

One Was Nude
and
One Wore Tails

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Characters

FIRST ROAD SWEEPER

SECOND ROAD SWEEPER

WOMAN

NAKED MAN

PATROLMAN

MAN IN EVENING DRESS

We find ourselves in a street on the outskirts of town. A couple of lamp posts, a withered hedge, a dilapidated park bench, a news vendor's kiosk (which is closed) and a trestle with a sign indicating 'Road Works'.

Enter several ROAD SWEEPERS, pushing their carts. They sing in unison:

The wise man sleeps on a bed of wool,
 The lazy man sleeps on a bed of feathers.
 The rheumatic sleeps on wood,
 And the rogue on a pretty girl's breast.
 At night we clean the streets,
 The long avenues, dirtied during the day.
 Dead leaves, deformed by the frost,
 Or by the doings of a dirty dog;
 We pick up litter and rags,
 And dog ends walked on and flattened,
 Before, by the sad vagaries of fate,
 They all end up blocking the drains.
 Sometimes we find a thousand-lire note.
 Hell, but it's one of the old ones... not worth a thing,
 So we stick it on the bonfire.
 But then we are seized with remorse,
 And we give it to a blind beggar.

Exit the ROAD SWEEPERS. Only two of them remain on stage. They talk quietly for a while. Then one of them raises his voice:

FIRST SWEEPER: Listen, you know what I say? I say that it's

best to speak the truth, and have done with it. At least, that's the way I see it...

SECOND SWEEPER: Ah, yes, the truth, you say... And what is the truth? You will tell me that the true is the opposite of the false... Correct. So, now tell me: what is false and what is true? Is that which is true true, or is that which is false true? Thus, if the true and the false are one and the same... (*The FIRST SWEEPER moves away, irritated*) ...Hey, wait, why are you running off in such a hurry?

FIRST SWEEPER: Because I want to be on my own... that's why.

SECOND SWEEPER: I say... You wouldn't happen to be angry with me, would you?

FIRST SWEEPER: Who said anything about angry...? The fact is, I am sick of hanging around here giving myself a headache with your speeches every night. You rave on with your mad theories, and then it starts me thinking. I've already told you that thinking gives me a pain right here.

He points to his forehead.

SECOND SWEEPER: That's because you're not trained for it... The brain is a muscle, and when it is not subjected to regular strenuous exercise...

FIRST SWEEPER: Oh yes, brilliant! You know what? I bet, if I start exercising my brain muscle strenuously, afterwards, I guarantee I'll get brain strain... Wonderful!

SECOND SWEEPER: (*Amused*) Brain strain! Ha, ha! I like that!

FIRST SWEEPER: That's right. And what's more, I don't understand why you, with your well-trained muscle, and with all your education, still carry on working as a roadsweeper.

SECOND SWEEPER: Because for me, being a roadsweeper is not a job, but a mission...

FIRST SWEEPER: Here we go again, more crazy notions!

SECOND SWEEPER: Not at all. Sensible, if anything. To start with: what is the most important thing in life? Answer me that!

FIRST SWEEPER: Well, I should say it's that a person should have good health and happiness...

SECOND SWEEPER: ...That way he can reach true happiness?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, and then if he doesn't give a damn for anything or anyone... that's even better.

SECOND SWEEPER: There you go! Well done. I have to admit that I was mistaken about you. You're not really as stupid as you look. That's exactly correct: in order to be truly happy, one must raise oneself above life's wretched vicissitudes, forget one's own ambitions, suppress one's feelings and passions...

FIRST SWEEPER: Not give a damn! Exactly! But that's easier said than done...

SECOND SWEEPER: Ah, indeed, it is not easy... But the means do exist.

FIRST SWEEPER: Like what?

SECOND SWEEPER: Have you never heard of yoga?

FIRST SWEEPER: Eh? What's yoga?

SECOND SWEEPER: I have to admit that I was *not* wrong about you... You really are as stupid as you look. Yoga is an exercise, a psycho-physical discipline, which enables those who practice it to achieve the most absolute sublimation, and thereby reach a state of beatitude, in other words, happiness.

FIRST SWEEPER: Alright... But what's this yoga got to do with being a roadsweeper?

SECOND SWEEPER: It's got a lot to do with it... Basically, it's the same principle. What can be more suitable than a roadsweeper's life, in order to suppress within us that baggage of arrogance, pride and ambition which prevents us from stripping ourselves of pointless vanities, and going

forward, naked but happy, to attain the bliss and ecstasy of the platonic world of ideas?

FIRST SWEEPER: Naked? There, I knew it. Now I'm starting to get a headache! What do you mean, naked?

SECOND SWEEPER: Naked! Naked outside, but clothed within, with our spirit clothed...

FIRST SWEEPER: Our spirit clothed! Hey, I like that! I'll have to remember that... But what does it mean?

SECOND SWEEPER: I'll explain it in a couple of words... You, for example: do you see yourself as someone?

FIRST SWEEPER: What a question! I'm a roadsweeper... What do you expect me to see myself as...?

SECOND SWEEPER: Precisely. You don't see yourself as anyone. You see yourself as nobody, in short, a nothingness... But is not nothingness perhaps the beginning of everything, in other words, the absolute? And the absolute, as Plato says, is God, and therefore you are God...

FIRST SWEEPER: Me?

SECOND SWEEPER: Yes, you!

FIRST SWEEPER: Oh come on... You're just saying that because you like me... But look, when you get to know me better... Ha...! They've been telling you stories about me, and you fell for it.

