylight, stinking crawlers of the dirt, who prostituted your soul and honour and identity to the only sanctifying brothel of the papal church! I heard that you took the life of our only honest advocate, the poor faithful Marzio.

Camillo My girl, your blasphemies vanish in these cellar vaults like the cries of drowning victims in the water. Not even these solid walls can hear what you say. The confessional of the Vatican has nothing to hear or forgive. It can only give mercy. Confess, and we shall appeal and obtain pardon.

Lucretia That's our only possible salvation, my girl! I have told them everything, and if you don't repent we shall all be torn asunder limb by limb!

Beatrice My brother, did you then also submit to those swine?

Giacomo I have accepted my guilt and responsibility. Go thou and do likewise. Then perhaps we could have mercy. We have no other chance.

Beatrice Brother, you are a woman, and cheap as such. Am I then the only man in the family except little brother Bernardo, *(embraces him,)* who alone besides me haven't had any lies forced by torture to confess? Then also I with my Bernardo am alone in the family without guilt and without a bad conscience.

Camillo My girl, you are stupid in your absurd obnoxiousness. You will gain nothing by it. If you insist in defending the parricide you will all be sentenced to the most cruel imaginable death.

Beatrice Even Bernardo?

Camillo Yes. Your stubbornness can least of all protect him.

Beatrice But it still saves our honour and name and our integrity! And it will go on living forever on the wings of popular legend until we one day will be publicly exonerated by the full power of justice strengthened by centuries of patience, and that power of justice will then smother the catholic church and world Christianity! And the pope will then no longer himself be able to defend centuries and millennia of unresolved and concealed crimes by, as heretofore, hiding with them in the Vatican, but he will be dragged in chains all over Europe as a laughing-stock and be an object of ridicule to all the world!

Camillo (to the prosecutor) There is nothing we can do here. She is hopeless. It's just to pass the sentence. *(to Beatrice)* Slut, you are lost to hell forever for in unsound mind defending the murder of your noble father, and thereby you drag your entire family down with you into perdition! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

Lucretia My daughter, think then of us! Perhaps you might still be able to save us if you give in and confess! The cardinal alone here has the power to save us!

Giacomo My sister, think of little brother Bernardo. Only you can save him.

Beatrice Little brother! It would then be just for you that I would compromise with the most disgusting vultures the world knows, namely our pope's inferno of black cloaks! Cardinal Camillo, I confess, if it saves little brother Bernardo, for I don't think you wish to save the other three of us. Me and Giacomo at least you would sacrifice with pleasure whatever we confess, repent or pray for. But you know that little brother Bernardo is completely without guilt. It is your duty to save him.

Camillo I shall do what I can. So you accept your part of the responsibility of the murder of your father?

Beatrice For the sake of Bernardo, or else you would not save him.

Camillo (to the whole family, with his hands stretched out for blessings) Dear children, then there is hope for you to at least obtain the blessed paradise in spite of all.

(to the prosecutor) Come, Monsignore let's leave. We have heard all we wished for. (They leave.)

Beatrice That stinking accursed entirely corrupt and rotten hypocrite of a eunuch!

Lucretia My daughter, don't blaspheme so. He is our friend, and he can still save us, since he even is a cardinal.

Beatrice Save us? Do you think, mother, that a pope who rules with the inquisition for his instrument can pardon and save a family that belongs to the world's richest? He will sentence us and let us burn just to be able to get over our gold! If little brother Bernardo (embraces him) will be pardoned it will surely not be without at the same time being completely ruined.

Lucretia Hope is a virtue, my daughter, and it lasts as long as life lasts. Let's not give up while we still are allowed to live. We have the right to hope as long as we still may live.

Beatrice Mother, you prattle nonsense and gaga like the perfect naïve Italian obstinacy itself. My brother Giacomo knows better. Quiet, don't say anything, Giacomo, for that is better. All we can still hope for is to be together for our last moments. Isn't that about right?

Giacomo If the world lets us down, we shall therefore not give up on each other. We will never fail ourselves because the pope fails us. We live and we die together.

Lucretia God's will be done!

Beatrice No, mother, that's precisely what is wrong with us. It is not God's will that is done any more. Instead it's the will of the pope, that is entirely motivated only by economic interests. It's not best what happens in the world any more, but what happens is the worst, just because it is money and people's greed and not God any longer that runs this world. And we are the first victims of that corrupt capitalism.

Scene 2. The pope's quarters

Camillo All Rome is pleading for the young virgin's innocence and liberation.

Clemens You mock me, my friend. She did give birth to a child. She has confessed like her brother. My command is that they all four be tied to the tails of wild horses, each one to four horses, and that they are torn asunder according to the practice of the law concerning quartering.

