

A TRIBUTE TO ANDREA CAMILLERI

THE DEVIL'S SMELL



An Inspector Montalbano case
illustrated by 15 comic book artists
as a celebration of Italian comics
as part of The Week of the Italian Language 2020

Curated by Massimo Fenati
for the Italian Cultural Institute in London

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This book was made possible by a special funding
of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

PREFACE

How best to showcase the dynamic unity of word and image? This superb visual work by an international panel of talented young comic artists and graphic novelists translates into compelling images the short story 'L'odore del diavolo' (1998) by the celebrated novelist Andrea Camilleri. Their imagination and creativity breathes new life into the textual genius of the 'father' of Inspector Montalbano, while at the same time promoting the global vitality of the Italian language today.

Katia Pizzi, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute London

GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

When the Italian Cultural Institute in London appointed me as Curator of the events for the 'Week of the Italian Language 2020', my first plan was for an exhibition of original drawings by a number of graphic novelists and comic book authors, which was meant to be a feast for the eyes: being able to get up close and to observe the mark of a pencil, the ink line or the colour splashes on the texture of the paper of an original illustration can reveal all the craftsmanship and artistic bravura of a draughtsman.

But 2020 brought us Covid, and with that the need for a radical rethink: a virtual exhibition lacks the pleasure of being close to the actual sheet of paper and to enjoy all those details.

Yet, having to make a virtue out of necessity, one often achieves even more interesting results. As I had to plan an online exhibition, I wanted to give the project a must-see element that could go beyond a simple slideshow. Thus, I decided to put together a story illustrated by a multitude of illustrators, where the plot provides the common thread that brings together the work of a number of renowned artists. My thoughts went immediately to the masterly work of Andrea Camilleri: a tribute to the author who died just over a year ago seemed a winning idea both to the Institute's Director and myself.

The choice proved to be perfect on two grounds: not only are his short stories small masterpieces of contemporary writing that translate very well into visual storytelling, but whilst approaching the illustrators for this project, the author's name has often been the magic word that got me an enthusiastic response even from the busiest artists. My aim was to create a dialogue between a number of extraordinary Italian illustrators and a selection of iconic and highly regarded English/international names.

So, if finding 14 artists that would join me in this endeavour proved relatively easy, the real challenge was putting together a brief. After adapting the exquisite short story of Inspector Montalbano into a script for comics, the following step entailed the creation of an incredibly detailed description of characters and settings to ensure that the protagonists and their environment would be clearly recognizable from one page to the next, despite the strong stylistic differences between the various authors – to ensure that the storytelling would flow seamlessly around a unified set of guidelines. But despite the need for a clear brief to

ensure the work of multiple hands would come together into a cohesive whole, I was keen to avoid constraining descriptions and leave the artists ample creative freedom, allowing them to express themselves through their unique poetic visual language.

The reader will therefore understand why Clementina's hairstyle varies slightly from one page to the next, why Filippo Fulconi's moustache come and go across the story or if a cordless phone becomes wired with a turn of the page. These slight aesthetic variations enhance the pleasure of reading the final product, adding a layer of playfulness to the experience, as the reader engages in a sort of subtle 'detective work' to spot the ever changing shapes and colours, taking a journey through the richness, depth and variety of voices and artistic approaches that characterize the world of Italian and international graphic novelists and comic artists.

Each artist interpreted the brief in their own unique way: some relished the use of traditional grid of six panels (two across three tiers), others bent all the rules and took over the page in more anarchic ways – by using a syncopated rhythm of extreme close ups, or embracing a more 'filmic', panoramic vision. Some accentuated the warm and familiar milieu of the story, while others delved in its darker subtexts and overtones... One author could not contain his vision within the confinement of one page, and doubled it for the opening of the story.

The art of the graphic novel is much more than the art of drawing skilfully – it is the more complex task of being able to tell a story through images. Unlike the movies, which can reproduce the full flow of an action and a scene, the graphic artist needs to breathe pulsating life through a gallery of static images, suggesting and capturing the elusive nature of what lies between each panel – the moments unseen, the word unspoken.

It is the art of whispering in the reader's ears, of stirring their emotion and imagination to fill in the gaps, to bring the drawings to life.

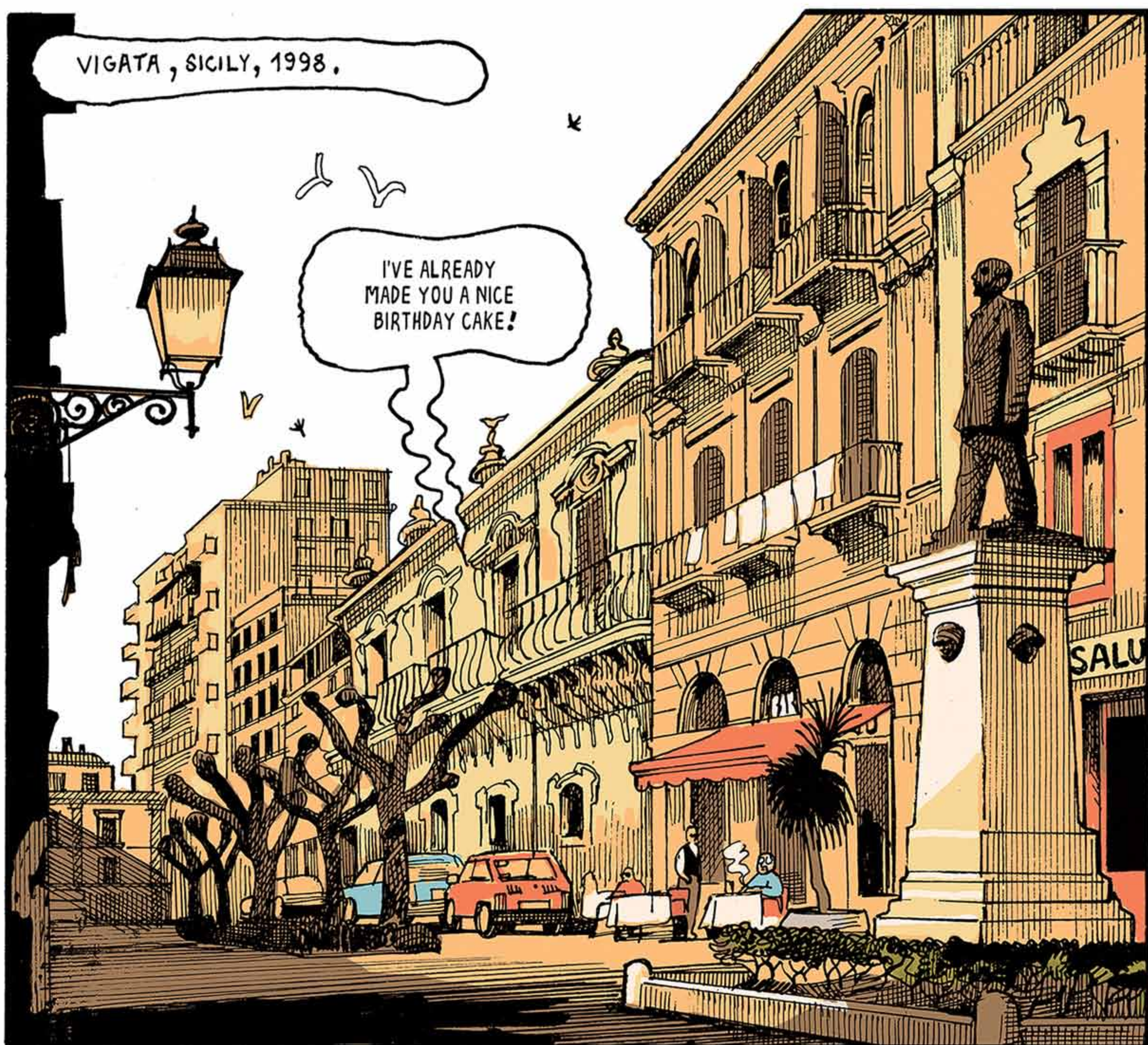
Fragmenting a single piece narrative into many threads and allowing a number of different skilled hands to weave it back together allows us to understand the unique qualities of each artistic approach and to simultaneously admire the beauty and coherence of the resulting fabric.

