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# The Salt of Life

By Valerio Attanasio

The Salt of Life

Listen to Alfonso, he's a lawyer.

The notary, Madam Valeria,  
is going to read us a legal document.  
Don't be concerned.

It'll be over in five minutes,  
then we'll take you home.

Don't worry, Mum.

- May we start?

- Yes.

- We are here to...

- My mother knows all about it.

Really I...

The undersigned Valeria de Franciscis  
born in Rome on 12/14/1915

and residing in Rome

on Quinto Orazio Flacco Street,

a retired widow,

social security number 1554...

hereby grants,

special power of attorney

to her son Giovanni Brandani,

born in Rome on 2/19/1949,

residing in Rome on Glorioso Avenue,

social security number 4919...

that he may,

on behalf of the undersigned,

undertake all necessary actions

to arrange and complete the sale

of her co-ownership rights...

Gianni, he said 'sale',

what's that got to do with it?

Excuse me, Mr. Notary,

maybe I didn't understand correctly,

but what's selling got to do

with my allowance?

Nothing, Ma'am.

Let's accompany Madam Valeria.

Madam Valeria, welcome back.

Is everything alright?

Goodbye.

- Outstanding!

- Oh, please.

You made me look like shit

in front of the notary!  
My mother forgets everything, I...  
She's sharp as a tack, sharper  
than the two of us put together!  
She'll put me in the poorhouse:  
Don't you see? She...  
What if we went to a judge  
for guardianship?  
Guardianship for whom, Gianni?  
You need guardianship yourself!  
You said it first.  
You've got a bombshell in there  
and you don't say a word!  
The girl?  
She's a girl, I can't just go around  
being an idiot!  
She's a goddess, didn't you see her?  
She's got a face like porcelain,  
she's wonderful.  
- I've seen her.  
- Don't you like women anymore?  
Read this.  
"I'm thinking about you. "  
Who's thinking about you?  
She's totally crazy.  
The other evening in Villa Borghese,  
she suddenly started laughing  
and running around.  
I didn't understand why,  
so I just stood there.  
She ran faster, laughing...  
I realized she wanted to be caught  
so I started running,  
my feet were flying  
then I finally grabbed her.  
We kissed like crazy  
and then we fell to the ground,  
laughing on the grass.  
We became one body... wonderful!  
You never in your whole life  
forget things like that, Gianni.  
It's pure poetry, beautiful.  
Sure.  
Why are you looking at me

like that?  
You could do it too if you wanted.  
You have to make the first move,  
get on with it.  
These things can happen.  
Sure they can!  
See Maurizio?  
He's been with that clerk  
at the corner store for two years.  
Maurizio? Are you nuts?  
I saw him with my own eyes.  
Two years!  
Understand?  
Get on with it!  
Pallina!

**It's 7:**

- Here's your coffee.  
- Thank you.  
Thank you.  
- Hi, Daddy!  
- Teresina!  
- How are you?  
- Fine.  
- Sit down.  
- No, I'm in a rush.  
It's... I don't even have a watch!  
This?  
- Can I?  
- Sure.  
Any sugar?  
In there...  
- Michelangelo's here.  
- Again?  
He stayed the night...  
- I thought you two had broken up.  
- Yeah, we did.  
But we got back together again.  
Some decisions are painful,  
but they have to be made.  
I'll leave him after my exams.  
I'll get them out of the way,  
then I'll have a freer mind,  
a lighter heart.

What do you think?

That's a good idea.

I just can't do it all:  
school, exams, his calls...

- I have to run.

- Alright dear, take care!

Bye, Daddy.

- Hi, Mum.

- Bye, love.

Can you pay the rent  
at the post office?

Here's the money.

It's 200 Euros short.

I'll take it from my pension,  
although...

Alright.

I wrote it all here:  
can you go to the cleaner's,  
pick up the toaster...

I did that, you didn't even notice.

Good boy.

So,

you could go to Ikea  
and buy some curtains.

Isn't there a shop nearby?

- What else do you have to do?

- Nothing, but...

- Okay, do what you want.

- Don't get mad!

As if I would! I'm in such a rush...

I'm going out. Give me Riccardo,

I'll walk him for you.

Riccardo!

- Are you going to the market?

- Yes.

- Can you get me some fruit?

- Alright.

Well?

Cherries and a pineapple.

- Anything else?

- No, thanks.

Here you are.

Hello.

- Still sleeping?

- I have a headache!

I brought your fruit.

If you have a headache, you should eat and drink lots of water.

- It'll go away?

- Sure.

