



# *The Replacement*

by Christian Lanciai (2003)

*(based on a true story)*

*The Characters :*

Bruce Lockhart  
Lord George Cecil  
Robert, his son  
Clothilde, his fiancée  
Dick, their friend  
a waiter  
Evelyn, bank accountant  
a police officer

The action takes place in England, Italy and India in the 1990s.

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## *The Replacement*

Act I scene 1. A fashionable party in Brighton in smokings and evening dresses.

*Bruce* What a rabble! All vain snobs who have nothing but money. A glittering surface, an impressive undeserved affluence – that's all. No depth, no meaning, no purpose and no substance – just fluttering mayflies.

*Lord Cecil (coming up)* Bruce, my young man, I have heard a lot about you. I understand you have just returned home from a journey.

*Bruce* That is correct.

*Cecil* A global traveller is just what I am looking for.

*Bruce* Why?

*Cecil* My son. I understand you went to school together.

*Bruce* Robert Cecil, of course, he was a rogue.

*Cecil* He still is. The problem is that he has disappeared.

*Bruce* Then it's perhaps on purpose.

*Cecil* That's just what I am afraid of.

*Bruce* Has he made some unsuitable person pregnant?

*Cecil* No, it's worse. Bruce, may I entrust you with a mission? You will be handsomely remunerated.

*Bruce* Then you had better explain what I am supposed to do.

*Cecil* You are right, my boy. My son has disappeared in Italy, where he is probably leading a high life fooling around with girls. I send him money for his maintenance, but I have had enough of it now. I want him to come home and start working. There is no one else to carry on my business

*Bruce* I understand, Sir. Shall I track him down, drug him, put him on a plane home, snatch him away from his girl or girls forever and dispatch him straight home to you by cash on delivery?

*Cecil* Rather, but try to convince him about the necessity. Only an old friend of his like you would be able to convince him.

*Bruce* He had closer friends than me.

*Cecil* I only know you, and you happen to be here. You are also free and available. I will cover all the costs.

*Bruce* And if I fail?

*Cecil* Look at it this way. If you succeed, you have made your fortune. If you fail you haven't lost anything.

*Bruce* Very well, Sir. You are convincing enough. Where shall I start?

*Cecil* The Italian riviera. He spent a fortune gambling in Monte Carlo. He partied all around San Remo. The latest news was that he has some girl in Rapallo.

*Bruce* Italian?

*Cecil* No, a French girl, Clothilde Charmant.

*Bruce* A suitable name for an attractive girl.

*Cecil* Search her out in Rapallo. If she is still his girl, we are lucky. She should be able to give you a lead to him in any case.

*Bruce* I think we have reached an agreement, Sir. (*offers his hand*)

*Cecil* A gentleman in distress can always rely on another gentleman. (*accepts his hand, and they are agreed.*)

## Scene 2. Clothilde's apartment.

(*The doorbell. Enter Clothilde to open the door.*)

*Bruce (outside)* Good morning, Clothilde.

*Clothilde* Are you that fellow Bruce?

*Bruce* I am.

*Clothilde* Come inside, then. I was so surprised when you called. I didn't know Robert had any friends.

*Bruce* I am perhaps one of the very few ones.

*Clothilde* At the same time I am very pleased that you made contact. Someone like you was exactly what I needed.

*Bruce* Why?

*Clothilde* Someone who understood Robert who could teach me to understand him.

*Bruce* I am afraid I never quite understood him myself.

*Clothilde* You are modest.

*Bruce* I try to be honest.

*Clothilde* You are just the kind of friend that both I and Robert stand in need of.

*Bruce* It seems that you are still together.

*Clothilde* Yes. Why have you come to look for him? Are there problems at home? Doesn't his father want to send him any more money?

*Bruce* Something like that.

*Clothilde* So you have both the onfidence of Robert and his father.

*Bruce* At least his father's. I don't think Robert ever had confidence in anyone.

*Clothilde* That's true. But he is confident in himself.

*Bruce* When can I see him?

*Clothilde* When it pleases him.

*Bruce* What does that mean?

(*Robert opens the door and enters.*)

*Robert* Bruce, you old paragon of propriety, pardon me for having evesdropped in silence, but I couldn't help it when I heard you were coming. So the old man wants to break the contract.

*Bruce* He wants you to come home and start working in his business.

*Robert* He always wanted that, but I am not fit for it. I can't make money. I am only able to consume it.

*Bruce* It's always a greater pleasure to waste it than to make it.

*Robert* That's what I mean. The old man has made money all his life but never consumed it. Not even I will be able to consume it in all my life. Why then should I make more money?

*Clothilde* Perhaps he thinks you are living too leisurely.

*Robert* Still I am only keeping steady company nowadays and since more than half a year! I am gradually beginning to settle down! He can't demand any higher morals of me than that!

*Bruce* I still promised to try to persuade you.

*Robert* Yes, do that, Bruce! Stay on here and live with us! Join us when we go out sailing! Let's try to convince each other, you about how reasonable my father's puritanism is, and I about the soundness of my way of living, and let's see who will be converted by whom!

*Bruce* A fair challenge. But I will have to keep your father informed.

*Robert* Do so, by all means! Tell him about my virtues! Belaud me and my beloved, the most beautiful and pious woman in the world! If there ever was anything I didn't deserve, it was to find such a good woman as she.

*Bruce* She seems to share your opinion.

*Robert* That's what I mean.

*Clothilde* Come on out with me in the kitchen now, boys, and make up your minds about what you would like to eat.

*Bruce* Is she a good cook as well?

*Robert* If she is! She loves making good cooking. That's her life's greatest sport, and with that attitude she always succeeds – it is always delicious. No one cooks well by routine. It's an art demanding meticulousness and contemplation, isn't it, Clothilde?

*Clothilde* And exactness first of all.

*Robert* Don't you have any girl, Bruce?

*Bruce* No one ever wanted me.

*Robert* You were too proper.

*Bruce* No, too poor.

*Robert* You would never have been able to travel to Italy if the old man had not paid for it, would you?

*Bruce* Correct.

*Robert* I think we will have gnocchi today, Clothilde. It's real farmer's stuff that would suit someone down to earth like Bruce.

*Bruce* I'll gladly accept anything.

*Robert* "Anything goes", like the old bugger Cole Porter used to say.

*Clothilde* It's good not to have to live up to the demands of others.

*(goes out into the kitchen)*

*Robert* She is a gem, Bruce. What do you think of her?

*Bruce* Charmant.

*Robert* Yes, she lives up to her name. Still I am almost ashamed for her sake.

*Bruce* Why?

*Robert* She is too good for me. It feels as if I am using her.  
*Bruce* She doesn't seem to mind.  
*Robert* And as long as she doesn't I will just carry on with her as far as it goes, just to see how it will end. Naturally I can't then pay any heed to the old man and his wishes.  
*Bruce* What if he chooses to withhold your maintenance?  
*Robert* He will not, Bruce. I am his only son.