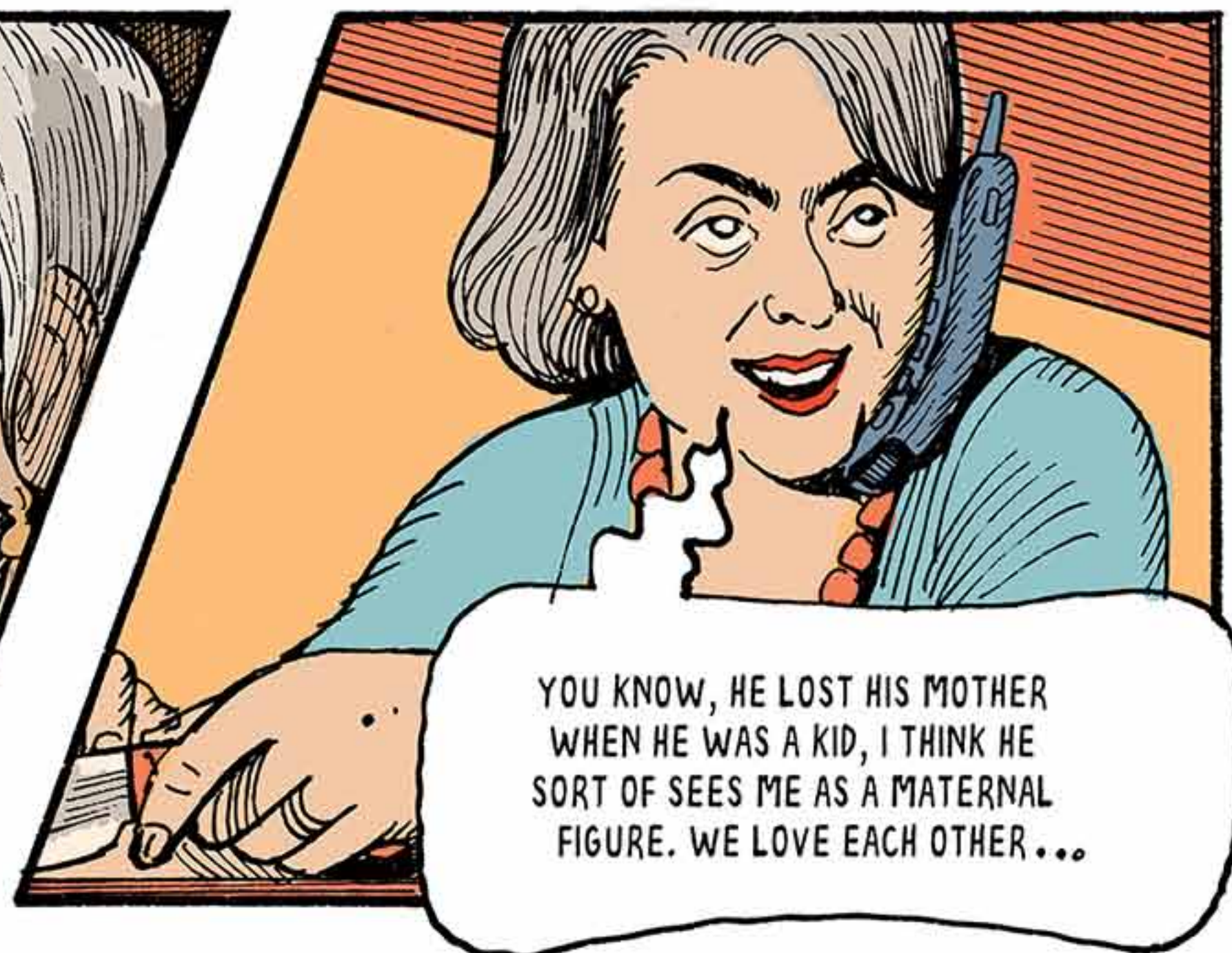
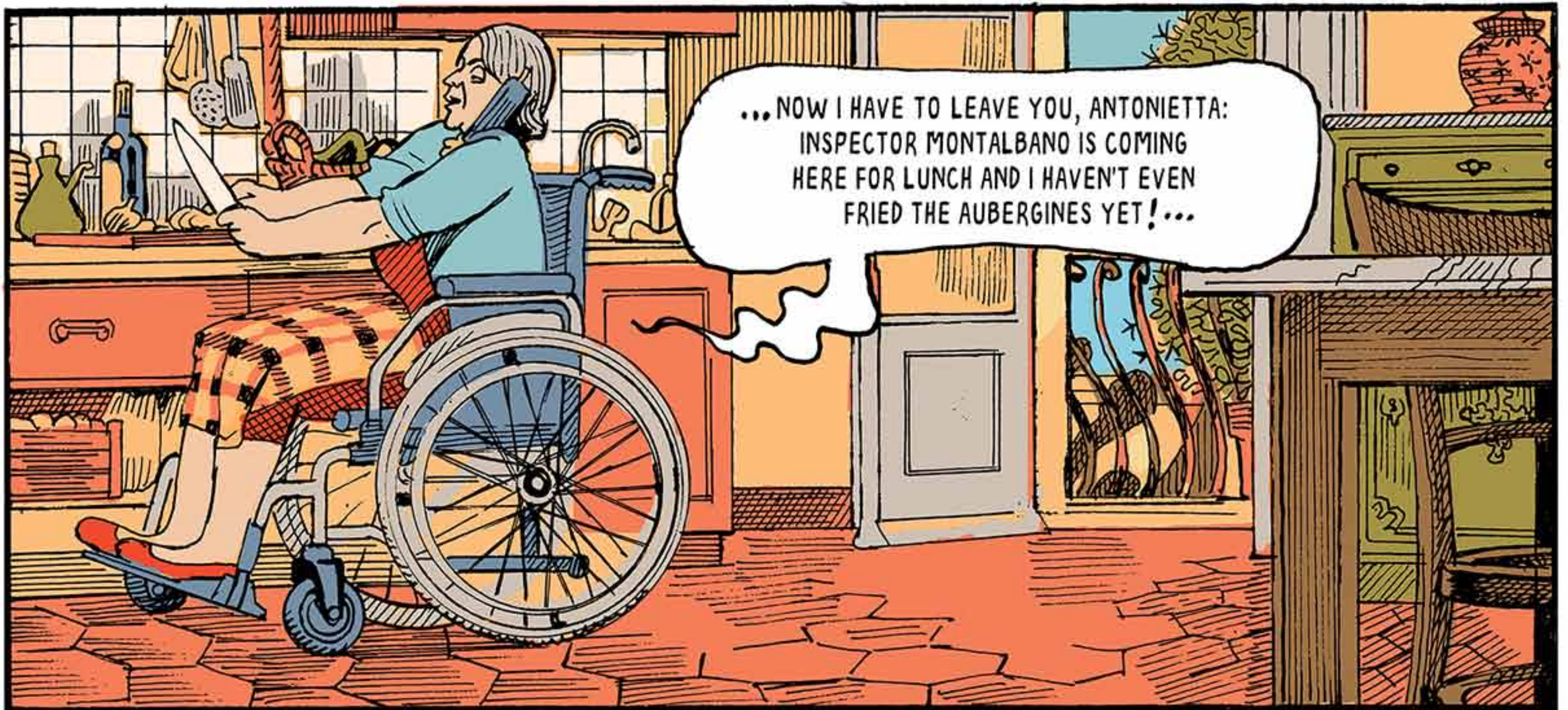
Enjoy the reading,