Camillo It will not do, your holiness. I promise you, that all Rome would revolt like one man. All are praying for Beatrice and sympathising with the family. If the girl is executed she will be a saint to all the people.

Clemens She cannot be defended! She took the life of her father!

Camillo She only acted in self-defence. Consider! Francesco Cenci took his own daughter's virginity, and he ruined his own son. I heard myself how he cursed those two sons of his that perished earlier. His grotesque malicious joy was without limits, and he would gladly have acted himself as their murderers. The poor girl had no other choice than to defend herself and avenge herself by a parricide.

Clemens It will not stick! Did they give the old man any chance for his self-defence? No, the children first gave their father poison to safely incapacitate him to make it easier to kill him off! If it wasn't so obviously a premeditated methodic parricide I could maybe have

given them mercy. If I now gave them mercy it would be the wildest precedent in the world, which would make all crimes allowable! For this crime is the roughest of all.

Camillo At least give them some time to consider! Give their lawyers a human chance to defend them! There is not one jurist in this Rome that hasn't offered himself to speak warmly for their cause. All over Rome there are pamphlets, petitions, articles and sincere supplications being written and published and spread around. Everyone wants to defend them except you.

Clemens Has Rome then sunk so deep down into despicable infamy beyond contempt, that there are not just Romans who murder their fathers but even lawyers who defend premeditated parricides!

Camillo Give them a chance! Give them a respite!

Clemens How long would you wish for the matter to demur?

Camillo In five and twenty days all lawyers will have time to formulate their concerns.

Clemens Well then, you will have your five and twenty days. On the twenty-fifth day every petition and supplication must have reached me, and I will conscientiously study them all to the finest detail. But then I will give a fair judgement.

Camillo May your words have been those of his holiness indeed. (*bows and leaves*)

Clemens It has gone too far for any possible chance to turn back. All that remains is to make the demission of that family as formally soft as possible. No one shall have any reason to be able to say that his holiness the good clement father the pope did not wish to give them all the mercy in the world or that he didn't consider everything that could be considered for their part in the case. They have forfeited their lives. My duty is only to make sure their downfall and death is made acceptable.

Scene 3. The prison.

Giacomo (*walks to and fro*) How can they torment us like this? They are murdering us just by their silence! It has been three weeks without relaxing even an inch of the straps of the rack! It's worse than to immediately have your death sentence declared!

Lucretia Calm down, my boy! Every day of life is more valuable to us than a whole lifetime to an ordinary man, for we are living under the constant threat of death, which raises the level of the meaning of life.

Giacomo Stepmother, you just prattle your usual nonsense that has no sense at all. I am twenty-five years old, have family and children to live for, who suffer the same unspeakable torture as I for our fate not being settled but hanging and pending in constant torture, making of me something of a gorilla confined in too small a cage. An animal family bereft of their father and provider can die for less!

Lucretia There is still hope, and for every day that passes the hope for our pardon increases. That's what cardinal Camillo says himself.

Giacomo That bastard hypocrite! Do you really think he is unaware of that he is constantly aggravating our torture?

Beatrice We have to be pardoned. I know that all Rome is working on it. You can't just kill us for having defended our lives against a mad father who didn't know what he was doing. God himself must work for our freedom, and even our pope is subject to God's higher order.

Bernardo Take it easy, big brother. Our sister is probably right. It's not possible or reasonable for them to just kill us after such a long wait and so many lawyers.

Giacomo Quiet! I hear people coming! It's probably the cardinal.

Beatrice Yes. It is the twenty-fifth day. Now the pope has decided our case and our destinies. If he is human we must be granted freedom from accountability.

Bernardo (hopefully) Life begins now, my sister!

Beatrice I hope you are right.

(Enter cardinal Camillo with guards.)

Camillo My children, I have done everything I could.

Beatrice What does that mean?

Camillo Your death sentence has been pronounced.

Giacomo For all four of us?

Camillo For all four of you.

Beatrice It isn't be true!

Camillo Unfortunately, my daughter, it is true.

Beatrice It can't be true! They cannot do that to us!

Camillo No, they cannot do that to you, but still they are doing it. Not all the jurists and most prominent lawyers of Rome could help you with their bricks of volumes for your powerful defence.

Beatrice You can't act like that against life! After all, we are proved innocent! It was Marzio and Olimpio who took the life of our father, it has been proved, and you priests have long ago taken their lives. Isn't that enough? Do you have to extirpate an entire innocent family? Are you so extremely greedy and totally inhuman? Is the pope then so afraid of me, that he doesn't dare to let me live? No, it can't be true. It's just a cruel play with our lives. They make a show of us. When we stand on the scaffold in front of the hangman with the axe we are informed that the pope has pardoned us. He just can't take our lives and have us seriously killed without a conscience. If he does he is worse than Saturn.