Scene 3. Later.

*Bruce* But I don't understand what's your problem with Robert.  
*Clothilde* I don't understand that myself.  
*Bruce* As far as I can see, he is the ideal friend, rich and handsome, generous and courteous, he has everything and offers you everything and doesn't even deceive you.  
*Clothilde* You had better not know anything.  
*Bruce* About what?  
*Clothilde* Sure he is nice. He charms everyone. He doesn't even have to buy his friends. He gets them all for nothing wherever he goes. Not even you, who have known him for so long, can see anything of what is hidden beneath the brilliant surface.  
*Bruce* At school he earned some notoriety for doing some daredevil pranks. He climbed the chapel spire and risked his life just to pin the school flag on it. He was crazy but never wicked.  
*Clothilde* Naturally you never got to know the erotic side of him.  
*Bruce* Is anything wrong with that?  
*Clothilde* I don't want to talk about it. Do you really think you could tempt him to go home?  
*Bruce* I don't know yet.  
*Clothilde* It would be the best for all of us and for himself if he did.  
*Bruce* I can only try. Either it works out or it doesn't.  
*Clothilde* The problem is he doesn't want to.  
*Bruce* He could be persuaded into wanting it.  
*Clothilde* It has to be a clever persuader to be able to succeed.  
*Bruce* I am the only possible candidate.  
*Clothilde* His only chance.  
*Robert (enters)* Are you sitting there again plotting against me?  
*Clothilde* Not at all, Robert. We are just discussing the possibility of getting you back to England.  
*Robert* Haven't you given that up yet, Bruce?  
*Bruce* I have to do all I can.

*Robert* Yes, since you are paid for it. Enjoy the situation as long as possible, Bruce. Live up daddy's money. He will send you more if you just allow him to keep hoping that you could get me back. Let's live and laugh at his vain hopes, that keep us all sustained.

*Clothilde* You are so irresponsible, Robert.

*Robert* That's on purpose. What is responsibility? Only vain worries about nothing. What have I to do with the rise and fall of the stock market? What can I do about the world starvation and the Aids epidemic? What can I do about the Chinese military build up and expanding terrorist autocracy? All I can do is to let the Aids negroes die and let the Chinese murder as many of their own citizens as possible. All I can do about world starvation is to let it spread and constantly grow worse, which it will do anyway whatever anyone tries to do. All I can do about the unreliability of the stock exchange and the world environment destruction is to stay out of all that business myself and keep my hands clean. Am I not entitled to live my own life? Isn't that a natural human right? Let me just keep clean and leave me in peace out of all the misery and dirty business of the world. It's no more than a reasonable democratic human right.

*Bruce* You are a philosopher, Robert.

*Robert* No, a living artist.

*Clothilde* But aren't we all responsible for all life on earth and obliged to individually accept our part of the responsibility?

*Robert* I did nothing to bring out the Aids epidemic. I haven't done anything to add to the world environment destruction. I haven't exploited people or caused any bank to collapse. I am innocent. Let me maintain my innocence.

*Clothilde* But you have money and means to make a difference for the environmentalists and the anti-globalization.

*Robert* It's dad's money. I did nothing to deserve it. I use his money in the best possible way by setting it in circulation and buy myself some gaiety by parties and good company. It's not even very expensive. It will last well enough as long as I live and longer, if only the old man doesn't start fussing. As long as you keep him at a reasonable distance, you are welcome to share our lives.

*Bruce* A diplomatic challenge.

*Robert* You are the right man for it. – Any further complaints, Clothilde? Well, where shall we go for tonight's dinner and party?

*Bruce* I suggest Gino's.

*Robert* Splendid! Are you on, Clothilde? You don't have to cook tonight. Save your pretty face from sour frowns, if you please. Remember our agreement.

*Clothilde* I love you, Robert.

*Robert* Then show it and be happy in my company. What you need now is a good glass of wine.

*Bruce* I guess we all need that.

*Robert* That's right, Bruce! Never let me down, my friends, for I love you both and trust you! I want to go on being able to party with you for always!

*Bruce*            We are with you, Robert.  
*Robert*           Come on then! Our table is waiting!  
*(They go out, Robert in the middle with his arms around the others.)*

Act II scene 1. The taverna.

*Robert*           This is my world, Bruce: party and entertainment. Let the world be happy if even only at the pub! The only paradise is called wine, which makes us forget all that we should forget but never can forget. Dance with Clothilde, Bruce!

*Bruce*            I am afraid I am not much of a dancer...

*Robert*           Make an effort at least! Do it for my sake! I am inviting you. I want to see how you two would go together.

*Clothilde*        We seem to have no choice, Bruce. The chief commands us.

*Robert*           No, I ask you kindly. Please be courteous and rise.

*Bruce (politely invites Clothilde for a dance. They mingle among the others on the dancing floor.)*

*Robert*           See how they dance. Nothing exposes you more than how you dance. My girl, sensual, refined and well controlled with a rich portion of both cold common sense and a far reaching intuition, and Bruce, the poor beggar, who never got a chance, cautious, hesitating, awkwardly out of place everywhere and almost absurdly conventional. Yes, they would go well together, at least he with her but she would never go with him. She is too much alive and he is too shy. I have nothing to fear from him. My school mate! We certainly saw each other, but we never got to know each other. No one ever got to know Bruce.

*Dick (comes up) Bob!*

*Robert*           Dick! What are you doing here?

*Dick*            I happened to pass by. Are you here alone?

*Robert*           My girl is dancing with another.

*Dick*            Do you allow her? What does she think of that?

*Robert*           I compelled them But have a seat. Here, have a glass. *(pours him a glass of wine)*

*Dick*            Thanks. Just what I needed. Who is he?

*Robert*           An old fellow from school. Sent by the old man to tempt me to go home. Instead we are both cheating the old man.

*Dick*            So you allow him to live here at your and Lord Cecil's expense to keep him from letting it seem that you are going home?

*Robert*           Why not?

*Dick*            He seems to like your girl.

*Robert*           She loves me only.

*Dick*            Don't be too sure. Nowadays girl break their engagements for nothing.

*Robert*           She wouldn't with me.

*Dick*            So you are engaged.

*Robert* Not by any means. But she would be willing.  
*Dick* Then you should strike. She is a juicy fruitcake.  
*Robert* I leave her to decide the rhythm. Besides I want to keep out of range, if I have to move on.  
*Dick* I understand. Normal procedure.  
*Robert* You know me.

*(The dance is over. Clothilde and Bruce return.)*

Dick, may I present to you an old chum from the college days, an incorrigible rogue but clever and sly. Just don't try to fool him! This is Bruce, my old schoolmate. Clothilde you know already.