Massimo Fenati

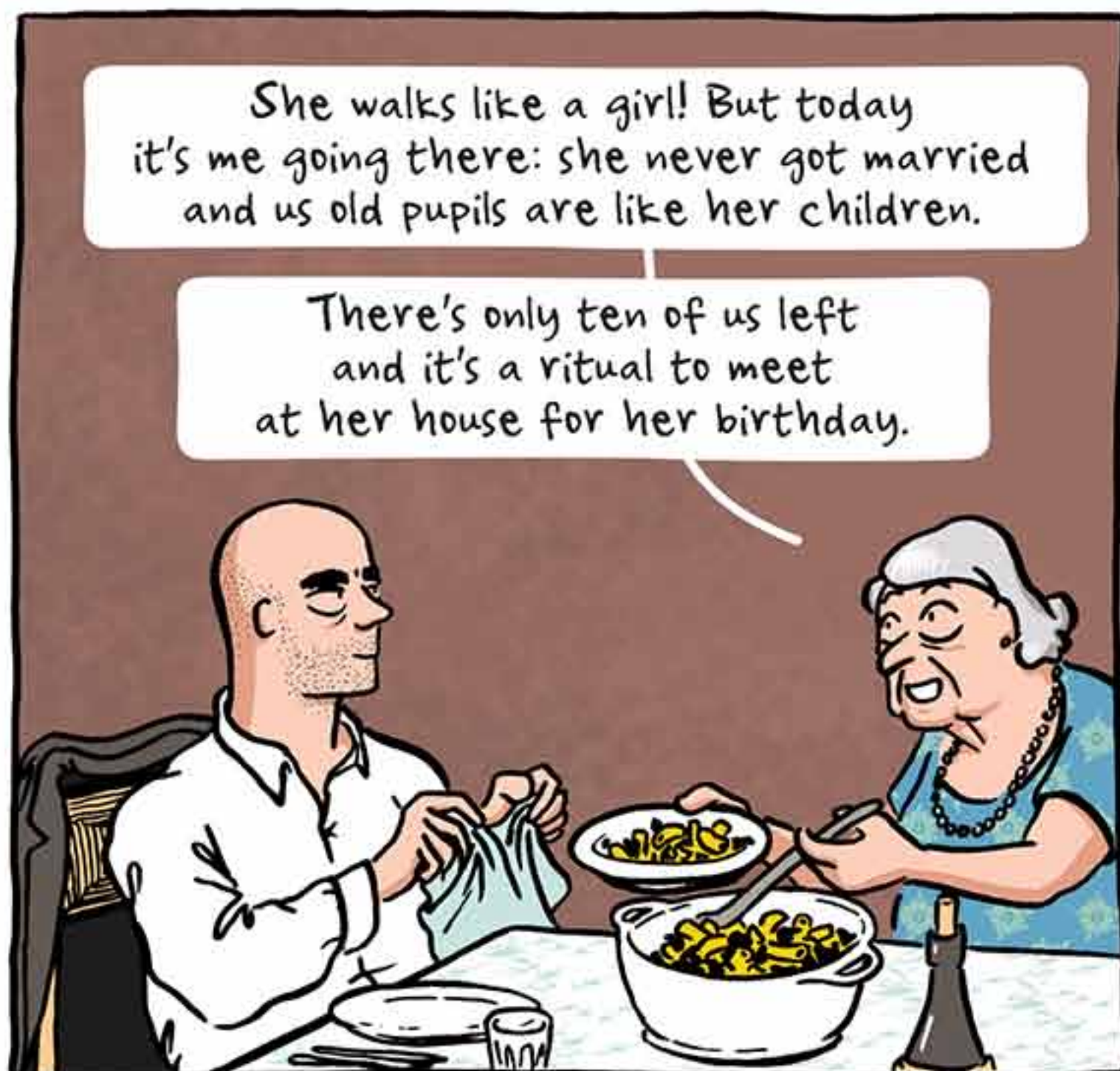
Artist in Residence 2020, Italian Cultural Institute in London