Camillo Your sentences are as follows. Beatrice and Lucretia and Bernardo are to be decapitated in public with the mannaja. Giacomo shall die according to the law as a parricide: his flesh shall be torn asunder by glowing tongs, after which he shall be mangled on the wheel with a sledge-hammer.

Giacomo It pleases his holiness to play jokes on us. And this is what we have been waiting for in twenty-five days full of hopes?

Camillo Everybody did everything humanly possible.

Giacomo The problem is just that the pope is not human.

Camillo There have been too many parricides lately. Yesterday the marquess Santa Croce was murdered by her own son because she refused to bequeath her entire fortune to him. This famous lady of sixty years was brutally butchered by her own son with a knife! And he got away! No one knows where he has gone. And add to that the horrible fratricide that occurred quite recently which is already famous as the Massini family tragedy. The pope feels obliged to put an end to this actual epidemic of ghastly family murders.

Beatrice Since he has everything to gain on it as he thereby is enabled to confiscate their money and fortunes. He can only afford to let poor people live.

Camillo Daughter, I regret and understand your bitterness.

Beatrice So we have to write our wills and don other clothes, so that it may seem that we make penitence as we walk to the scaffold, isn't that it?

Camillo Everything is well prepared. A confessor is waiting for you, after which you may partake in a holy service.

Beatrice All to establish the pope's power of our souls, our senses, our destinies and forever of this Rome.

Camillo My daughter, your jeering scorn is out of place now. Your father's life was scorn enough of all the papal church. Make the conclusion of the Cenci scorn worthy for your own part.

Beatrice Be calm, my good cardinal. Your pope will not have to be ashamed of anyone but himself.

Camillo Then I leave you here in peace to return later to lead you to the holy mass.
(*leaves*)

Lucretia (hysterical) Humanity has condemned us!

Beatrice Mother, it's just the papacy that has condemned itself and thereby all humanity.

Last guard (to Beatrice) Tell me, Miss, is it true that you are no older than sixteen years?

Beatrice You don't ask a lady about her age. It's very stupid to do that, because you might get disappointed. Go now, guard, and leave us alone.

Giacomo Now the people of Rome will again have something to talk about which like all other eternal Roman matters only will add to the constantly growing disgrace of Rome and the church.

Beatrice You will see, my brother, that we in the last moment will be pardoned. They would not dare kill us, because it would be too scandalously self-destructive. And everybody knows that little brother Bernardo is completely innocent. We are four innocents who intrigued to our self-defence, and all the world knows that and will know it forever. If the pope now executes us in spite of the entire world opinion, he will have to stand alone forever for all the guilt attached to the Cenci name, for then he is even worse than our father.

Giacomo Even if these Vatican walls can't hear you by their smothering everything human to death by their silence, may your words have legal power forever by divine right.

Lucretia Amen.

Scene 4. The pope's quarters.

Clemens Well, my cardinal. Tell me now. What happened?

Camillo Everything went smoothly and according to all preparations, but it was still too strong, too much and too unendurable. The one who ought to have seen everything at a close distance were you, if anyone.

Clemens You are upset. Tell me how it all went along.

Camillo In the morning Beatrice was completely hysterical, and you could not bring the young girl to dress. It was incomprehensible to her that she had been sentenced to death. Finally she pulled herself together, donned the penitence dress and wrote her will. I could read it. She gives all her property and all her family's fortune to about thirty monasteries, hospitals, prisons, charity institutions and congregations with the one reservation that a capital is deposited in advance for an unnamed child, who at twenty will be given possession of this capital with interest. The strange will named a friend as accountable for that child.

Clemens Such matters are normal in the wills of nobles with less legitimate children to provide for. Well, and then?

Camillo They were allowed to go to confession and then to attend mass. Then they were brought out of their prison, and Giacomo was the first to be brought up on the cart. Then came Bernardo with pinioned hands and blindfolded. There he was given his pardon, which you at last had granted that same morning.

Clemens Was he happy about it?

Camillo From the beginning he was and remained benumbed by his grief for his family, and he could not get away from having to see them die. Then the women were brought out of the prison in their simplest penitence cloaks. The cart brought them to the piazza, many people had gathered everywhere, and mother Lucretia cried desperately all the way, while the proud calm of Beatrice instead brought all the spectators in the streets to tears.

Unexpectedly Bernardo was first brought to the scaffold, where he instantly fainted. He was recalled to life with cold water and had to sit down straight opposite the mannaja, so that the boy would carefully see how his sister, brother and foster mother were executed.