*Clothilde* How nice to see you again, Dick. Where have you been?  
*Dick* In the south. I suggest that you come to me in Sardinia. I have rented a villa there and it needs to be inhabited.  
*Robert* Any facilities?  
*Dick* A beach. A sailingboat. Everything. Nothing is missing.  
*Robert* We are on, Clothilde. What about you, Bruce? Will you join us?  
*Bruce (cautiously)* Am I invited?  
*Robert* Am I invited? Listen to that! Do you want it in writing? Come on, Bruce! A month's extra holiday with a sandy beach and a yacht! You can't turn that down!  
*Dick* Friends of Bob are friends of mine. You are welcome if you want, Bruce. I have to mostly stay out of there, so I am only pleased if you will stay.  
*Bruce* I only have one consideration.  
*Robert* Well?  
*Bruce* Your father, Robert. What shall I write to him? That I followed you and your girl to Sardinia to share your life there to more easily be able to persuade you to abandon it?  
*Robert* You were never stupid, Bruce. You will come up with something.  
*Clothilde* Let him go home if that's what he wants. Let him tell your father that he has failed. Your father can't abduct you from me anyway.  
*Robert* What skills do you have, Bruce?  
*Bruce* Only one, really. *(writes)*  
*Robert* You knew many tricks at school.  
*Dick* What the devil is he writing?  
*Robert* Only his name.  
*Clothilde* But in different handwritings.  
*Robert* Now I remember, Bruce! You went into training as a calligrapher!  
*Bruce (shows his paper)* Here you are my name in four completely different handwritings. I actually master practically any writing style and handwriting. That's my only real practical skill.  
*Robert* We could use that.  
*Clothilde* How?

*Robert* Bruce, we need my father's money, and you could provide it. We'll fix it. I am a lousy writer myself. During my three years in Italy I have only written two short letters home. Now I shall improve.

*Bruce* Do you mean that I should write your letters and be your ghost writer?

*Robert* Not immediately. I will dictate them to start with, so that you get the hang of my style. I will praise you to the old man, tell him that you have made me consider things, made me a better man, and so on, and enclose some bills. Then we shall proceed. If he makes trouble we will write more letters, and then you shall help me. If I go sailing with Clothilde for a longer time you could write my letters yourself on my typewriter and learn to sign them with my signature. If you could undertake that the coast is clear.

*Bruce* Your ghost writer and forger?

*Robert* What wouldn't we do for the old man's money?

*Dick* I couldn't have thought it out better myself.

*Robert* Bruce, are you with us? Don't come up with any more stupid considerations now! You have a life to live!

*Dick* The experiment deserves being put to the test.

*Bruce* Okey, let's try and see how it works.

*Robert (enthusiastic)* Bravo!

*Clothilde* Regard it as a game, Bruce, a postponement of the seriousness of life.

*Bruce* Yes, well, that's probably what it is.

*Dick* Let's go then! What about tomorrow?

*Clothilde (raises her glass)* To Sardinia!

*The others* To Sardinia!

*(They cheer and drink.)*

## Scen 2. A sunny terrace by the Mediterranean.

*Bruce* What about this, Robert? *(reads)* "Dear father, I regret that you disagree with my life here so much that you importune me with an old school-fellow entrusted with the secret mission to reinstall me under the yoke of virtue and labour. I can assure you, that he has meticulously made the most of it and almost convinced me, so that I am on the verge of giving up my licentious vagabond life just to please you. Still there are some obligations to fulfil and finish before I can part, as you can see from the attached bills. But the most important matter is not about money but about my girl, with whom I have been attached now for six months, and naturally I can't just let her go. First I must reach some decision whether we shall continue together and settle down or separate. I beg you of forbearance with your careless son, Robert Cecil." Is that all right?

*Robert* Splendid. I couldn't have put it better myself. May I suggest that you change "been attached" to "running along", to make his recognition of me better. For the rest you make me seem better than I am. It will impress on the old man.

*Bruce* The main thing is that your credit is extended.

*Robert*           Precisely.  
*Clothilde*       No father could resist such a letter from his son.  
*Dick*               Bruce is getting more and more indispensable to you, Bob.  
*Robert*           To all of us.  
*Dick*               Good. I will bring the letter with me as I leave.  
*Robert*           Write it out on my typewriter, Bruce, and I will sign it afterwards.  
*Bruce*            If you are going out sailing for a month, I could need a number of your signatures to practise on.  
*Robert*           Aren't you coming along?  
*Clothilde*       Perhaps he would prefer staying here.  
*Robert*           How good a sailor are you, Bruce?  
*Bruce*            I have been sailing every summer at least as a helping hand.  
*Robert*           Then you will do. Come along!  
*Clothilde*       I suggest that the two of you do some training first and find out how you work together as seamen, before we take any risks all together.  
*Robert*           You are as usual wiser than all of us put together, Clorhilde. But of course, Bruce. You will see all my signatures from last year. I have kept all my receipts from the bank.  
*Bruce*            That will do well, Robert.  
*Dick*               Hurry on with the letter, Bruce, so that I may reach town and return here in time before the evening. I don't want to miss Clothilde's dinner. And tomorrow I am off to Rome.  
*Robert*           You are pushing us, Dick!  
*Dick*               It will get better as soon as I am gone. The house is all yours, like also the entire ocean.  
*Bruce*            I will write it out at once. (*leaves*)  
*Robert*           Do you have any considerations about Bruce's company, Clothi?  
*Clothilde*       I don't know where I have him.  
*Robert*           We have him here. Let's use him.  
*Clothilde*       Everything is all right as long as you agree.  
*Robert*           That's what I mean. What could you possible fear about me if he comes along as a protection while we are sailing?  
*Clothilde*       Nothing.  
*Robert*           We were lucky to get him on our backs.  
*Clothilde*       I hope so, Robert.

Scene 3. On the sailing-boat at sea.

*Robert*           We are good at sailing together, aren't we, Bruce?  
*Bruce*            Better than expected.  
*Robert*           You seem more used to sailing than I.  
*Bruce*            You are not exactly a beginner yourself.

*Robert* Or else I never would have dared, least of all with you.

*Bruce* You have nothing to fear of me, Robert.

*Robert* I know that, Bruce. But I know nothing about you.

*Bruce* There isn't much worth knowing.

*Robert* You were always quiet and reticent at school and never wanted to race of to excel in anything. You gave the general impression of being a nobody, but you always got everything right at every exam. A quiet and mystical but covert careerist with hidden motives and a secret agenda. That's our impression of you, Bruce.

*Bruce* I don't know myself what I want. I just follow the mainstream and sometimes take care of opportunities, like when I had this offer from your father.

*Robert* That was a stroke of luck which you fortunately jumped at. I like your company, Bruce. Something tells me that we are equally rotten rogues both of us. The only difference is that I have money while you have nothing, and I have a girl while you manage without.

*Bruce* I have no ambitions.