THE DEVIL'S SMELL

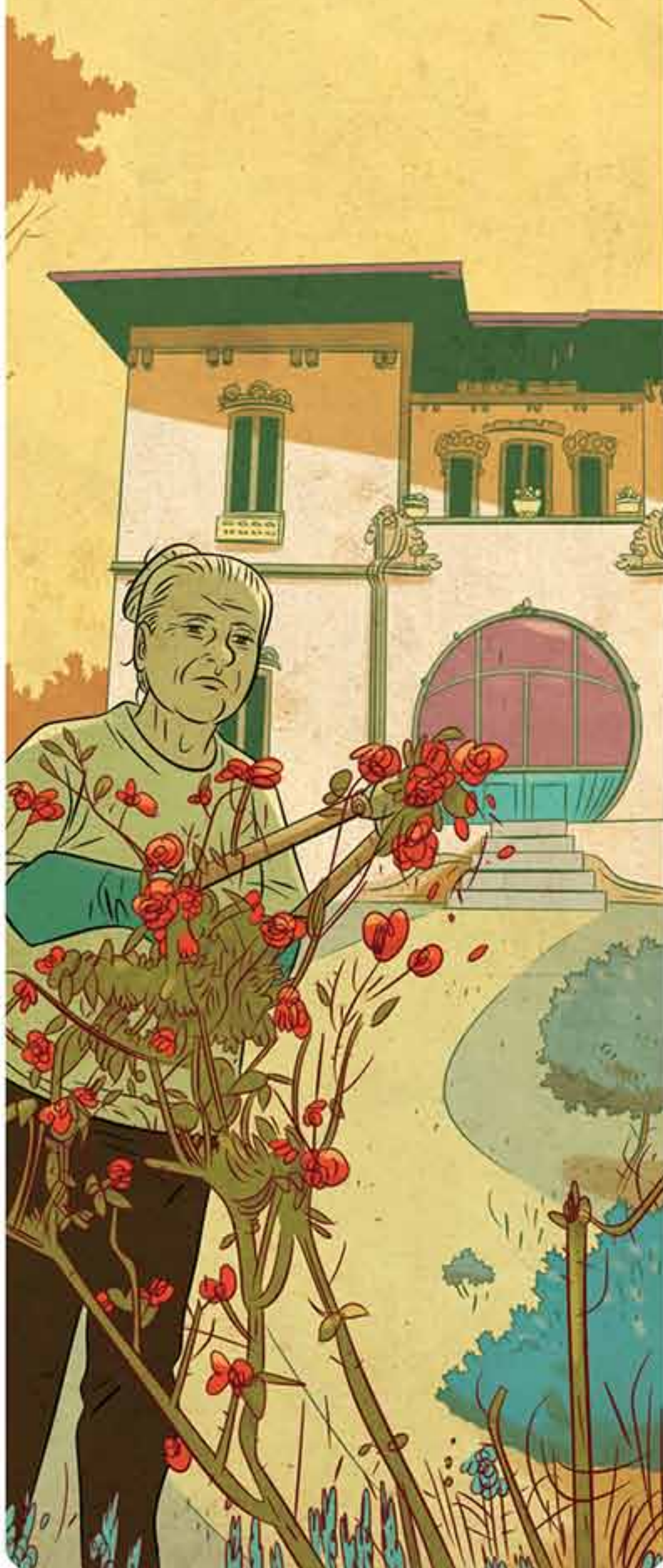




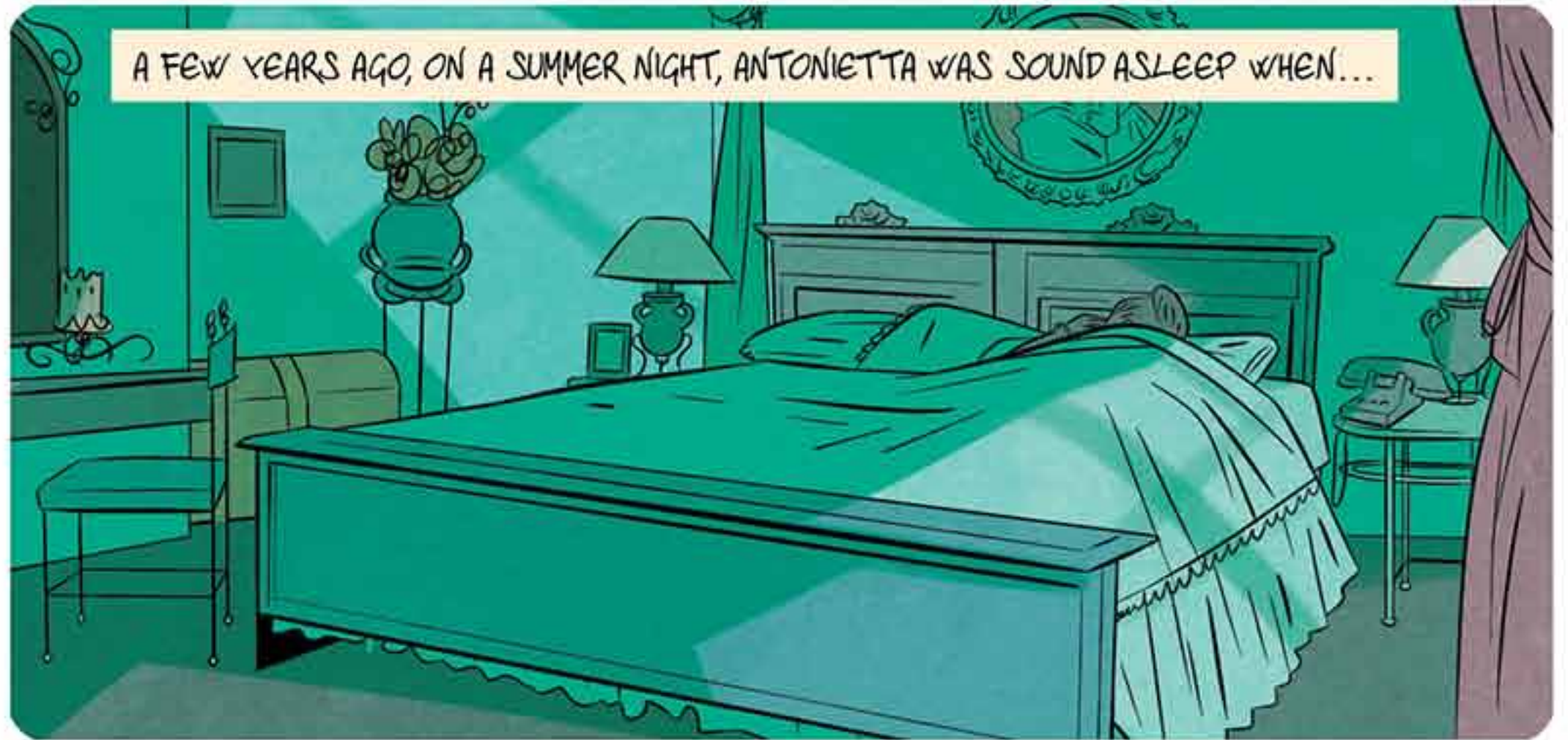




ONCE SHE'D RETIRED, ANTONIETTA LOVED TO STAY IN HER COUNTRYSIDE VILLA AND SHE KEPT IT SHIPSHAPE. SHE USED TO COME TO VIGATA ONLY IN WINTER, BUT THEN THE BAD STUFF STARTED...



A FEW YEARS AGO, ON A SUMMER NIGHT, ANTONIETTA WAS SOUND ASLEEP WHEN...



CRRRRBUM VLAN

OH GOD,
WHAT'S THAT?...
BURGLARS?!



QUICK, THE
CARETAKER...

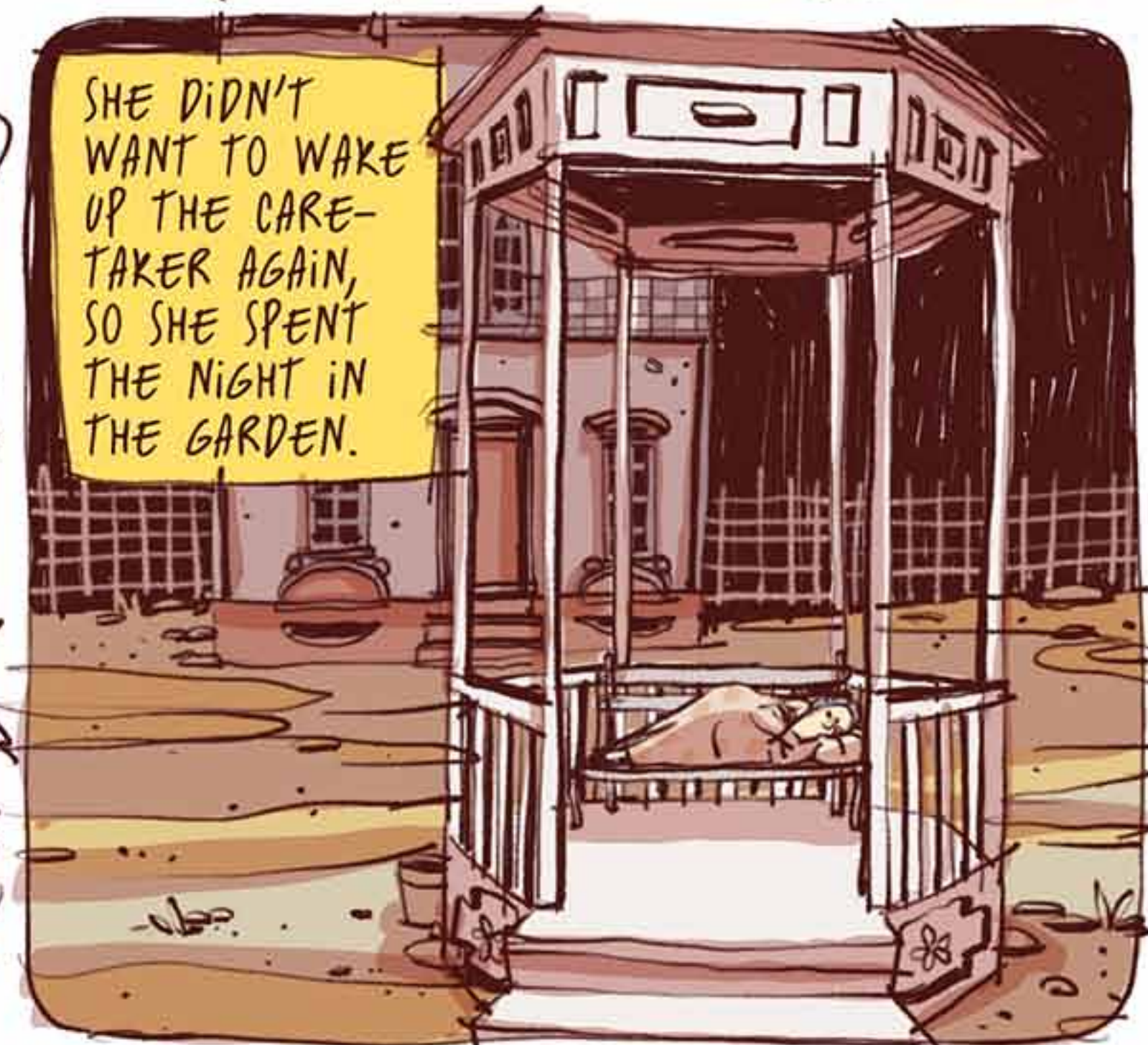
VITO, I'M HEARING
NOISES, I'M AFRAID
THERE MIGHT BE
BURGLARS!...

I'M
COMING!



AAAH!





THE FOLLOWING MORNING THE SMELL WAS WEAK, BUT STILL THERE. EVEN THE CARETAKER'S WIFE COULD SMELL IT.



DID IT HAPPEN AGAIN?

OVER AND OVER AGAIN! ANTONIETTA GOT THE CESSPOOL EMPTIED, THE ATTIC AND CELLAR CLEARED OUT... NO JOY. SO SHE KEPT SLEEPING IN THE GARDEN.