SECOND SWEEPER: Lucky you, to understand so little! Look... A person could dress you up as absolutely anything: a king, a clown, a soldier, a priest... Stark naked, or in evening dress, you will always be yourself, a roadsweeper. In fact, not even a roadsweeper – a nobody, because you are nobody, and therefore everything...

FIRST SWEEPER: And since everything is God, as Plato says, I am God...

SECOND SWEEPER: Well done! I see that it's sinking in at last!

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, yes, it's not so hard really... But tell me, does the Pope know that I am God?

SECOND SWEEPER: The Pope?

Enter a WOMAN, running. She looks very worried.

WOMAN: Hell... This time I'm really done for... Oh, excuse me... Maybe you can help me...

SECOND SWEEPER: Happy to oblige... In what regard might we be of assistance?

WOMAN: They nabbed me... Just as I was negotiating with a client...

FIRST SWEEPER: *Who* nabbed you?

WOMAN: The Vice Squad. There they are. They're coming! Oh, for pity's sake, help me... Do something!

FIRST SWEEPER: Let's hide her in the bin! There's plenty of room, as long as she squeezes up a bit.

SECOND SWEEPER: Don't be stupid... Such a good-looking woman... In among all that rubbish...?!

WOMAN: Thanks for the compliment... But unfortunately the fact that I am good-looking, as you say, isn't going to help me a lot... The Vice Squad don't mess around. They lock you away as soon as look at you. Last time, a gentleman saved me by passing me off as his fiancée, but this time...

SECOND SWEEPER: Oh yes, I can just see it! Just imagine if we said that you were our fiancée... that *would* make people laugh... Roadsweepers, as everyone knows, are incapable of love...

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, one fiancée between two... It wouldn't be right... On the other hand, though...

SECOND SWEEPER: Oh yes, how stupid of me... I didn't even think of that...

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, we could take it in turns... Me first! I thought of it first...!

SECOND SWEEPER: Behave yourself, and take this. (*He*

removes his roadsweeper's cape) The caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly; it throws off its old skin and flies. *(He tosses his cap and cape into the bin, and then pulls a top-hat from his toolbox)* Let us go, my love. Tonight I shall be your protector...

WOMAN: Oh, thank you, you're very kind... And you look like a real gentleman... I really don't know how I can repay you.

SECOND SWEEPER: Don't worry, I'm sure we shall find a way. *(Theatrically)* Cling to me, treasure; Love will save us...

FIRST SWEEPER: Just a moment, before you two start clinging to each other, what am I supposed to do with this bin of yours? I can hardly go round with two bins at the same time, can I! Supposing I run into a supervisor...?

SECOND SWEEPER: You're right... What can we do?

FIRST SWEEPER: Well, maybe there is a way: I'll hide my bin behind that little wall, and I'll take yours to the depot, and I'll tell the supervisor that you felt ill, and that you had to go off... I won't say who with, though...

SECOND SWEEPER: Well done... You're divine!

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, I know, you've already explained that. You don't have to go telling everyone, though... These are delicate matters, you know! Let's go.

WOMAN: Thank you too... It's been a real miracle running into you.

FIRST SWEEPER: There, you see...? A miracle now! If word of this gets out... Come on, hurry up. Go.

WOMAN: Yes, yes, we're going. Goodbye... and thank you again.

The two of them exit, arm in arm. The FIRST SWEEPER follows, wheeling the SECOND SWEEPER's bin.

A few seconds of blackout, to indicate the passage of time.

FIRST SWEEPER: *(Re-entering)* Hey, let's not start playing

tricks... Who's shifted my bin? (*The bin, which was on-stage prior to the blackout, has now been shifted behind a hedge*) Ah, here it is... Just as well... That gave me a fright... (*He starts picking up litter*) That would have been a fine thing... A fellow worries about another fellow's bin, and in the meantime his own one gets stolen... If I find the rat who shifted it...

He opens the bin lid, and throws in the rubbish that he's collected.

NAKED MAN: (*Annoyed, popping up out of the bin*) Good God! Mind where you're throwing that rubbish... I suppose you think that's funny.

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Not believing his eyes*) Oh, excuse me...

NAKED MAN: (*Dusting down the top hat which he's wearing*) Excuse me be damned! If you think that's funny... I can assure you that your jokes are in extremely bad taste...

FIRST SWEEPER: Hey, now look, you, you're a bit mad...

NAKED MAN: Ah, so I'm mad now, am I? That's lovely – now you start insulting me into the bargain. And what's to stop you starting to hit me too? Come on, feel free! However, I must warn you that you are about to hit a... naked man.

FIRST SWEEPER: A naked man? Let me see this naked man.

NAKED MAN: Please, go ahead... (*He stands up, to show the top half of his body, which is indeed naked*) That'll do. After all, we hardly know each other! And anyway... don't you think you're going a bit far? Alright, I can imagine that, with your job, accustomed as you are to living among all kinds of filth... I'm sure that the sight of another's nudity is hardly going to embarrass you... But fortunately, in my case, modesty prevents...

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Losing his temper*) Right, that's quite enough, eh? Either you pack that up, or I'll make you pack it up...! I'll take my bin, with you in it, and I'll tip the whole lot into the first ditch I find...

NAKED MAN: (*Soothingly*) There's no need to get all worked up like that. Come on, calm down...

FIRST SWEEPER: No, my friend... It is *you* who should calm down... and cut the fooling about... Because I am quite capable of calling a policeman, and *then* you'll be sorry!

NAKED MAN: No, please... I humbly beg your pardon... on my knees... don't turn me in to the police... Because that would be the same as leading me to suicide... Please, don't call the...

FIRST SWEEPER: Alright, I won't call the police... But listen, just so that I know: how on earth did you end up in my bin, and naked into the bargain?