*Robert* Have you no desire of all the good things of my life, Bruce, now when you can have a thorough look into it? I will gladly share it with you. We could have real fun together. Let's go on journeying like this forever together. Let's go to India. There you can live well like a millionaire for just a thousand pounds.

*Bruce* And what about Clothilde?

*Robert* She wouldn't be interested.

*Bruce* Would you just leave her?

*Robert* Why not? She lives only on me. I have no obligations towards her.

*Bruce* She loves you, Robert.

*Robert* That's her problem. It doesn't concern me.

*Bruce* Do you mean to suggest that you would abandon her to live with me?

*Robert* Why not? It would be an intriguing experiment. I feel like testing you, Bruce. You have become like a brother to me.

*Bruce* And you are like an elder brother to me.

*Robert* There you are. We should team up for real.

*Bruce* And your father? What would he have to say? What would you make me write to him? That you scrapped your girl to wage a life with me in India, whom he entrusted with bringing you back to England?

*Robert* Don't work yourself up, Bruce. Look at it casually. We would only live like brothers.

*Bruce* For how long?

*Robert* Until it wouldn't work any longer. Until I would find another host to leave you for, like I am now considering leaving Clothilde for you.

*Bruce* It isn't right, Robert.

*Robert* It has nothing to do with what is right or wrong. It's only about getting out the most of life.

*Bruce* You are running off the rails with your relationships.

*Robert* Perhaps I have good reasons to.

*Bruce*           What do you mean?

*Robert*          I have reasons to suspect that I am HIV positive, Bruce. In that case life doesn't matter anyway. Why then save it for boring duties and routines?

*Bruce*           Have you been examined?

*Robert*          No, and I have no intention to make any tests.

*Bruce*           Are you sleeping with Clothilde?

*Robert*          No, we don't make love like that. I am careful about her. There are other ways.

*Bruce*           Then I understand her ambiguity. How certain are you about your suspicions? What if you are in perfect health and are yourself repressing that vicissitude?

*Robert*          I have symptoms. I give myself chances of 40%, and those chances are dwindling every month.

*Bruce*           But Robert, that is terrible!

*Robert*          Don't exaggerate, and don't dramatise. We are entering an age in which that is becoming a normality. A mortal illness which doesn't show, just like cancer, until it suddenly breaks out in overwhelming force just before you die. Release that jib a little, Bruce.

*Bruce*           Your father doesn't know, of course.

*Robert*          Nor shall he ever, like neither Clothilde. Only you and I know about it.

*Bruce*           With the hope that it isn't a certitude.

*Robert*          A patient knows best the degree of his illness. A doctor can only state facts, if they are available. If they aren't manifested he can do nothing to help the patient.

*Bruce*           Clothilde should be informed. She would sacrifice anything for you.

*Robert*          I don't want any sacrifices. I want to live. The last thing I want is pity. I thought I could trust your manly detachment, Bruce.

*Bruce*           I don't feel like following you to India, Robert.

*Robert*          Then we leave that idea. Then it only remains to go on playacting to my father to with your help squeeze him out of more money even though I am not coming home. That could be quite fun as well. You understand, don't you, that I can't come home?

*Bruce*           If you are so certain about it I can but understand it too well.

*Robert*          And that I never will be able to quite commit myself to Clothilde?

*Bruce*           I understand that also. But make at least some allowance for the possibility of your good health!

*Robert*          I have another idea, Bruce. I already have all that you are missing. Suppose that I am really dying – what about taking over my part, as a pressing replacement? You have already grown half way into it. You can imitate my handwriting. I taught you on purpose. When I am gone you could take over my passport and paste your own photo in it. You could even take over Clothilde, comfort her and make her happy. For you at least are in perfect health, aren't you? You haven't messed yourself up sexually, have you?

*Bruce*           Stop speculating in your own death, Robert.

*Robert* We have to deal with reality. We can't get rid of it.

*Bruce (after some consideration)* I will consider everything you have said, Robert, and you may trust me with one thing: all this is strictly between us. I will never reveal anything to anyone.

*Robert* Or else I would not have been able to tell you about it. I knew you were a friend, perhaps the only one I have and can trust. I am sorry, Bruce, that I have shared more than just my affluence with you.

*Bruce* It's quite all right, Robert. Let's turn around now and go home.

*Robert* As you wish. *(starts turning the helm)* Ready for battle!

Act III scene 1. On the terrace. A lovely morning.  
Clothilde and Bruce with drinks.

*Clothilde* Robert has changed since he returned. What really happened between you out there?

*Bruce* Nothing.

*Clothilde* And you want me to believe that?

*Bruce* What do you think?

*Clothilde* I will tell you what I think. I have reason to believe that Robert is seriously ill.

*Bruce* Why do you think so?

*Clothilde* I can't tell you, but sooner or later you will probably find out anyway. I would like to postpone that moment as long as possible.

*Bruce* You said what you thought but not what you know.

*Clothilde* I know what I believe. I can trust my intuition. But I can't express it in practical terms. At the same time I suspect that you know more than you allow us to believe.

*Bruce* I am here as his father's ombudsman and as such I am restricted to some obligation of silence.

*Clothilde* I understand and respect that.

*Bruce* But in what way would Robert be ill?

*Clothilde* It's in his soul. He is deeply unhappy inside, and I don't know how I could help him. But perhaps we both could, if we would help each other.

*Bruce* I'll do everything I can.

*Clothilde* Just tell me one thing. Do you know more than I or not?

*Bruce* I think I know more.

*Clothilde* Good. Then keep that knowledge to yourself, and I will keep mine to myself, as long it is possible.

*Bruce* Do you think they differ?

*Clothilde* To a very large degree. You knew him only as a child and boy. I have learned to know him in bed. That's a slight difference.

*Bruce* Yes, it probably is.

*Clothilde* Here is to you, my boy! To our friend for us to take care of!  
*Bruce* I think we share some common interest to the highest degree, Clothilde.  
(*They toast and drink to each other in deep consensus.*)

Scene 2. The bedchamber. Robert and Clothilde.