ONCE FROM THE GAZEBO SHE HEARD FRIGHTFUL NOISES COMING FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE. IN THE MORNING SHE FOUND ALL HER PLATES AND GLASSES BROKEN, THROWN AGAINST THE WALLS!



AFTER TWO MONTHS OF THIS EVERYTHING STOPPED. SUDDENLY, SHE WENT BACK TO SLEEP IN HER ROOM, BUT THEN SOMETHING WORSE HAPPENED...



ANTONIETTA ALWAYS SLEEPS ON HER BACK. AND ONE NIGHT, ALL OF A SUDDEN...



SHE WAS WOKEN UP BY SOMETHING HEAVY THAT HAD FALLEN ON HER TUMMY...



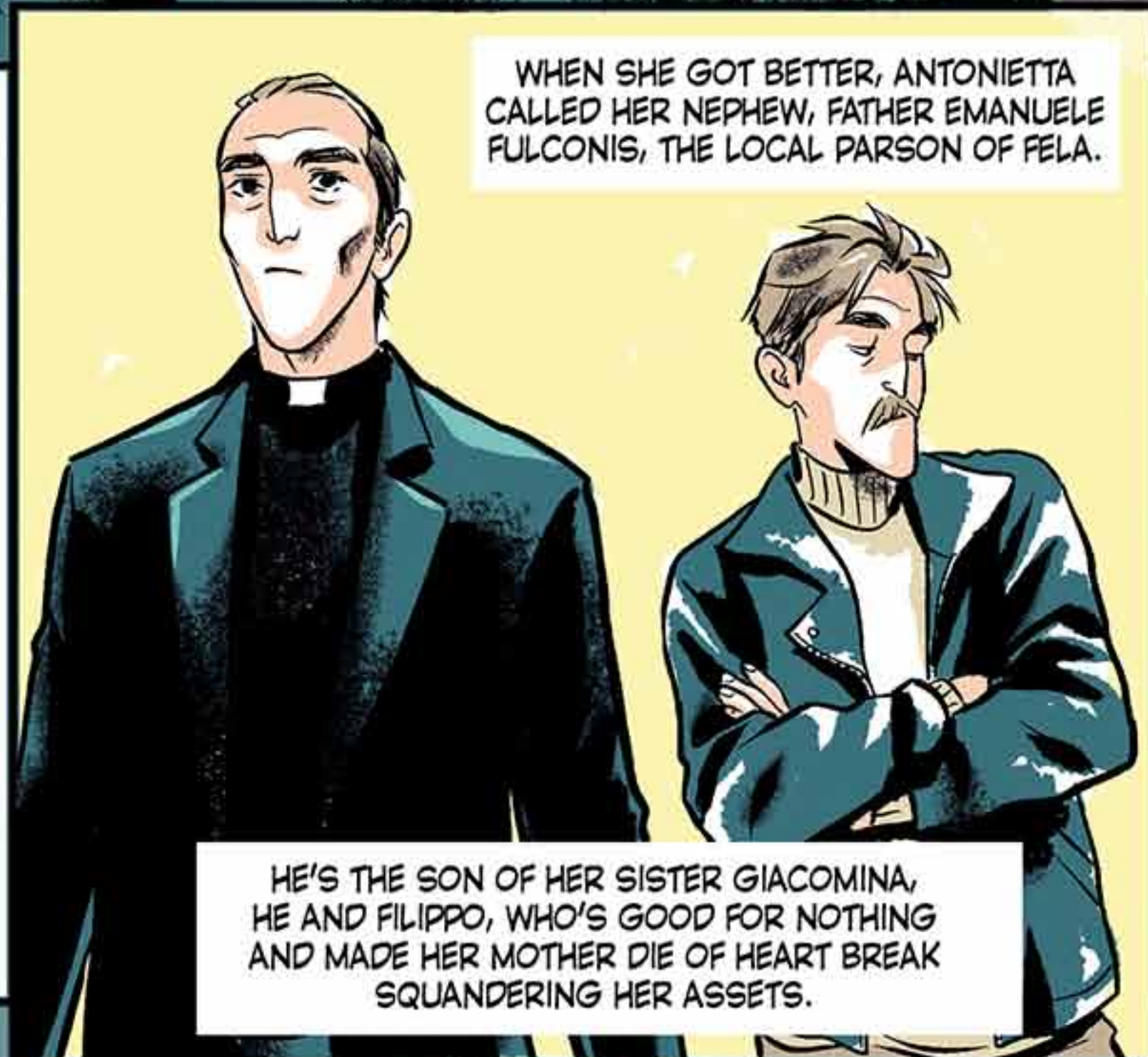


...THE
DEVIL!



THE CARETAKER AND HIS WIFE HEARD HER SCREAMS AND RUSHED THERE. THEY HAD TO CALL A DOCTOR AS ANTONIETTA WAS FEVERISH AND DELIRIOUS FROM FRIGHT.

THE SMELL WAS STILL LINGERING IN THE ROOM, BUT NO TRACE OF THE BEAST.



WHEN SHE GOT BETTER, ANTONIETTA CALLED HER NEPHEW, FATHER EMANUELE FULCONIS, THE LOCAL PARSON OF FELA.

HE'S THE SON OF HER SISTER GIACOMINA, HE AND FILIPPO, WHO'S GOOD FOR NOTHING AND MADE HER MOTHER DIE OF HEART BREAK SQUANDERING HER ASSETS.



FATHER EMANUELE WAS KNOWN AS AN EXORCIST. ANTONIETTA HOPED HE COULD DRIVE THE DEVIL OUT.



BUT AS SOON AS HE WALKED IN, THE PRIEST FELT A VERY STRONG DEMONIC PRESENCE AND ALMOST PASSED OUT.



HE ASKED TO BE LEFT ALONE IN THE VILLA. TWO DAYS WENT BY WITH NO NEWS. EVENTUALLY ANTONIETTA GOT WORRIED AND CALLED THE CARABINIERI.



THEY FOUND FULCONIS BEATEN UP. HE SAID THE DEVIL HAD APPEARED, THEY FOUGHT BUT THE DEVIL HAD WON.



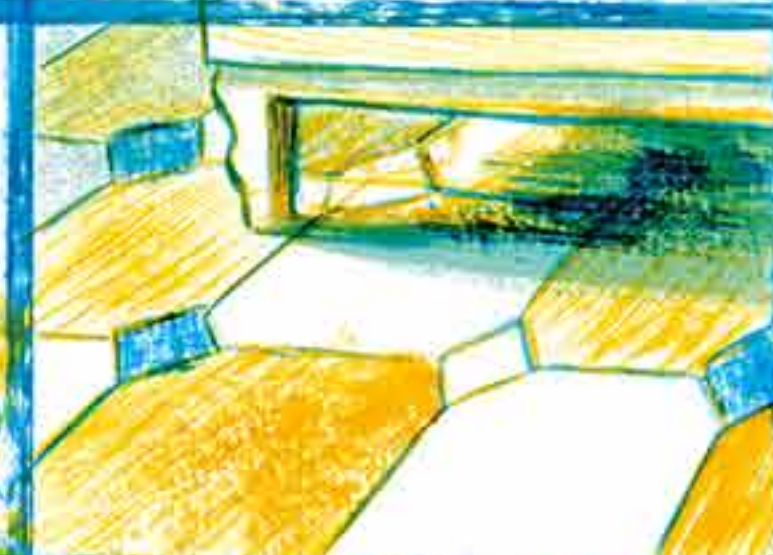
EVENTUALLY, ANTONIETTA HAD TO PUT THE VILLA FOR SALE. BUT NOBODY WANTED A HAUNTED HOUSE!



I CAN TAKE YOU TO ANTONIETTA, IF YOU WISH



YES PLEASE, INSPECTOR



SO DID SHE MANAGE TO SELL THE VILLA?