NAKED MAN: I ended up in here precisely because I am naked... I don't have to tell you that if I had been clothed, I wouldn't have come anywhere near your bin.

FIRST SWEEPER: Are you sure you didn't take off your clothes just to see how it felt being naked in a bin, eh?

NAKED MAN: No... I got undressed for quite another reason... the most sublime of reasons... for love... But unfortunately, just as we were getting down to it, HE had to turn up... the husband... just like some third-rate farce.

FIRST SWEEPER: Ha, ha! Just like in the cartoons...

NAKED MAN: Precisely. And in order to avoid reacting in the traditional way, which would have sent me scurrying under the classic bed, or into the even more classic wardrobe, I took my hat, (*He points to the black top-hat he is wearing*) I gritted my teeth, and went out onto the balcony just as I was...

FIRST SWEEPER: Stark naked, but with a top-hat on your head and your teeth gritted. Forgive my laughing, but things like this make me laugh.

NAKED MAN: Go ahead, go ahead. I wish I could do the same, but, as you can imagine, it is difficult to laugh when one is naked and up to one's neck submerged in filth.

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, yes, it's hard, I know, but all the

same, it makes me laugh... Ha, ha.

Anyway, how did it go, how did it go...? Wait a moment... It was really good... Ah, yes, that's it: (*He declaims, imitating his philosopher friend*) The important thing is to be naked, but clothed... that is, naked outside, but clothed inside... And since you are inside, obviously, you are clothed...

NAKED MAN: I don't understand.

FIRST SWEEPER: It's philosophy... It would take too long to explain... I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to continue my round... So I must ask you to get out of my bin, because otherwise there won't be any room for the rubbish.

NAKED MAN: Oh no, please, you wouldn't want to leave me out in the street like this, would you? I mean, it wouldn't be decent! Come on!

FIRST SWEEPER: What do you mean, it wouldn't be decent? So, in your opinion, what am I supposed to do. Supposing I run into a supervisor, what am I supposed to do? He'd probably end up reporting me for unauthorised hire of a vehicle for illicit purposes, or something!

NAKED MAN: If you could just be so kind ... and so understanding... as to take me home...

FIRST SWEEPER: Home? I mean...! What do you take me for, a taxi?

NAKED MAN: It's not really so very far... And, look, as a token of my appreciation, take this... I'll give you my watch. (*He removes it from his wrist*) The only thing that I'm still wearing, apart from my hat. Take it... it's a valuable watch... 18-carat solid gold.

He hands him the watch.

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Taking it, embarrassed*) And you are giving me this valuable, 18-carat, solid gold watch, just for taking you home?

NAKED MAN: Indeed... and I regret having nothing else with which I can demonstrate...

FIRST SWEEPER: Alright, it doesn't matter. Settle down.
Where are we going?

NAKED MAN: Via Donini... number 27...

FIRST SWEEPER: 27 via Donini...? And that's supposed to be not very far? That's two miles on foot, you know! You can keep your watch, because I don't want trouble... Supposing I run into a supervisor, what am I going to tell him?

NAKED MAN: There you go again with your supervisor...! Can't you think of anything other than your supervisors? What kind of sons-of-toil mentality is this...? It really is true what they say: once a road-sweeper, always a road-sweeper.

FIRST SWEEPER: Now then, go easy... Who says that, anyway?

NAKED MAN: I say it... And I also say: that people like you make me ashamed of being human... because I can accept anything – cowardice, poverty, ignorance – but not nothingness...

FIRST SWEEPER: Ah yes, nothingness... But, in case you didn't realise it, nothing is everything, and everything is God. And you can say what you like... but hands off my divinity. *(At that moment, a NIGHT PATROLMAN appears from the back of the stage. The NAKED MAN sees him, and immediately disappears into his bin. But the SWEEPER, who has his back to the PATROLMAN, continues talking)* Because I become an animal, and I don't care who you are...

NAKED MAN: *(Hissing at him)* Stop it, shut up! Look out...!

FIRST SWEEPER: Stop it? You're telling me to stop it? *(He thumps his fist on the bin-lid, which closes again)* You're the one who should stop it... Dirty old man... First you go flirting with other people's wives, then you get yourself caught, and then you come and start making fun of people... But I'll sort you out. *(He gives the bin a kick)* And thank your lucky stars you've got no clothes on – because

otherwise... (*He bangs his fist on the lid*) ...that ugly head of yours... Damn you... (*The PATROLMAN behind him can't restrain a laugh*) Yes, yes, go ahead, laugh! Ha, ha! But I'll have the last laugh... Enjoy yourself, carry on with your little jokes... When I tip you into the canal, ha, ha, I'd like to see how you get on in the water... Ha, ha! Help, help... And down you'll go... glug, glug... Like a submarine.

At this point, the SWEEPER becomes aware of the PATROLMAN's presence Glug... Glug... He stops for a moment, perplexed, but then continues unperturbed, miming the sinking of a submarine. He sings.

The submarine goes Glug, Glug, Glug
 The little fishy too goes Glug, Glug, Glug
 And the submarine goes Glug, Glug, Glug.
 All together now, Glug... Glug... Glug...

All this is accompanied by a kind of tap dance, which ends with the SWEEPER kicking the bin.

PATROLMAN: Um... Ah... Are you not feeling well?

FIRST SWEEPER: No, no... You see, I was just... well, just passing the time... Glug... Glug...

PATROLMAN: So just to pass the time, you start kicking this poor bin? But what's it done to you?