*Clothilde* I love you, Robert, and I only want to help you. But how could I help you when you never let me come into you? What is really between you and Bruce?  
*Robert* Nothing that you have to worry about.  
*Clothilde* But you have secrets.  
*Robert* So have we.  
*Clothilde* But I am your woman.  
*Robert (laughs)* Are yo jealous?  
*Clothilde* It's no laughing matter. I know what you Englishmen are like. You are all bisexual, and outside England you take any liberties.  
*Robert* I have no homosexual relationship with Bruce.  
*Clothilde* Why don't you have any sexual relationship with me then?  
*Robert (starting to get angry)* Do you crave it of me?  
*Clothilde* Something is holding you back, and it is like a wall between us.  
*Robert (getting more angry)* You don't know what you're asking of me.  
*Clothilde* Just some naturalness.  
*Robert* Aren't we friends? Isn't that enough? Am I not generous with you? Do you want more? Do you want more?  
*Clothilde* I want love.  
*Robert* Then you shall have as much love as you want damn it and more to it!  
(*throws her brutally in bed, gets out his girdle and ties her hands to the bed behind her head*)  
*Clothilde (laughs)* Robert, now you start to get somewhere! But what kind of a wild animal have I released? You are sick!  
*Robert* Shut up! (*gags her with his scarf*)! Clothilde, I have loved you, but you don't know with whom you are dealing! You shall have what you want, but soaked in tears and by heart-rending screams of despairing terror and complaint! Try to forgive me, but I could never nor even wish to harm you before! Judge me then for what I am, and separate from me if you want to, but don't provoke the wild beast within me ever again! Cry out loud and publish my perversity to the whole world if you like, but leave me in peace! I am not experienced! I was already ravished as a boy by mad dirty priests of Catholic bigotry! I have fucked a thousand whores and as many boys! I am all lewdness! (*tears off all her clothes. She is constantly more surprised but not terrified. He calms down and lies down beside her.*)

I had thought and hoped to find a partner in you whom I could protect against myself. I thought an ideal friendship to be possible with a woman without any derailment into quarrels, violence and sex. I really loved you, Clothilde. Look now what happened just because you demanded sex! (*removes her gag, kisses her*) But

behind this monster there is an unfathomable ocean of tenderness. Can you forgive me?

*Clothilde* Robert, there is nothing to forgive, if only you don't do me any harm.

*Robert* I have already harmed you. And what's worse: you have excited me!  
(*rises and starts removing his clothes*)

*Clothilde* No, Robert, not like this! I believe you! But don't rape me! Then everything will end up wrong!

*Robert* You asked for it yourself, you poor slut. (*throws himself upon her*)

*Clothilde* Help! Help!

*Robert* Shut up! (*will gag her again when suddenly the door is thrown open and Bruce breaks in. He immediately understands the whole situation.*)

*Bruce (interferes)* No, Robert! You must not! (*throws Robert naked out of bed*)

*Robert* Who the hell asked you to interfere?

*Bruce* I heard your voices. Clothilde called out for help. That was enough.

*Robert* Have you been eavesdropping, you false peeping Tom!

*Bruce* No.

*Clothilde (calmly)* Robert, release me.

*Robert (breaks down, releases her)* My beloved heart, I couldn't control myself. I never could. Help me protect myself against myself, for I never could do that myself! (*cries*)

*Bruce (sits down beside him, comforts him)* It's all right, Robert. It's over now.

*Clothilde (gets hurriedly into her nightgown)* I have never seen him like this before. What is the matter with him really?

*Bruce* He is just oversensitive and hysterical.

*Clothilde* He is all beside himself and totally distraught. He needs to calm down. Go away with him, Bruce. Take him for a trip. I must think this incident over.

*Bruce* Will you abandon him now?

*Clothilde* No, but I need to get detached. Meet me in Rapallo. Take him to Sicily, Naples, Capri and Rome, and I'll see you later in Rapallo.

*Bruce* What do you think of that idea, Robert?

*Robert (calmer)* Do with me whatever you wish, but save me from myself.

*Bruce* He agrees.

*Clothilde* We leave Dick and his sailing-boat to their fates. He will have to accept that we have more important things to do. I think it's best that the two of you don't go out sailing together again. My man could get into his mind to do something stupid, since he is obviously a potential mortal danger to himself.

*Bruce* Do you love him?

*Clothilde* More than ever.

*Robert* You arrived in the last moment, Bruce. It could have ended up badly.

*Bruce* I know. It's all over now.

*Robert* No, Bruce, it can never return to normal again. You have seen it yourself.

*Bruce* Come, Robert. You need some sleep. (*to Clothilde*) Do you have any sedative?

*Clothilde (gives him some pills)* Here.

*Bruce* Sleep well now, Clothilde. For the sake of the best for both of you, you are separated for the night.

*Robert* It's best that way. (*Bruce leads out Robert.*)

*Clothilde (alone)* What is behind all this? He is no psychopath. He is rather like a wild and spoilt child who can't control himself, but at the same time with so much warmth, tenderness, generosity and benevolence. Why doesn't he want to give vent to it biologically? What is holding him back?

(*sits down on the bed and lights a cigarette.*)

### Scene 3. Villa San Michele on Capri with a view of the *Faraglioni*.

*Robert* I am serious, Bruce.

*Bruce* It's a most extraordinary offer.

*Robert* You see how my fever goes up and down. I am done for.

*Bruce* But is it practically feasible?

*Robert* If you are clever enough.

*Bruce* But how would it work practically? There are many details to be worked out.

*Robert* Don't make it more difficult than it is. Let's live as long as possible. Say nothing definite or unambiguous to anyone. Remember, that you must be as ignorant about it as everyone else.

*Bruce* The greatest conundrum is your body, which never must be found.

*Robert* Let me handle that. Trust me.

*Bruce* How do you intend to disappear?

*Robert* At worst you will have to help me.

*Bruce* There you are. There is the problem.

*Robert* No, there is no problem. I could go to India anonymously and disappear in the jungles of Nepal. Thousands vanish there every year.

*Bruce* Another problem is Clothilde. I could never lie to her.

*Robert* You don't have to. Just don't tell the truth. That's your only obligation I must insist on: no one must ever know that I suffered from Aids.

*Bruce* But what shall I tell her?

*Robert* That's your problem. Bruce, I give you my life. You can cash in my cheques from daddy. You can write to him in my name. You will have two lives instead of one. Make the best of it. I have arranged a flat for you in Rome by Dick. He has provided it in my name, but you can have it. Take care of Clothilde. Make the best of my life, since I can't live it myself. Do everything that I was unable to. I had everything but messed it all up by falling ill. You have nothing but are healthy. Regard it as a lifetime trust.

*Bruce* And what if someone finds out and the hoax is exposed?

*Robert* That will be your concern. Just make sure it isn't. You are clever. You can make it.

*Bruce* I think your best way out of it is to vanish in India.  
*Robert* I think so too.  
*Bruce* I accept your offer on one condition. You must keep in touch with me from India as long as possible.  
*Robert* That's fair.  
*Bruce* Mainly for me to be able to send you money as long as possible.  
*Robert* At worst, Bruce, if our scheme is found out, you could come after me to India.  
*Bruce* Yes.  
*Robert (offers his hand)* Agreed?  
*Bruce (accepts it)* Yes, with dread.  
*Robert (to an employee)* Can we have a few more drinks.  
*The employee* The same again?  
*Robert* Yes. Manhattan is what counts. We must celebrate our deal with a vengeance, mustn't we?  
*Bruce* As you wish.  
(*They get their drinks and toast each other, Robert with alacrity, Bruce with some dread.*)

Act IV scene 1. Rapallo, like in act I scene 2.