AFTER A FEW MONTHS SOMEBODY FROM FELA MADE A VERY LOW OFFER, WHICH SHE ACCEPTED. HE OPENED A RESTAURANT IN IT, BUT THE CARABINIERI FOUND IT WAS THE COVER FOR AN ILLEGAL GAMBLING HOUSE AND IT GOT SHUT

POOR ANTONIETTA, WHAT AN AWFUL STORY

NOW I DON'T KNOW

SOMEBODY ELSE MUST HAVE BOUGHT IT



AND NOW IT'S STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN!



It would be terrible if it happened the same as the other house.



Please keep me posted.



DING DONG



Clementina! How lovely to see you!



A ray of light in this very dark moment.



So how are you? You look so tired!



I've spent the last two nights out there, sitting on the step outside the front door. I just can't cope with that stench...

SHUT



What does the Devil want from me?



From tonight, you're coming to stay at my flat!



You can stay here during the day if you wish, but not at night.



Oh yes please.



But now there's a birthday to celebrate!



What a gorgeous cake! Thankyou!

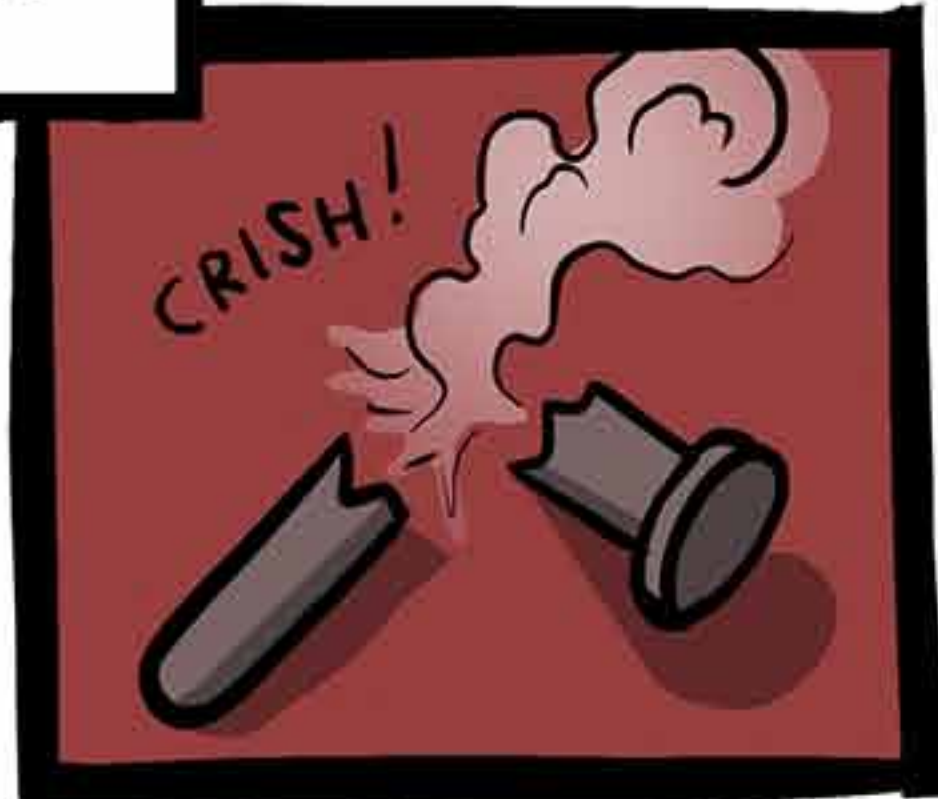


Come, let's get ready before the other guests arrive.

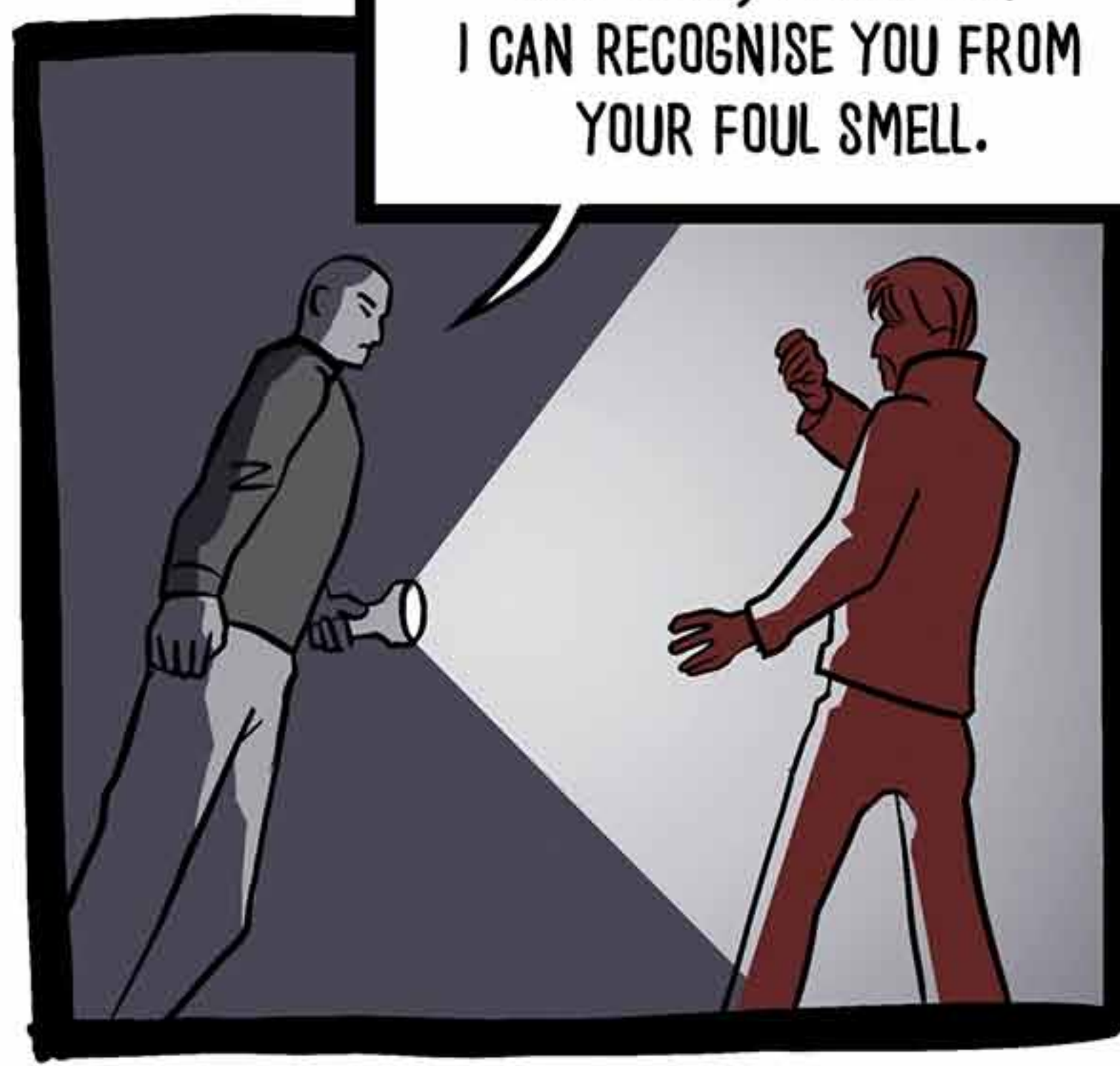




JUST A MOMENT.