FIRST SWEEPER: It's... well... it's made me angry... It's made me... Every now and then, who knows why, bang... it stops... and there's no way to get it moving. Look... You see... it's making fun of me... the wretch! (*He gives it another kick*) But believe me, one of these days... (*He gives the bin a push*) There you go, you see? (*The bin has moved*) Now it's moving... It's got frightened... because you're here... I tell you... dustcarts are like children... If you don't treat them roughly every once in a while, if you don't shout at them, they end up doing just what they want. They show you no respect, they... (*He starts talking to the bin*) Come on, get a move on... and don't pull any more stunts... because, if you do, I'll call the Park Keeper

again... and Park Keepers are not to be trifled with! Come on, come on, you shout at it too...

PATROLMAN: (*Embarrassed*) Ah, yes, if it's all the same with you, I... I... Well, I'd better be going... See you...

He gets on his bicycle, and exits rapidly.

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, yes, see you... (*He mops the sweat from his brow, and from inside his hat*) Phew! What a terrible five minutes...

NAKED MAN: (*Cautiously sticking his head out*) Has he gone?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, yes... You almost landed me right in it, there... Look, I'm all sweating...

NAKED MAN: Well I don't have to tell you what it was like for me... If he had hung about for just one minute longer, I would have died of suffocation...

FIRST SWEEPER: Would that it was true, dear boy!

NAKED MAN: (*Leaning out of the bin like a preacher out of his pulpit*) Oh, don't be like that... I've realised it now, you know. You... There's no point in you pretending to be a hard, heartless person, because you're really very kind... Thank you., thank you for what you've done for me... I assure you that I shall reward your sacrifice, once you get me home.

FIRST SWEEPER: Home? Ah, here we go again... You must be mad if you think that I'm taking you home...

NAKED MAN: Well, look, tell me, how much wages do you make in a month?

FIRST SWEEPER: Me? Well... It depends... For example, this month... Wait, I've got my wage packet... I picked it up today... Here we are... Twenty-two thousand and fifty... exactly. Why, what's it to you?

NAKED MAN: Right. Consider it doubled... And I'll throw in my watch too, for good measure.

FIRST SWEEPER: What...? You're going to give me your

18-carat gold watch, plus twenty-two thousand and fifty lire... just for taking you home?!

NAKED MAN: Certainly... As soon as we reach 27 via Donini... you wait downstairs for me a moment, while I go up... Oh, no... no... I can't...

FIRST SWEEPER: What do you mean, 'I can't'? First you say you can and then you say you can't. Make your bloody mind up!

NAKED MAN: But... what did you think I meant? I was just saying that I can't go home in the condition I'm in now.

FIRST SWEEPER: But why? Who do you think is going to see you at this hour?

NAKED MAN: My wife... Since I haven't got my keys, I imagine that she will come and open the door... and when she sees me naked and without my evening dress, what am I going to tell her?

FIRST SWEEPER: Without your evening dress?

NAKED MAN: Yes. Before this misfortune, I was wearing evening dress... I'd told my wife that I had to attend an embassy *vernissage*.

FIRST SWEEPER: An embassy *vernissage*, in evening dress? Just a moment, this evening dress, is it a jacket with long, long tails?

NAKED MAN: Yes, why?

FIRST SWEEPER: Because in that case, there's one coming towards us on a bicycle...

NAKED MAN: An evening dress on a bicycle!?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, look... (*He points off-stage, behind the NAKED MAN*) It must be one of those fellows who go round at night selling flowers.

NAKED MAN: So it is...! A real evening dress...!

FIRST SWEEPER: Relax, I'll see to this... Hey, Evening Dress... Stop, a minute...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Are you referring to me?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes... Listen... Are you looking for business?

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: You're not going to start telling me that roadsweepers buy flowers too, these days?

FIRST SWEEPER: No, I want to buy your evening dress... and immediately, too. Tell me how much you want. Let's have a look what it's made of... *(He lights a match, and holds it up to the tails of the tailcoat)* Hum... cheap wool. Pretty tatty!

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Wretch, mind what you're doing with that match! And get your dirty hands off... I've just had it dry-cleaned, if you don't mind.

FIRST SWEEPER: You'll see... after all it's not exactly solid gold... I just wanted to pass a bit of business your way... But seeing that you're playing hard to get, you can keep your evening dress... Anyway, people who wear evening dress always strike me as a bit lacking in taste...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: So, if it's so lacking in taste, why do you want to buy it?

FIRST SWEEPER: Because I'm depraved... psychologically depraved... And I only like things which disgust me...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Like being a roadsweeper... for example.

FIRST SWEEPER: Correct. You've hit the nail on the head. So, do you want to do this bit of business? In exchange I shall give you this valuable 18-carat gold watch. And in addition I shall give you 15,000 lire, in cash. Come on, it's a deal... Take it or leave it.

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Leave it, be blowed... Even if I wanted to, how am I going to...? I can hardly go home naked!

FIRST SWEEPER: That's true, and then what are you going to tell your wife?!

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: What wife...! I'm not married, you know...

FIRST SWEEPER: Well then?

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Well, just think a moment...

Can you imagine me, nude, on my bicycle?

FIRST SWEEPER: Ha, ha, that's even better than that other fellow, nude on the balcony... Ha, ha...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Balcony? What's balconies got to do with it?!

FIRST SWEEPER: Nothing, nothing... I forget! But now I think of it, there would be a way... Once you were naked, you could put yourself in my bin...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: What, what? Me, naked, in your bin?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes... And it's not all that bad in there... it's been tested... You settle down in there, nice and comfortable, and I take you home... Door to door service... Everything included... It's a deal: either take it or leave it.