*Clothilde* Come in, Bruce. Where is Robert?  
*Bruce* Is he not here?  
*Clothilde* I thought you were coming together.  
*Bruce* I thought he would reach here before me.  
*Clothilde* But do come in and have a seat. Coffee? Wine? Tea?  
*Bruce* Thanks, coffee, please.  
*Clothilde* Now tell me everything. Obviously you went different ways. What happened?  
*Bruce* We separated on Capri. Robert wanted to get to Rome before me to make arrangements for his apartment and other things. He asked me to wait a week and then go directly to Rapallo.  
*Clothilde* Then he is probably still in Rome.  
*Bruce* I passed Rome and looked up his address. His portress said he had gone. Then I thought he had gone here.  
*Clothilde* Do you think he might have thought of something stupid?  
*Bruce* He always did now and then. Hasn't he been in touch?  
*Clothilde* Not after Sardinia.  
*Bruce* He must turn up or get in touch. If nothing happens we have to contact the police.  
*Clothilde* Will you inform his father?  
*Bruce* Only if we contact the police.  
*Clothilde* I think we should do that at once. I have a feeling something is wrong.

*Bruce* As you wish.

*(Clothilde immediately picks up her phone and dials a number.)*

*Clothilde* Hallo. We wish to report a person missing, Robert Cecil, English. Yes, he was last seen on Capri but went from there to Rome. Thanks, officer. *(hangs up)* They will investigate the matter immediately.

*Bruce* Just as well.

## Scene 2. London.

*Cecil* A most worrisome concern, Evelyn. My incorrigible son seems to have vanished without a trace.

*Evelyn* Voluntarily or by reason of necessity?

*Cecil* No one knows. I should go down there and join the investigation, but I want you to follow as his economic guardian.

*Evelyn* As you wish, George. When did he disappear? What's the last about him?

*Cecil* I sent an old schoolmate of his down to get him back home, a certain Bruce Lockhart. He apparently had some good influence on my wanton son, for, can you imagine, Robert suddenly started to write home. And they were real touching letters. He wrote that he was sorry for his wicked ways and would seriously consider the possibility to come home. And then he just disappears.

*Evelyn* Did he have any reason for disappearing?

*Cecil* Not as far as I know. His accounts were all in order, and his girl loved him. What more could he ask for? He always got whatever he needed.

*Evelyn* But you wanted him to come home.

*Cecil* But he did not protest.

*Evelyn* And you have paid for both his and that fellow Bruce's maintenance in Italy.

*Cecil* Yes.

*Evelyn* You don't think they might have cheated you together?

*Cecil* Never. My son is good for nothing, but Bruce was all prudence and perfect order.

*Evelyn* Do you think anything might have happened? Do you think Robert could have happened to something?

*Cecil* That would have been noticed in that case, like for example if he suddenly would have been murdered they would have found his body. Instead there are only indications of the opposite. He had just arranged a nice flat for himself in Rome.

*Evelyn* So he planned to stay there and not come home.

*Cecil* That's what it looks like.

*Evelyn* Consider yourself betrayed, George.

*Cecil* What do you mean?

*Evelyn* It's just my first hunch and reaction to the situation. I think Robert has blown away with as much money as possible. He made a great draft not long ago.

*Cecil* That's why we need you in Rome, Evelyn. You have all the figures.  
*Evelyn* Let's go then.

Scene 3. A fine flat in Rome.

*Bruce* I am doing as well as I can, Robert, and I can't do any more. But you have given me a difficult path to tread, and I falter and stumble on one step at a time, constantly afraid to tumble down. But so far everything has worked out well. (*the doorbell*) I just hope it's not the police again.

(*opens. Finds Dick.*) Dick!

*Dick* I thought Robert lived here.

*Bruce* He does.

*Dick* But you are opening. Where is Robert?

*Bruce* No one knows.

*Dick* May I come in?

*Bruce* Of course! (*lets him in*) A drink? Coffee?

*Dick* You seem nervous.

*Bruce* You seem suspicious.

*Dick* And do I not have reasons for suspicions? I give you everything, and you abandon my house on Sardinia quite suddenly without even notifying me! When at last I get in touch with his girl in Rapallo she doesn't know anything about you. Still I then get him this apartment in Rome, and he lives here, but I have been here a number of times. And when at last someone is at home and opens, it is you, his murky friend on a secret mission to bring him back home to England. What the devil has been happening around here?

*Bruce* Take it easy, Dick. We all wonder the same thing. A drink? Coffee?

*Dick* No thanks, nothing.

*Bruce* The police is involved. His disappearance is being investigated.

*Dick* I understand you were sailing together all by yourselves.

*Bruce* Yes.

*Dick* Did you go on sailing after Sardinia? Did you drown him at sea and take over his person and life? You learned to forge his signature, if I remember correctly.

*Bruce* Don't be ridiculous.

*Dick* I am not being ridiculous. I just want to have the matter cleared, since I am engaged in Bob's life, since I have helped him with all kinds of matters.

*Bruce* You have every right to have things cleared up.

*Dick (calmer)* It's good to have the police on the case. That puts me slightly more at ease. Is there any hearing at hand?

*Bruce* Tomorrow.

*Dick* May I be present?

*Bruce* Of course. Eleven o'clock in the Quirinal.

*Dick* Give me the address with a description to find the right location and room.  
*Bruce* You are welcome.. His father will be there from England together with Robert's bank accountant, and Clothilde, of course.  
*Dick* I think I'll need a drink after all.  
(*Bruce obliges him.*)

Scene 4. The hearing.

*police* Before I account for the police investigations and conclusions, I wish to hear from each one of you what you may have to say, since every piece of information is invaluable to the investigation. May I ask our bank accountant from London, who managed the departed's business, to begin.

*Evelyn* At Lord Cecil's request I made sure that there was always money enough on Robert's international account. I made regular depositions, and he made regular withdrawals. That was all. Sometimes he made greater withdrawals, so that the balance was disturbed, whereupon the bank contacted me and I got in touch with Lord Cecil, who gave clearance for restoring the balance. That was all. Nothing disturbed the rhythm, until Robert suddenly withdrew everything from all his accounts, even his savings and funds, and went missing three weeks ago. Since then nothing has happened.

*polisen* Mylord Cecil.

*Cecil* I am very much worried, especially since I really believed Robert was on his way home. I sent his friend Bruce here to pull him out of his reckless ways of living and get him home, and the effort appeared successful. Robert wrote to me himself and expressed sincere regrets and good intentions, and then he just disappeared. My greatest fear is that he has withdrawn all his money to go away somewhere to nowhere without telling anyone to be able to live more recklessly than ever. My only hope is that he will get in touch from somewhere. I intend to go on helping him economically all the way until he has left us with a death certificate.

*police* Mademoiselle Clothilde, what do you think?