Thank you, Gianni.

I'll pay you later.

- Yo, Gia'!

- Michelangelo, hi.

Your phone rang twenty times.

- Who was it?

- I didn't answer.

I've got a headache!

If no one answers, why keep calling?

You could have answered at least once.

You all have headaches.

We went to a party last night and got smashed.

Your daughter was wasted,

I can't stand her like that.

- She went ballistic.

- You argued?

Again.

Perfect.

Listen,

did she say...

that she wanted to break up with me?

No, I don't know anything about that.

Have some jam

and don't think about it.

Here's the paper.

Michi, tell me, your folks,

don't they say anything?

What about?

About the fact you're gone all night, or about work...

There's no work for anyone.

Even if you have a degree in Law

or Economics there's no work,

so imagine what it's like for me!

Isn't there something you like

doing? Do you have a passion?

Music.

We're organizing a couple of parties,  
we might make some cash.

Sure...

Do you know Maurizio?

He's always at the cafe down here,  
wears a track suit.

Maurizio, yeah.

- He has a lover.

- The corner clerk?

What about her?

Nothing.

- But, well..

- What?

I don't know.

Hello? Mum!

I'm glad you called,  
I wanted to call you too,  
I wanted...

Sure.

Sick, in what way?

I'll be right there.

- Ten thousand for you.

- You can't be serious!

Hello, ladies.

Look who's here!

How are you?

Fine.

- Hi, Giovanna.

- How are you doing?

- You all look wonderful.

- You're not bad yourself.

- Iole!

- Hi, Gianni dear.

Mother dearest.

It's nothing,  
just a drop in blood pressure.

Forgive me.

Listen, Gianni,  
my friends and I are concentrating  
on our game,  
you're so kind,  
would you do me a favour?

Cristina's not here.

Of course.

- Would you help us?

- Okay.

I prepared a simple lunch.

- It's all in the refrigerator.

- Alright.

- The drinks are in there too.

- Don't forget the drinks!

Alright.

Please, leave now,

we're in the middle of our game.

We have our highs and lows too...

Wait, you're getting confused.

You didn't shuffle!

She's got four of a kind at least.

You think so!

We can't keep playing!

The one time I had a full hand...

- Let's start over.

- I'm not playing anymore.

Deal again.

It went against you, dear.

You had a flush,

but she got confused!

Look, you're wrong!

Gianni!

Look, the screen...

Thank you, Gianni dear.

- What are you doing?

- Nothing.

Don't you dare!

The signature's authentic.

And there's

a personal dedication on it.

I know, but if we sold it we could

stretch things a little further.

I'm worried,

you're happy-go-lucky with money!

I have no more resources.

When did you ever have resources?

Sorry for saying this,

but do people retire at 50?

I didn't retire, they made me retire.

You can go if you like.



Cristina's coming back.

Now that Cristina's coming back,

I can go!

Where will I go,

it's 11 and I'm half drunk?

Every time Cristina has a day off,

you feel sick.

- Who knows why!

- That's sweet!

Gianni, put it down.

- You drink too much.

- Sure, I do!

You leave 150-Euro bottles half open

to evaporate.

- Mr. Gianni!

- Cristina.

- Excuse me.

- Please.

Sorry.

I just wanted a glass of water.

Don't leave, stay a minute.

Keep me company.

What's it like

looking after my mother?

She's a real pain in the neck.

Madam Valeria?

She's wonderful!

You know she's giving me

more money now?

I don't doubt it.

She increased my salary, by a lot.

I'm glad.

And she gave me this, like it?

Very, very much.

It's beautiful, isn't it?

She bought me lots

of designer clothes.

I'm glad.

Did you know she asked my three aunts

who live abroad to visit us?

Here?

To play poker with her.

Wonderful.

I feel sad sometimes.

I have some regrets  
because I wanted to be a nurse.  
- I know you have a diploma.  
- You know?  
Of course, but it's hard, isn't it?  
Yes, but all things considered,  
I'm fine with your mother.  
Yes, but things can change,  
it will work out fine.  
There are hard moments in life,  
but it all works out,  
and besides, a lovely girl like you  
should be happy.  
Mr. Gianni, thank you.  
Good night.  
Cristina, may I?  
Good morning.  
Mr. Gianni, what are you doing here?  
I brought you coffee  
because I was drunk last night  
and I wanted to make amends.  
Thank you, you shouldn't have.  
- I dreamed about you last night.  
- You did?  
It was such a beautiful dream.  
It wasn't very clear, it was strange.  
But then I realized that...  
You were...  
my grandfather.  
Right.  
Thank you.  
- My love, how are you?  
- So, so.  
Why, what's the matter?  
- Nothing, forget it.  
- Is someone mistreating you?  
I have something  
important to tell you.  
They're all complaining  
in the building  
because the noise from your parties  
goes on till 3 a. m.  
How can you have a party  
without noise?