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: But you must have some kind of screw loose... I mean, me, nude, in the bin...?! While we're at it, why don't we have it so that I've got a dummy in my mouth and a baby's bonnet on my head, and we can play at nanny taking baby for a walk in the pram?

FIRST SWEEPER: Oh, why do you have to make things so difficult...? If you really want to know, there's one fellow already in there. (*He points to the bin*) He's been in there for a couple of hours, and *he* hasn't been complaining all along, like you...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: What, what? There's a man in your bin?

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Offended, giving him a mean look*)

Certainly... what did you think was in there?

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: A living man?

FIRST SWEEPER: Obviously living. You wouldn't expect a corpse, would you? I'm not an undertaker, you know... Alive, and nude.

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Impossible... Let me see!

He makes as if to go over to the bin.

FIRST SWEEPER: Hey, gently... Stand over there... You're not at home now... Don't you think you should knock first? You might find that he's not in the mood for guests today... And wait over there, because he's not a great one for trusting people. (*Knocking*) May I? Am I disturbing you? Excuse me, Ambassador... (*Turning to EVENING DRESS*)) He's from the Embassy! (*Turning back to the NAKED MAN*) If you don't mind, I wanted to introduce you...

NAKED MAN: (*Lifting the bin lid*) Eh...? Ah, it's you... (*Noticing EVENING DRESS, who stares at him in amazement*) But what on earth do you think you're doing? Don't you understand that in my present state... I mean, are you really trying to ruin me? Introducing me to a complete stranger, in my present condition...?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, yes, a stranger, but he's got an evening dress... And if we don't find some way of settling an agreement, then, I regret to say, there's no chance of your getting home...

NAKED MAN: Alright... We shall tolerate this further humiliation... A pleasure... my friend.

He extends his hand, condescendingly.

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: A pleasure... But I don't understand... What on earth has happened to you?

FIRST SWEEPER: Nothing, nothing... it's a long story... Anyway, now you can guess why I wanted to buy your evening dress...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Ah, it's for him... Well, I'm sorry, there's no way that I'm going to strip naked and dive into that bin, in his place.

NAKED MAN: Well, maybe there could be a solution. You strip, you give me your suit, and you put on the sweeper's clothes...

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Swiftly calculating the odds*) And I end up naked. Wonderful!

NAKED MAN: But you can go in the bin...

FIRST SWEEPER: Even better... You both go off home, and I hang around here, waiting for somebody to cart me off to the police station...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: There must be some other way... (*Pointing to the SWEEPER*) How about you put on my evening dress... and I dress up... as a roadsweeper...

FIRST SWEEPER: (*More swift calculations*) And he's still left, stark naked... Wonderful, wonderful...

NAKED MAN: Yes, it is wonderful, because once we've got the evening dress, everything's resolved. (*Turning to the SWEEPER*) You'll take me back to your house... You must have another suit at home...!

FIRST SWEEPER: I've got an ordinary suit.

NAKED MAN: Very good. So we'll do a swap...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Alright, so if we're going to go through with this, let's get on with it. But you'll have to agree to buy my flowers too...

FIRST SWEEPER: Why? What are we supposed to do with flowers...?

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: And what am I supposed to do with them, once I've sold my evening dress, and dressed up as a roadsweeper? Who am I going to sell these flowers to, after that? I can hardly go into night clubs dressed as a roadsweeper...

FIRST SWEEPER: And how much do you want for these cabbages...?

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Let's see... (*A swift calculation*) There are 25 of them... five times five is twenty-five... seven thousand and fifty, plus 15,000 in cash for the evening dress, that makes 22,050. Not one lira less, though...

FIRST SWEEPER: Take it or leave it?

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: Yes...

FIRST SWEEPER: I'll leave it... (*He throws him the flowers. EVENING DRESS catches them*)

NAKED MAN: Take it!

Having caught the flowers, he gives them back to the SWEEPER.

FIRST SWEEPER: I don't want to end up without a lira...

NAKED MAN: I'll reimburse you the money. (*He grabs the wallet from the ROADSWEeper's hands, and hands it over to EVENING DRESS*)

FIRST SWEEPER: Hey, you could at least leave me my wallet...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: And what are you going to do with an empty wallet...? Come on, let's get a move on with this strip-tease before you change your mind...

He makes as if to get undressed.

FIRST SWEEPER: Slow down... You're surely not going to strip off just like that in the middle of a public highway... Supposing somebody comes by... Three naked men in one go... it's a bit much...

MAN IN EVENING DRESS: There I make you right... Let's go behind there...

FIRST SWEEPER: Allow me...

NAKED MAN: Go ahead, go ahead... But be quick...

The two of them disappear behind the news kiosk. Enter from stage left, the NIGHT PATROLMAN whom we already know, on his bicycle. He sees the bin centre-stage, and stops. The NAKED MAN only just disappears in time.

NAKED MAN: Action stations...! Dive...!

PATROLMAN: How irresponsible... He just dumps his bin here, and wanders off... It must be that lunatic from before! (*Looking around*) Where's he got to? (*He bends*

over to look at the number plate on the bin) Ah, there's his number... 30... I bet he's had another row with his bin! (He tries to lift the lid, but can't) Ooof...! It must be jammed...

Enter the WOMAN. She tiptoes up to him and kicks him up the backside.

WOMAN: Hands up!

PATROLMAN: (*Reaching instinctively for the gun in his holster*) Who's that... Ah... it's you...

WOMAN: Ha, ha... That frightened you, eh!

PATROLMAN: I can do without jokes like that... More to the point, you wouldn't happen to have seen the owner of this junk-heap anywhere around?

WOMAN: Why do you ask me...? I don't hang out with road sweepers, you know...