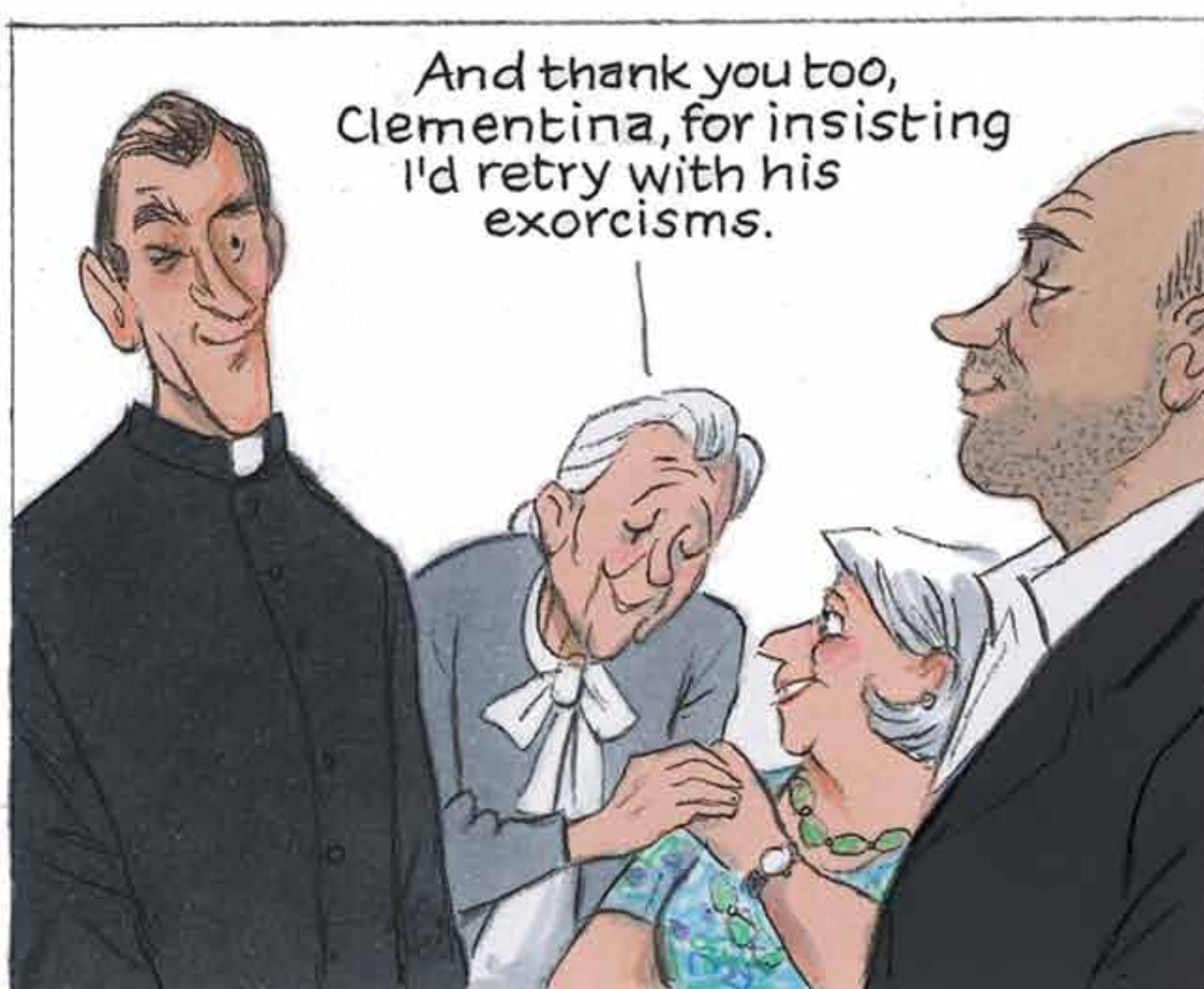
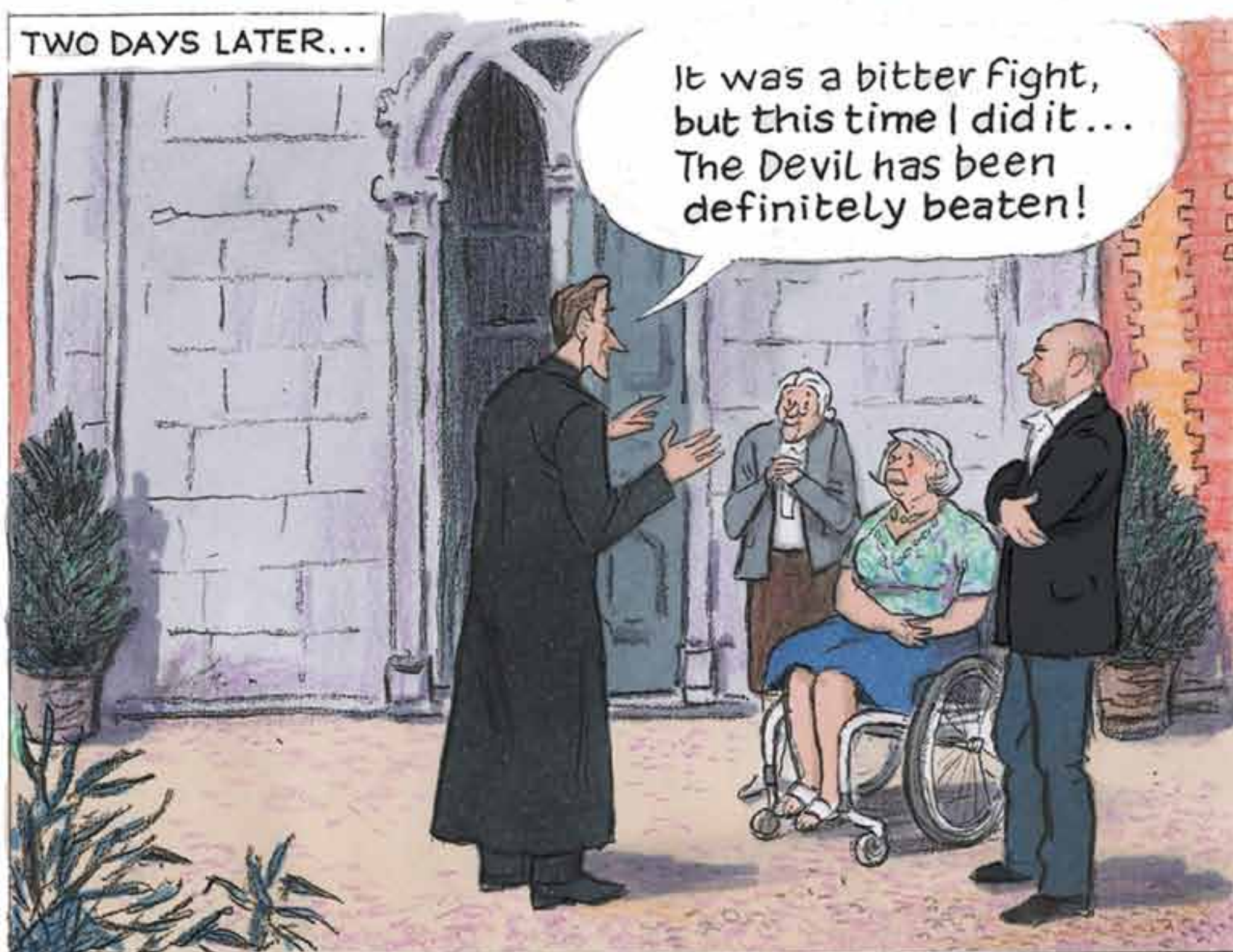
THE DEVIL, I SUPPOSE?
I CAN RECOGNISE YOU FROM
YOUR FOUL SMELL.