*Clothilde* Like Lord Cecil I think he has escaped abroad perhaps to India and probably incognito.

*police* We have examined that possibility. If he has left by air it must be possible to find him in the passenger lists. We have not found him. If he has gone abroad by flight he must have used a false name and passport. The possibility remains that he has left by boat, for example to Greece, Cyprus, Malta or Turkey. Then it will be more difficult to find him, but an Englishman always makes himself noticed, and our investigations have not found any trace of him on any boat.

*Cecil* Trains? Car?

*polisen* Even more difficult to investigate. May I now ask Mr Bruce for his view of the case.

*Bruce*            Apparently I was the last one who saw him. We left Clothilde together on Sardinia to later join her in Rapallo. That was her own suggestion. We followed her advice, took the boat to Palermo, went around in Sicily, had a party in Taormina, took the train to Naples, went out to Sorrento and Capri, where he left me to attend to his apartment in Rome, which Dick had provided for him. When I came to Rome a week later he wasn't there, so I assumed he had proceeded to Rapallo. In Rapallo I met Clothilde alone, and we were both surprised.

*Clothilde*        That is true.

*police*            I have understood that Lord Cecil also has paid for your subsistence here in Italy, Mr Bruce.

*Cecil*             Quite correct, and I am willing to go on with that as long as there is hope.

*police*            Mr Dick?

*Dick*              I have nothing to say.

*police*            Nothing at all?

*Dick*              No.

*police*            We are very grateful for your cooperation, since that is necessary for our investigation. Your eagerness to know what has happened to Robert is quite justified and commendable. We intend however to proceed no further with the investigation until something novel happens to bring new light upon the matter. (*Everyone is surprised.*)

*Cecil (upset)* But you haven't found him!

*police*            Yes, Lord Cecil, we have found him. He lives here in Rome on his address, which Mr Dick arranged for him. Several have seen him, and his lady confirms that he exists. We have found that he probably quite simply has wished to detach himself from family and friends. Isn't it true, Mr Evelyn, that he has continued withdrawing his monthly maintenance as usual?

*Evelyn*            Yes, two days ago.

*police*            So he is alive and carries on as usual. If he wants to be left in peace, you should respect it. He will probably get in touch again with time, when he feels like it. If he has written letters to you, Lord Cecil, he will most certainly do so again.

*Dick*              But when I visited him in Rome there was no one there but Bruce.

*Bruce*             It's true that he gave me keys to his flat in Rome.

*Police*            Did he give them to you himself?

*Bruce*             By the hostess. Spare keys for security just in case.

*Dick*              But you were living there.

*Bruce*             In Rome I had nowhere else to stay.

*police*            The case rests, Lord Cecil. It is neither concluded nor abandoned. If something happens to shed new light on the matter or to alter our impression that he will carry on his irregular and capricious life as usual, we will reopen the case. If no one has anything more to say, then that's all, ladies and gentlemen. (*waits for an answer. Everyone is stunned.*) You may remain and continue discussing the matter as long as you like. You will probably find your way out by yourselves. I regret that I must attend to other urgent matters. Buon giorno, gentlemen. (*leaves*)

*Cecil* Has he then cheated all of us?  
*Evelyn* It doesn't look any better. Come, George, and let's go home.  
*Clothilde* He would never abandon me in such a way.  
*Cecil* He most probably hasn't.  
*Dick (with an eye on Bruce)* There is something here that fails to make sense.  
*Bruce* What, Dick?  
*Dick* That's what I don't know – yet.  
*Clothilde* Bruce, take me out of here. I want to speak alone with you.  
*Bruce* We can go home to Robert's place, if you like.  
*Clothilde* Yes, please.  
*Cecil* Bruce, we will naturally continue to support you here as long as the crisis remains and as long as you wish to carry on.  
*Bruce* I will continue doing my best, Sir.  
*Cecil* We owe you thanks for that. Clothilde, you can count on every help from us.  
*Clothilde* Thank you, Sir.  
*Cecil* Come, Evelyn. Let's go.  
*Evelyn (looks at his watch)* There is a London flight in two hours. *(They leave.)*  
*Dick* Have you nothing more to say, Bruce?  
*Bruce* Not at the moment. But I will be at your service at any time.  
*Dick* Good. I will be in touch. *(leaves)*  
*Bruce* Come, Clothilde. I am at your disposal.  
*Clothilde* Thank you, Bruce. *(they leave)*

Act V scene 1. The apartment.  
 (Enter Bruce and Clothilde.)

*Bruce* May I treat you with something? Brandy? Whisky? Coffee?  
*Clothilde* It's just as if you were living here and not Robert.  
*Bruce* What would you say by that?  
*Clothilde* How much have you lived here, and how much has Robert lived here? Do you know?  
*Bruce* I came here directly after Capri. Then Robert had already been here and put everything in order as he wanted it. Nothing has changed. I don't know how much he has been here. I have myself only used the apartment for occasional nights. When I didn't find Robert here I went directly to you.  
*Clothilde* Do you know what I believe? Do you know what I really suspect?  
*Bruce* I have no idea.  
*Clothilde* I think you have murdered Robert and try to take over his life.  
*Bruce (avoids looking into her eyes)* What makes you believe that?  
*Clothilde* He is and remains mysteriously vanished. He would never leave me without an explanation. Still someone continues withdrawing his money and acting

in his name. You have the possibility to do so, since you learned to forge his name and could have taken over his passport.

*Bruce* Robert isn't dead, Clothilde. The police himself have established that as a fact.

*Clothilde* Prove it! The police is just lazy and comfortable and doesn't care whether he is alive or dead as long as nothing can be proved. And Dick believes the same as I.

*Bruce* Yes, he told me so. You may believe whatever you wish. I am under an obligation of silence, Clothilde.

*Clothilde* So you know more than anyone else and more than the police.

*Bruce* I am bound to absolute obligation of silence by Robert himself.

*Clothilde* You can never replace Robert, Bruce.

*Bruce* What do you mean by that?

*Clothilde* You can never be my lover like he was. You can never take care of me like he did. He was a devil sometimes, but no angel can replace him. And as long as he doesn't come back and you hold your silence about what you know, I will go on believing that you have murdered him.

*Bruce* Clothilde!

*Clothilde* Relax, Bruce. Neither Dick nor I will do anything about it. We haven't shared our suspicions with the police. We rest our case and watch every step you take. As long as the hope remains that Robert could return, you have nothing to fear. But if some day someone finds him dead you will be the only suspect.

*Bruce* Are you trying to warn me?

*Clothilde* I just give you the facts. You have the right to know where you stand. I have informed you. Tread carefully, Bruce. No one can follow Robert in his wild and waywards tracks.

*Bruce* I know that well enough.

*Clothilde* That was all. I will go back to Rapallo now. Don't try to contact me, unless you have news about Robert.