Lucretia was brought up with some difficulty, for she was fat and did not move easily. She didn't know how to manage, and it took an eternity for the executor to get her in the right position under the mannaja. The woman went on crying to the last moment.

In the meantime the flesh was torn sizzling with hot tongs from the prostrated body of the resolute Giacomo, and he endured the torture with admirable self-control. There was no sound of any whimper of pain from his lips.

Before any of the three yet had died, a large platform for spectators collapsed with many people on it, and several died. These were if possible even more innocent than the three of the family but died nevertheless and before the convicted.

Clemens Such matters always happen at autos-da-fé, cock-fighting, undisciplined sport games, at all popular feasts. Go on.

Camillo It was time for Beatrice. She asked if her mother really was dead. She was, so it was just for her climb up the bloody scaffold. Without difficulty she placed herself correctly for the mannaja and was ready for her encounter with death. Then there was heard from the castle of Sant Angelo a deafening cannon shot.

Clemens On my wish.

Camillo Then followed an annoyingly cruel and painful delay without the beautiful Beatrice getting any relief from her position next to death.

Clemens Yes. I wanted time to pray for her and give her in the right moment the final papal absolution. The guards at the castle were asked by me to fire the gun when she was laid down in position for the mannaja. After the shot the executioner was to wait for five minutes while I could have time to pray for her in silence.

Camillo It was cruel to her. Those minutes became her life's most intolerable pain. But she carried it well and constantly without interruptions commended herself to the care and company of Jesus Christ and into the Virgin's hands and God's personal eternal justice. When finally the mannaja was let down and her neck was broken and her head separated, Bernardo fainted now for the second time, and it took almost an hour before he could be restored to life. Giacomo was crushed in the meanwhile, *mazzolato*, massacred to death under the sledge-hammer.

When Bernardo at last came to life again he had a burning hot fever and was then brought back to his prison.

Many among the people also fainted mainly because of the heat. It was hot like in August, and the crowds were so massive, that every human being pressed on to get to see something. Many were by that trampled to death by each other mostly but also by horses, and many were those who caught a high fever. People are still constantly dying as a consequence of the emotionally extremely straining excitement. And there is not one in Rome who has not praised and sympathised with and loved Beatrice. She is worshipped as a saint although she was sentenced as a parricide.

Clemens What about Bernardo?

Camillo You should know that yourself, your holiness. You did not entirely pardon him. He was sentenced to service on the galleys and the loss of all his property and now has to pay four hundred thousand piastres within a year. But that's nothing against the fact that he had to watch at a close distance his sister, brother and stepmother being executed brutally and bloodily all three, which experience most certainly was worse than to die yourself.

Clemens That's enough, cardinal Camillo. Justice has been done. You may go.

Camillo I'll be off then. *(leaves)*

Clemens (rises after a thoughtful moment in his full length and breadth and seems to fill the entire stage when he in the execution of the great papal benediction says:)

Beatrice, I forgive you, and I hereby remove all your guilt and absolve all your sins.

Beatrice(s voice from nowhere) Hypocrite!

(The pope looks around in terror, sees nothing, shrugs his shoulders and leaves the stage, still now and then throwing some terrified look around.)

*February 1989,
translated June 2020.*

Post script.

This documentary tragedy has been written before by no one less than Percy B. Shelley in the year 1819. This Swedish version follows Shelley's up to the third act, where the author gives the drama his very own coarsely naturalistic character without any further poetical deviations or abstractions from the naked truth. Shelley never goes so far as to ever mention the incest with any single word and never allows the pope to appear on stage. Here the pope's part becomes even more terrible than the father's, who in comparison seems an angel to the pope, maybe chiefly because of Francesco Cenci's great humour and the pope's complete lack of it.

The actual train of events has also been treated by Stendhal 1839 and Stefan Zweig 1926 after the publication of earlier unknown material in the case by Corrado Ricci. This author of 1989 goes further than any of his predecessors in taking up guesses and theories of the earlier versions as real facts to increase the dramatic realism. In characterizing Beatrice was used an example from real life, a 16-year old girl who was violated by her alcoholic stepfather, for a model with stunning effect. It's Francesco, however, the hilariously scorning blasphemer, who wins the prize as the most unforgettable character of the drama and which very well could be an appropriate portrait of the real Francesco Cenci. Such Italians were not unusual during the Renaissance. The most remarkable supporting role is the servant Andrea though, a paragon of correctness. The murder scene in its absurdity constantly touches on the burlesque, but it is vital that all faces remain absolutely serious during the entire orgiastically morbid act.

Sagittarius 22.4.1989