You could turn down the music.

Sorry to be the one to tell you.

It's for your own good,

and because

I could be your grandfather.

My grandfather?

There's a love between us!

Sure...

Look at that guy!

What a weirdo!

- What's wrong with him?

- Nothing.

He's funny.

Then so am I,

I go out walking with a dog too...

And so?

You're my love.

Nice day, isn't it?

Yes.

Good day.

Hello? Alfonso!

It's about time, I've been  
holding the fort for half an hour.

I'd like you to meet  
my friend Gianni.

- Laura, a pleasure.

- Silvia.

- Are you a lawyer too?

- No.

He's not as unlucky as me.

Why don't we take advantage

of this beautiful day

and have brunch

with my friend Gianni?

We can continue discussing your case.

Why not?

A bite to eat would be nice.

It's easier to discuss these things

over a nice glass of wine.

White and cool.

Careful, we're fussy

about what we drink!

Do you know somewhere we can go?

Yes, there's a place nearby.

The food's very good.

Gianni produces

a wonderful white organic wine.

We prefer organic foods.

- Is it your vineyard?

- Yes.

- Where?

- In Friuli.

Where it's cool!

To us!

Could we taste some?

Definitely, he'll send you a bottle.

I'd say Gianni's the greatest  
connoisseur of white wine in Rome.

- What an exaggeration!

- He's modest.

You're excellent.

Well, this was an excellent choice!

Where will you go this summer?

We're off to Sardinia together.

Just the two of you?

We take all our holidays together,  
we have no ties.

- No!

- No!

Men today don't want  
a serious relationship,  
they're not like your generation,  
who married, had children,  
thirty years of happy marriage.

They had clear ideas.

But we're happy like this  
and we have lots of fun.

If Gianni makes  
his beautiful boat available,  
we'll come to Sardinia  
and have dinner together.

Sure, you have our phone numbers.

We'll have fun together.

You'll bring a special bottle,  
of course.

No, absolutely not.

Thank you, that's very kind.

Please!

Please excuse us,  
we'll just go and freshen up a bit.  
Watch what you say,  
we'll take them for a drink...  
Why did you tell them  
about a boat, the wine, Friuli?  
I was there once with the army.  
What do they know?  
What's the problem?  
- Got your glasses?  
- Not my reading glasses.  
You only live once.  
I'll let you pick first,  
which one do you want?  
They're identical!  
One thing leads to another,  
so careful what you say.  
We're sure to pull this off.  
Goodbye, thank you.  
We'll let you know  
when we're back in Rome.  
"It's a good situation,  
one thing leads to another... "  
It can happen  
and it did happen.  
It did.  
Hello? Mum!  
Is it something quite serious?  
I'm coming.  
Thank you, Gianni dear.  
Thank you so much.  
- Thanks, Gianni.  
- You're welcome.  
We should buy another one.  
A 90-inch, of course.  
We could use one.  
Honey, please do me a favour.  
Livia is very tired,  
would you mind  
giving her a lift home?  
With pleasure.  
You're always such a gentleman,  
thank you.  
A great big kiss!

We'll go right away.

You're always so kind.

A hand for the little old lady...

- Gabriella.

- Mum.

- Gianni, hi!

- How are you?

It's nice to see you,  
you look wonderful.

Hi, Mum.

- How did she behave?

- Very well.

- Thank you, you're always so kind.

- It was a pleasure.

I'll leave. You young people  
should be on your own.

Good evening.

How long's it been  
since we last saw each other?

- A very long time.

- You look wonderful.

I'm in a rush, I'm going out,  
but please sit down a moment,  
we can talk for a minute.

- You're sure I'm no bother?

- Are you kidding?

Come in, sit down.

What a surprise!

- I haven't been here for years.

- You've been here?

- Yes, but you were tiny.

- A child.

And now I've become a child again!

- Did you hear I'm separated?

- Yes, I'm so sorry.

No, it was the right thing,  
I'm happy, I feel reborn,  
I want to move.

I want to come to Rome,  
to the centre.

It's better than here.

There are too many memories here.

I'm looking around the area  
where your mother's home is.