*Bruce* Clothilde, you are unfair.

*Clothilde* In what way? I haven't judged you. A suspicion is no sentence. On the contrary I have been fair in being completely open and frank with you. There was no need for me to be. We could have shared our suspicion with the police instead. Good bye, Bruce. (*leaves promptly and closes the door firmly behind.*)

*Bruce (beside himself)* Clothilde! Clothilde!

## Scene 2. London.

*Evelyn* What is it, George?

*Cecil* What would you think about this letter?

*Evelyn (reads out aloud and dryly)* "Dear old father, Pardon me for having subjected you and many others to new trials, but a crisis has come up which I haven't been able

to resolve in any other way than by temporarily disappearing, and even this solution to the problem is only temporary. I ask for some patience with my constantly exacerbated whims. At the same time I have to ask you not to give up on me just yet: I live and stand as always in constant need of more money, which I hope you will continue providing me as usual until further. I heard from Bruce that you all met in Rome and that the police could reassure you concerning me. Please be patient. Everything will come out all right.

Your wanton son, Robert."

At least a sign of life, isn't it, George?

*Cecil* Are you reading nothing between the lines?

*Evelyn* What would that be?

*Cecil* His health. His relationships. His condition. Where he is.

*Evelyn* He mentions nothing about those sort of things.

*Cecil* No, that's just it.

*Evelyn* Where was the letter posted?

*Cecil* In Rome.

*Evelyn* So he is in Rome. Yet another argument for our police officer down there to relax and take it easy.

*Cecil* But something isn't right.

*Evelyn* What?

*Cecil* He mentions nothing about Clothilde, as if he had forgotten all about her. When I phoned her she confirmed they had not been in touch at all. He can't just have scrapped her.

*Evelyn* Why not? Hasn't he done that sort of thing before?

*Cecil* He was serious about Clothilde. I am sure of that.

*Evelyn* The possibility remains that he with that fellow Bruce is pulling you by the nose.

*Cecil* Not Bruce. He is too conscientious and careful about his duties. He could never deceive anyone and least of all an employer.

*Evelyn* I am not so sure about that. Anyone could be corrupted by money.

*Cecil* I don't think so.

*Evelyn* Well, we shall see. At least there is a constant development to this strange affair.

### Scene 3. Rapallo.

*Dick* What's new, Clothilde? Have you heard anything from Robert?

*Clothilde* No, but from Bruce.

*Dick* That shitbag. I can't stand him.

*Clothilde* I am afraid we have been unfair to him.

*Dick* Impossible. That scumbag has more on his conscience than anyone could suspect.

*Clothilde* Read his letter.

*Dick* Do I have to?

*Clothilde* For Robert's sake.

*Dick* Bruce was never anything but a parasite. I hope the letter will endorse my convictions.

*Clothilde* Read it out aloud.

*Dick (reads)* "Dear Clothilde. Pardon me for writing to you, but I owe you to report what I can about me and Robert. I can now tell you, that he has gone to Goa, since I intend to go there after him. (*Dick frowns.*) On his request I have disposed of his flat in Rome, and probably neither you nor Dick will ever see any of us again, which perhaps is just as well. Robert asked me to take care of you in his absence, but you made that impossible. I don't blame you. I have enjoyed many and great advantages by my contact with Robert, which you not without good reasons begrudged me and regarded me with suspicion for, but God knows that I tried to make good for my salary by satisfying both my employers Robert and his father by strictest faithfulness in sticking to any words given.

That was all. Take care. You might sometime hear from either of us again.

Your servant, Bruce."

Has he really gone to Goa?

*Clothilde* I have checked his information. The apartment has been taken over by someone else. The hostess has confirmed that Robert has cancelled the contract. And with the help of the police I have checked the air companies. Yes, Bruce has gone to India. On a one way ticket.

*Dick* Incredible! What do you think about it? Were they gay? Did they have a relationship?

*Clothilde* No, Dick, neither of them was gay, at least not voluntarily. Robert was ravished as a boy, and as a grown-up he raped other boys, but he never enjoyed it, and it was never antural to him. It was more like some sado-masochistic self-torture.

*Dick* But he never reached a consummation with you, did he?

*Clothilde* Stop it, Dick! He loved me, and our love was sincere! Bruce knew himself that he could never replace Robert by any similar love.

*Dick* And now we have lost both. And no one can understand why.

*Clothilde* Bruce will certainly write to Robert's father. The story doesn't end here, Dick, but they have both left us behind.

*Dick* I am afraid you could be right.

*Clothilde* Go now, Dick. Leave me alone with my memories.

*Dick* As you wish. (*finds no other option than to leave, since she practically turns him out.*)

*Clothilde* That damned calumniator of a vulgar scoundrel! How could he make me believe that Bruce could have murdered him? Now I have lost both of them, and it's that scumbag's fault!

Scene 4. Goa, a sandy beach.

*Robert* We fooled them, Bruce! We fooled the entire world! Just don't tell me that it wasn't worth it! You don't regret that you came, do you?

*Bruce* I have no regrets.

*Robert* That's what I mean! Here is all paradise for you! Only free people! Here the parties can go on for days and nights without anyone getting tired. Here in India you have everything you need: freedom, beauty, endless possibilities, and even a naturally religious mentality with some unfathomable depth. Napoleon told his soldiers as they faced the pyramids of Egypt two hundred years ago: "Thirty centuries are looking down on you!" The same ascounts for all India. Here is culture and history everywhere with no beginning and no end.

*Bruce* And your illness?

*Robert* I have forgotten all about it. I don't care. You don't ask about Aids in India. If you get it you might die. That's all. The girls make no questions about it, and they are all as beautiful as enchanted sirens. If you feel out of joint you will have all possible means for reality escape, all drugs and all the best wines of India. This is the only place in India where they cultivate wine, but their rum isn't bad either. I can't recommend their whisky, though.

*Bruce* And Clothilde? Your father?

*Robert* Forget them. You are my secretary. We will write to my father sometimes and keep their hopes alive, and that will keep him happy. We could even go out sailing here. I don't understand why, but somehow women can never be quite convincing as qualified sportsmen.

*Bruce* And how long will this go on, Robert? How long could we live like this just for our pleasures with women, drugs and wine?

*Robert* As long as you want. Until one of us dies, Bruce. And I don't think any one of us will see to it that one dies before the other.

*Bruce* And if someone comes after us?

*Robert* Then we will just travel on. There are other safe havens like for instance on Bali, in Thailand, in the rest of India or Nepal. The whole world is open to us as long as we live. You did well in writing to Clothilde that you would go after me to Goa. That will make them keep their peace. As long as we both live, Bruce, everything will be in order, and everyone will keep quiet. One friendship is enough to maintain the entire world order. Come now, and let's have a drink in the bungalow.

*(They leave.)*

The End.

(India, 30.10 - 4.11.2003,  
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