PATROLMAN: True, except once a month... On payday...

WOMAN: So, what's that supposed to mean? I'm not ashamed of it... Anyway, when all's said and done, they part with their wallets better than a lot of others I can think of... I tell you, sometimes these road sweepers can surprise you... This evening, for example, I picked up one...

PATROLMAN: ...with your usual story about the Vice Squad being after you? Watch out, because one of these days somebody's going to tumble you, if you'll excuse the expression...

WOMAN: I will watch out... Anyway, as I was saying, I picked up one of them, and if it hadn't been for the fact that I knew he was a roadsweeper, I would have felt really bashful... You should have heard how he spoke, he was like a real professor!

PATROLMAN: Oh yes, I know, a professor of roadsweeping!

WOMAN: Yes, yes, that's right, make fun of me...!

PATROLMAN: Me, make fun of you? The very idea...! Anyway, would you do me a favour: I've got to go over here to make a phone call, to get them to come and pick up

this bin... Make sure that nobody runs off with it.

WOMAN: OK, but get a move on. I've got things to do.

PATROLMAN: I'll be back in a couple of minutes.

No sooner has the PATROLMAN left the stage, when from behind the news kiosk emerges the ROAD SWEEPER, in evening dress.

FLOWERSELLER: (*Previously the MAN IN EVENING DRESS. From off-stage*) Ha, ha... God you're goodlooking... You look like the Chief Undertaker!

FIRST SWEEPER: Well, you're a pretty fine sight, yourself... a right sight... With that overcoat hanging down to your feet. (*Noticing the WOMAN*) Good evening... miss... (*He tries to hide his face with the bunch of flowers that he's holding. He has recognised her, and does not want to be recognised in turn*) A warm night, eh?

WOMAN: (*Flattered that such a distinguished gentleman should strike up conversation with her*) Oh, yes... the heat is unbearable... I had to come out... because I felt I was suffocating... And you? I heard you joking with your friend... You must be a great joker, you...

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, I find very great pleasure in jokes...

WOMAN: But, you know, now that I see you better... I feel as if I've seen you somewhere before!

FIRST SWEEPER: No, no, it's not me... the one you mean... He's someone else... I... I am... an ambassador...

He begins walking like a circus horse, with long, sweeping strides.

WOMAN: Good heavens...! An ambassador...! I've never seen one from close up.

FIRST SWEEPER: (*His horse-like gait has now carried him across the stage. Now he casually leaps the Road Works trestle, as if it was a fence at a horse show*) You know, we ambassadors don't tend to let ourselves be seen from close up. We have this terrible shyness...

WOMAN: That's where I've seen you... on television... Or in the newsreels...

FIRST SWEEPER: Well, yes... maybe... Sometimes I do go to the cinema...

WOMAN: But then, if you are an ambassador... I suppose you must be a count too...?

FIRST SWEEPER: Count? No, we are not a count...

He positions himself between the WOMAN and the bin.

WOMAN: Don't try to deny it... I understood immediately that you were a count... You have such a refined way about you...

At this point, the lid of the bin lifts, and the NAKED MAN pokes his head out. He signals to the SWEEPER to get a move-on.

FIRST SWEEPER: That must be because of the long tails (*He preens himself*) which we ambassadors carry behind us.

WOMAN: No, I wouldn't even have thought of that... I would have noticed at once, even if you had been dressed, let's say... as a roadsweeper.

FIRST SWEEPER: As a roadsweeper? (*The NAKED MAN grabs a tail of his dinner jacket, and tugs at it*) Well, excuse me, duty calls... I have to go.

WOMAN: What a shame...

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, unfortunately... You see, I have to take these flowers.

So saying, he sticks his bunch of flowers in the bin, arranging them as if they were in a vase.

WOMAN: I envy the lucky woman who's going to get them...

FIRST SWEEPER: If you would like one... here... (*He offers her a rose*) It's been a pleasure...

WOMAN: (*She offers her hand to be kissed. The SWEEPER has a moment of embarrassment, but then pulls himself together, and kisses her hand*) How kind... The pleasure is

all mine. Oh, thank you.

The SWEEPER, slightly embarrassed, bows, and then exits, with his horse-like gait, pushing his bin before him.

FIRST SWEEPER: Goodbye.

WOMAN: *(She sighs ecstatically, but then notices his curious exit, and is a bit bewildered)* But... what... why...? Your excellency... ha, ha... How eccentric... *(He takes the bin, and off he goes, as if it was a Lambretta)* Ha, ha!

Enter the PATROLMAN.

PATROLMAN: What are you laughing at...? And what about the bin? Did he come to take it?

WOMAN: Who?

PATROLMAN: The roadsweeper.

WOMAN: But that was no roadsweeper, that was a count...

PATROLMAN: A count...? A count took away the sweeper's bin?

WOMAN: Certainly...

PATROLMAN: What, what? A count with a bin? But why didn't you say something?

WOMAN: I did... I told him that he was a lovely fellow... and he gave me a flower, and kissed my hand... just like he'd do with a lady. What gentlemen these counts are!!

PATROLMAN: He kissed your hand, and carried off the bin? But what's he going to do with it?

WOMAN: Well, just for a joke... you know, one of these things that gentlemen do...

PATROLMAN: Ah, just to amuse himself, I suppose... I'll teach him to play pranks with Council property... He went over that way, did he?

WOMAN: Yes... But surely, you're not going to start rowing with a count...? And over a dustbin, at that...? Wait for me...

But the PATROLMAN is already on his bicycle, and exits.

The WOMAN also exits, running. From the other side of the stage, enter the ROAD SWEEPER in evening dress, pushing his barrow.