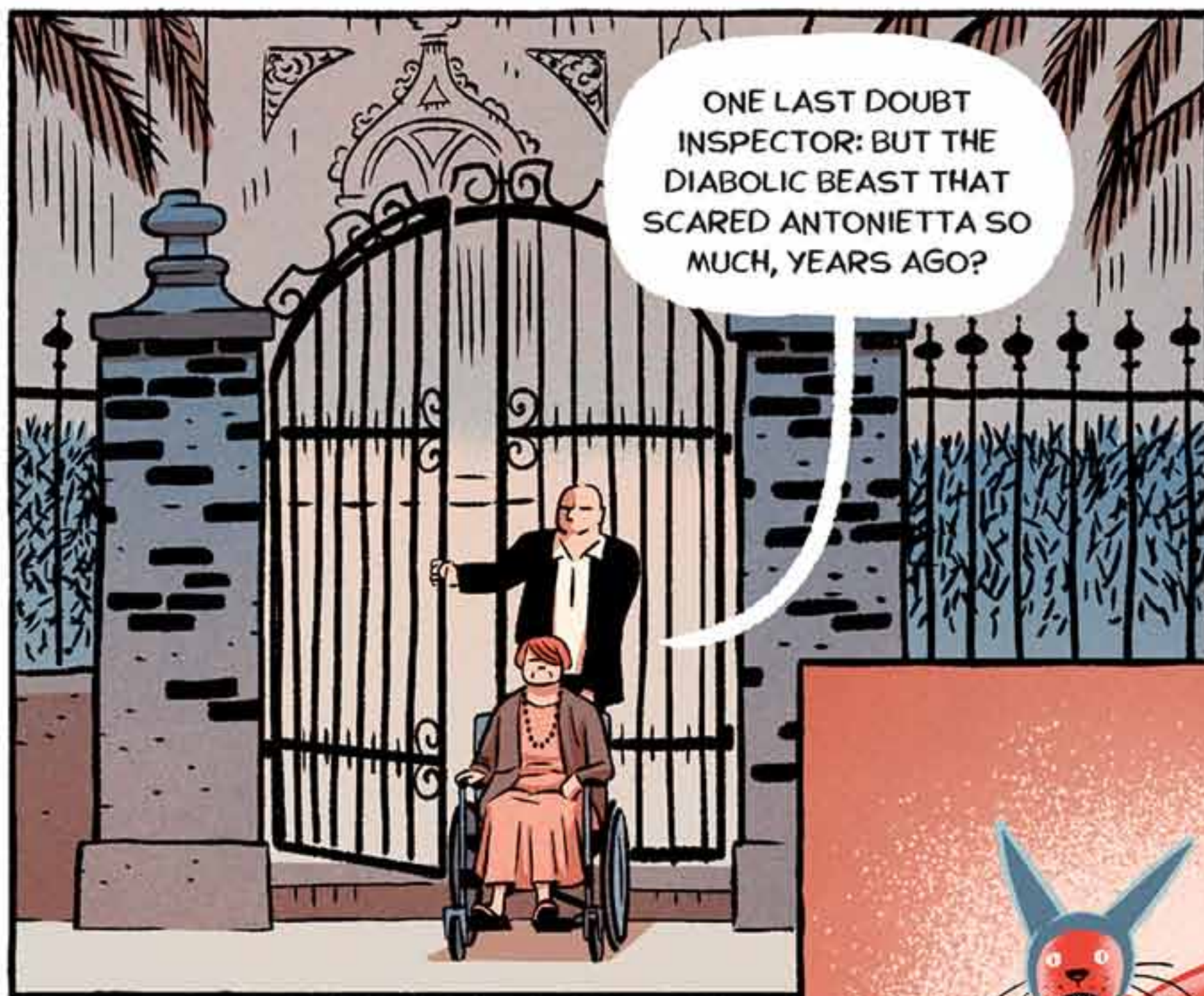




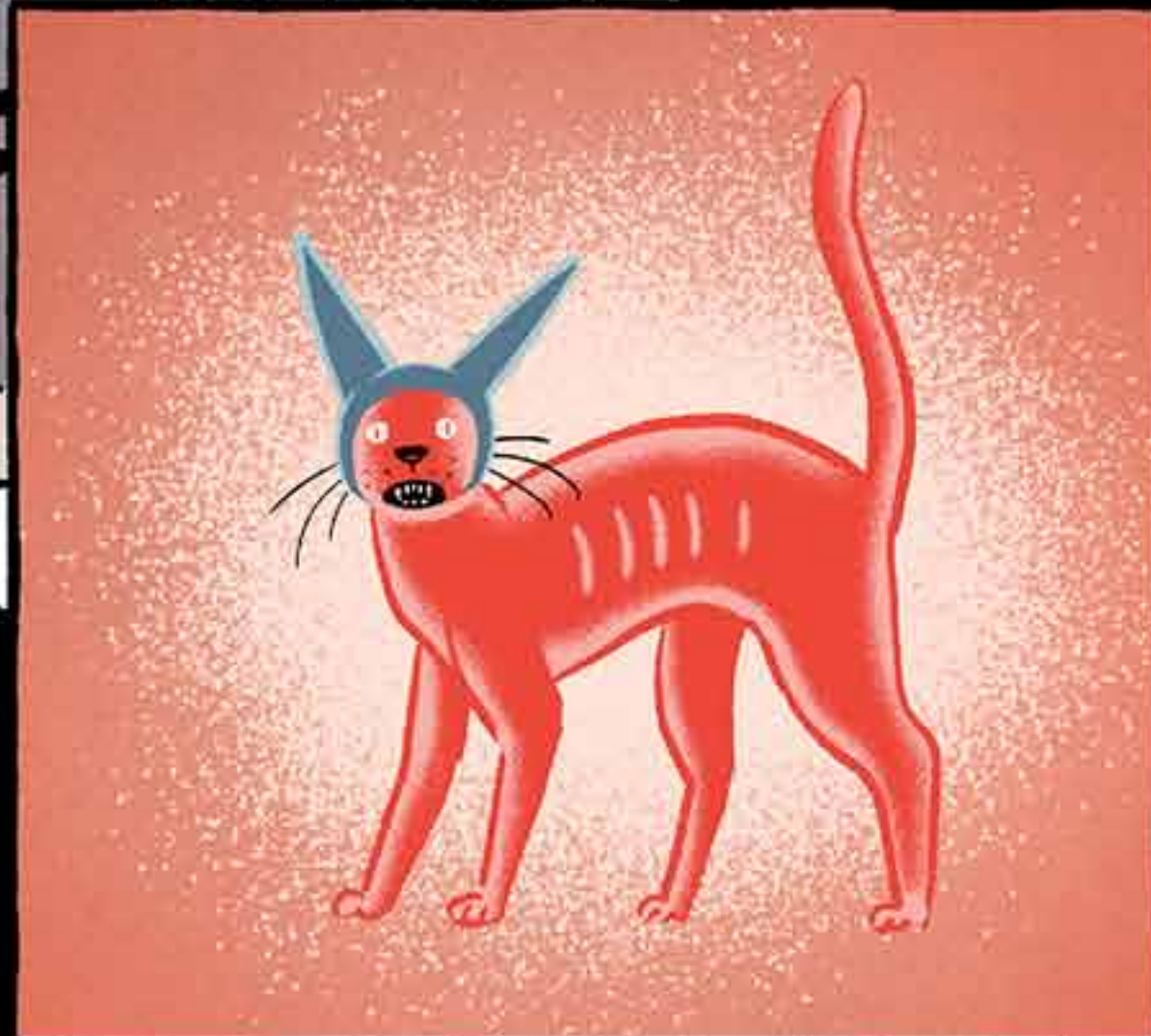


TWO DAYS LATER...





ONE LAST DOUBT
INSPECTOR: BUT THE
DIABOLIC BEAST THAT
SCARED ANTONIETTA SO
MUCH, YEARS AGO?



A POOR
STRAY CAT,

WHICH
FILIPPO FULCONIS
SPRAYED WITH
FLUORESCENT
PAINT...

AND TRICKED
OUT WITH A PAIR
OF CARDBOARD
HORNS.



NOW IT'S
MY TURN FOR A LAST
DOUBT: BUT DO YOU
BELIEVE IN THE DEVIL?

ME? OH
PLEASE!

WHY WOULD
I HAVE TOLD
YOU THIS
STORY?



IF I HAD
BELIEVED IT, I WOULD
HAVE RATHER TOLD
THE BISHOP, DON'T
YOU THINK?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost a big 'thank you' to Rosetta, Mariolina, Andreina and Betta Camilleri, for their belief in our proposal and whose support was indispensable to make this project happen.

To the publisher Antonio Sellerio, for his consent to the rights to this short story.

To Simonetta Agnello Hornby, for building the necessary bridges for the realisation of this project.

We also thank Leonardo Rizzo and Paul Gravett for their availability, kindness and cooperation.

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