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Addressing the NAKED MAN whose head is sticking out from among the flowers stuck in the bin*) And what are you complaining about now? There you are, in the middle of my flowers, looking like something out of Botticelli's Primavera, and you're still whinging: 'Hurry up, hurry up.' How do you expect me to go any faster than this...? And, what's more, when one is in evening dress, one must walk in a refined manner... One cannot start running like those who are not in evening dress, you know!

NAKED MAN: But was it really necessary for you to waste all that time playing Don Giovanni with that girl... If you really want to know, I'm sick to death of being stuck in here like a sardine in a can!

FIRST SWEEPER: Well, you can imagine how sick *I* am, having to be your servant for the last three hours...

PATROLMAN: (*From off-stage*) Hey... Sir... Stop!

NAKED MAN: What's happening now?

FIRST SWEEPER: Action stations! Dive!

NAKED MAN: Dive!

He disappears.

FIRST SWEEPER: (*He arranges his flowers around the head of his unfortunate passenger, and sings softly as he awaits the PATROLMAN*):

Look at all the pretty little flowers,
Pretty flowers that bloom in Spring...

PATROLMAN: Excuse my stopping you... but why have you walked off with that bin?

FIRST SWEEPER: What bin? (*Looking at the barrow as if seeing it for the first time*) Oh yes, it's a bin!! I hadn't even noticed... I had bought these flowers, you see, and not knowing where to put them, I put them in here... I mistook it for a flower vase...

PATROLMAN: A flower vase? On wheels?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, you know, one of those modern vases... A mobile vase...

PATROLMAN: So, you're in the mood for silly jokes, eh?

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, to tell the truth, I'm very much in the mood... You know, I am quite a joker... And you?

PATROLMAN: Well, I... But wait a moment... You know what, your face is very familiar.

Enter the WOMAN, panting after her long run.

WOMAN: Whew... what a run...! Good evening.

She thrusts her hand under the SWEEPER's nose, in order for him to kiss it.

PATROLMAN: I'm sure I've seen you before... somewhere...

WOMAN: Of course you have... You must have seen him at the pictures, or on television... I told you, he's a count, and an ambassador...

PATROLMAN: An ambassador?

WOMAN: Yes... and now you've gone and made a fool of yourself... You should have listened to me... Look – now you've offended him.

FIRST SWEEPER: Oh, don't worry about offending me... sticks and stones may break my bones...

WOMAN: How kind you are... Thank the count...

PATROLMAN: Thank you... You must understand, sir, if it was up to me... you'd be welcome to take all the barrows you want... (*The flowers sticking out of the bin start waving in an agitated manner. Evidently the stowaway wants his driver to get a move on*) But this is Council property, and without proper authorisation, I regret...

FIRST SWEEPER: I understand... You're only doing your duty... But I have no intention of stealing it... I only want to borrow it.

WOMAN: Yes, that's right... borrow it... Otherwise, how's he supposed to get all those flowers home...? You surely don't expect a count like him to carry them in his arms?

PATROLMAN: He can carry them how he likes, but without a proper authorisation, I am not authorised... (*Now the flowers begin to look too unnatural as they wave around; the SWEEPER gives them a slap, pretending to brush off flies*) And what's more, haven't you thought of the poor road sweeper. If you take his bin away, he's going to lose his job.

FIRST SWEEPER: Precisely... that's precisely the reason... that I'm not taking it away... my bin...

PATROLMAN: Oh, that's rich, that is! Here you are – you, Lord Muck, amusing yourself by getting road sweepers the sack. And as we all know, there are still people around who vote for the monarchy!

FIRST SWEEPER: Hey, no, let's not start getting into politics... Because in that case, I shall just have to tell you the truth: here there is no count, and no ambassador... because, if you really want to know, I am a road sweeper!

PATROLMAN: Yes, and I am an elephant.

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Observing him with incredulity*) An elephant? With a gun? Don't think you can fool me, because I'm an expert on elephants...

PATROLMAN: Fool you? I would never dream of it! Seriously, though, rest assured, I realised immediately that you were a road sweeper...

WOMAN: What do you mean?

PATROLMAN: Obviously, he's a road sweeper in evening dress... it's their new uniform, isn't it. Everybody knows that the Council has ordered a new style for municipal employees: we're going to have road sweepers in dinner jackets, dog-catchers in morning dress, and sewermen in party frocks... what's odd about that?

FIRST SWEEPER: Alright then, since you want to start being comical about it... I'll show you my card... (*He searches in*

his jacket) Hell... it was in the wallet that that money-grubber took off me...

PATROLMAN: But I told you, there's no point in trying to convince me. I'm already convinced... But now you're also going to have to convince the Inspector, who is a man absolutely devoid of imagination... and if he does not get his hands on something... or rather, his handcuffs...

FIRST SWEEPER: Ha, ha... that was good... His handcuffs... I was only joking, though!

WOMAN: Yes, that's right, leave him alone... He was joking...

PATROLMAN: Alright then, will you pick up your flowers, and leave me the bin? (*He turns to the WOMAN, turning his back on the SWEEPER, who leans against the barrow*) And from now on, mind your own business...

NAKED MAN: (*Popping out of the bin*) No I won't!
He dives back in immediately.

PATROLMAN: (*Thinking that the words came from the SWEEPER*) No? Alright, then... I must warn you that anything you say will be taken down and may be used...

WOMAN: Leave him be... Don't go getting yourself into trouble.

The PATROLMAN turns his back again.

NAKED MAN: (*As above*) Go ahead, arrest me... But in the end, you're going to regret it!

PATROLMAN: (*Aggressively*) So, do you think you frighten me? I would advise you to stop fooling about... Because otherwise, you could end up in trouble...

The WOMAN tugs at his jacket. The PATROLMAN is distracted.

NAKED MAN: (*Taking advantage of the situation, he slaps the hands of the PATROLMAN, who is holding the SWEEPER by the collar*) And get your dirty hands off, you lout...

He hides again

PATROLMAN: Who are you calling a lout? (*He responds by slapping the innocent SWEEPER about the face*) I warned you...

FIRST SWEEPER: Hey, ouch... gently... That hurts, eh?!

WOMAN: Have you gone mad? Now he's going to sue you for assault... and quite rightly, too...

PATROLMAN: (*Again turning his back on the barrow*) Oh yes, he's in the right, because he's a gentleman... In this world of idiots, the rich can amuse themselves, making a fool of you, insulting you, kicking you in the face...

NAKED MAN: (*Throwing an apple at his head*) And throwing rotten apples at your head...

PATROLMAN: (*Turning round, furious, and again grabbing the SWEEPER by the scruff of the neck*) Wretch...! So you really do want me to give you a good hiding?

FIRST SWEEPER: No, no... I don't...

He receives another backhander across the face, and a punch in the stomach... The WOMAN, terrified, covers her face with her hands.

WOMAN: He's killing him... Oh God... Stop it... Help... He's killed the ambassador...

NAKED MAN: (*From his hiding place among the flowers, he watches the punch-up with glee*) Ha, ha... Nice one... a left hook...

At that precise moment, the SWEEPER ducks, and the NAKED MAN gets a punch in the face. The PATROLMAN's momentum carries him pirouetting around the stage. When he finally stops, the NAKED MAN has disappeared, unconscious, into his bin, after dropping some of the flowers. The SWEEPER swiftly puts the lid down.

FIRST SWEEPER: (*Seeing the PATROLMAN returning to the attack*) Pax. Pax. I'm not playing any more!

PATROLMAN: Ah, so you've finally come to your senses...

FIRST SWEEPER: Yes, yes, I have... You can keep the barrow, with everything that's in it.

WOMAN: Did he hurt you much? (*Turning to the PATROLMAN*) You've done a fine job there, Officer. I hope you're proud of yourself...

PATROLMAN: Yes, fairly much: if nothing else, I've taught him that you don't mess about with other people's bins... (*He picks up the bunch of flowers from the ground*) And now, will you please take your flowers...

FIRST SWEEPER: No, no, you take them... It's a present... for the winner. That's the custom...

PATROLMAN: Thank you... With pleasure. (*Without looking inside, he tosses the bunch of flowers into the bin*)

FIRST SWEEPER: The pleasure is all mine... Happy Easter...

The PATROLMAN gets on his bicycle, and exits, pulling the bin behind him.

WOMAN: Why did you wish him a Happy Easter?

FIRST SWEEPER: Because at Easter you open your Easter egg, and in your Easter egg, you always find a surprise...
He laughs.

WOMAN: Stop laughing like that... Because, otherwise, I'm going to start crying...

FIRST SWEEPER: Why, is my laugh that bad?

WOMAN: No, it's just that when I see other people laughing, and I can't laugh because I don't understand what it is that's making them laugh, I get so angry that I want to cry...

FIRST SWEEPER: But why?

WOMAN: Because I always end up thinking I'm stupid... you know... always the last person to catch on...

FIRST SWEEPER: And instead you should be happy,

because, as they say: the last shall be first, the penultimate shall be second, and the third from last the third, and so on...

WOMAN: What a pleasure it is listening to you talk. It must be good to feel that you're somebody...

FIRST SWEEPER: To tell you the truth, I don't really see myself as anybody at all... a nobody in fact... in short, a nothingness. But since nothingness is... (*He sits down on the bench, dismayed*) There, now I've forgotten what nothing is... But never mind... Anyway, just to give you an example... If I dress up as a priest, or as a jester, or as a general, or in evening dress, it's as if I was naked. In other words, a roadsweeper... You see?

WOMAN: Noooo...! You see, I really am the last to catch on.

FIRST SWEEPER: No, now that I think about it, *I'm* the last one to catch on... Because if you two (*Referring to the WOMAN and the PATROLMAN who has just left*) have not understood that I was naked, in other words, a roadsweeper, then it means that when I'm wearing evening dress, then I am someone... And so I'm no longer God... Do you follow?

WOMAN: Not really... After all, you're still a count and an ambassador...

FIRST SWEEPER: Look, I *told* you, I have never been either a count or an ambassador... And now I'm not even a roadsweeper... I've lost my money and my job, all in one go... At least they could have let me stay God... And now what am I going to tell the Pope?! He'll be very upset...

WOMAN: (*Touching his forehead, worried*) Have you still got a headache?

FIRST SWEEPER: No, no, now I feel quite alright... You won't believe this, but as far as I'm concerned, the fact of not any longer being everything makes absolutely no difference to me... Because I may no longer be everything, but at least I feel that I am someone... and the best part of it is, that others also think that I am someone... and so I am happy...

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WOMAN: And I'm happy too...

FIRST SWEEPER: How strange life is. You go banging your head against a brick wall, you go to incredible lengths to find happiness, and then, all of a sudden, all you need do is change your suit, and, zap...! You've got it... And all because I met a naked ambassador...

WOMAN: What naked ambassador?

PATROLMAN'S VOICE: (*From off-stage*) Stop him, stop him...

FIRST SWEEPER: That one...

He points to the back of the stage, where we see the NAKED MAN, in his barrow, crossing the stage at speed, pushing himself along with the broom, as if poling a punt.

Blackout