Yes, it's very convenient there.  
Enough of memories,  
enough of the past!  
- A new life!  
- That's wonderful, good for you!  
I agree with you.  
A strange feeling seeing you again!  
It means a lot to me too.  
And how long do we wait  
until we see each other again?  
We mustn't let years go by.  
We mustn't!

**I have an idea:**

Don't call, I'll be here.  
Please, drop by, so we can talk  
and give each other  
a little more time.  
- With great pleasure.  
- I'll be waiting, do come!  
I will.  
Michi?  
Come here, please.  
My leg!  
- Are you okay, Gia'?  
- Just fine.  
He's looking sharp!  
He's got a date!  
No, he's probably going  
to a christening.  
Gianni, what a surprise!  
Sorry, I'm in a rehearsal.  
Sit down a moment.  
- Let's take it from...  
- "Presto"?  
Come with me,  
you'll like where we're going.  
Here we are.  
Now, please, open that cabinet.  
Look, my daughter's a rascal!  
She puts it up there  
because I'm short,  
but you're tall, you can reach it.  
That'll teach her!

- Isn't it a little early?

- Don't worry about it.

- And your daughter...

- She's busy, don't worry.

The glasses are in there.

They're so small!

Gianni, you're not drinking?

Don't worry,

they won't stop before midnight.

Thank you.

Could I have a little ice, please?

Thank you.

Thank you.

They don't even respond anymore,

not even a glance.

- What do you mean?

- It's like I'm transparent.

You used to at least get a smile,

now even if you stand naked

in the street...

An old engine, that's been

abandoned for years and gone rusty,

takes time to work again.

Just wait.

What am I supposed

to be waiting for?

As Heraclitus said,

time is a wheel that turns, turns...

If you want some romance,

phone your girlfriend from school

and sort out the problem.

You laugh...

What a wonderful back!

She's a beauty.

Sometimes beauty overwhelms you.

Gianni, did you sleep like that?

It was late...

- What time did you get in?

- I don't know.

- Where were you?

- Just out, walking around.

New jacket,

trousers too, all new!

- Why, don't you like it?



- Sure, but...  
I wanted something  
for myself for once...  
I bought it with my pension money.  
Exactly, that's the point.  
So it's all spent.  
Yes, it's finished - so?  
Do you have a lover?  
A lover... you're all obsessed  
with the lover thing!  
Is it a collective psychosis?  
Remember you're taking me  
to Ikea for curtains today.  
- I can't.  
- You can't?  
What have you got to do?  
I have a terrible headache.  
Gianni, know what's wrong?  
You're drinking too much.  
Daddy!  
You're asleep?  
Why are you sleeping  
at this time of day?  
No reason.  
Are you sad?  
- You argued with Mum, right?  
- No.  
She said you spent all your pension.  
How did you spend all that money?  
Have you got...  
something going on?  
Boy, you're touchy!  
I'm closing the door,  
you're nothing to look at.  
- Can't sleep?  
- I've got insomnia.  
- Make some chamomile tea.  
- No, it's gross.  
- Everything okay, Gia'?  
- Yeah, fine.  
Have you seen the phone?  
No.  
Have you seen it?  
Have you seen the phone?

I have to hang up, bye.  
Sorry, I'll bring it right back.  
Hi.  
Occupied!  
- You told me to.  
- He hit on you!  
How do I figure in this?  
I'm jealous.  
- Okay, but don't take it out on me.  
- On who then?  
Valeria, it's Gianni.  
Gianni me!  
I found your number in my book,

**so I thought:**

Gianni, I'm here.  
Valeria.  
How are you?  
Sorry I'm late, I went shopping,  
I thought we might  
eat here at home, okay?  
Sure.  
I have a flight to Paris  
at dawn tomorrow.  
How nice to see you!  
- Come in.  
- It's beautiful here!  
- You've never been here?  
- No.  
What a feeling!  
Sit down.  
- Like some white wine?  
- Sure.  
You're as beautiful as ever.  
- And are you still good at cooking?  
- Yes.  
Then you can cook.  
I was afraid you'd forget.  
Silly, how could I forget the only  
evening I have with you?  
You've no idea  
how glad I was you called.  
- What did you think?  
- That I was glad.

Someone had to do the cooking!  
Right, let me see.  
- Himalayan salt.  
- It's good for you.  
What can I do with this stuff?  
You're still a princess!  
Aren't you the king of minestrone?  
Sure, but it can't be done this way.  
We won't eat till midnight.  
Have you got an onion  
and some herbs?  
Look in there.  
You don't even have pasta.  
Sorry.  
For years I asked myself:  
"Why didn't I marry Valeria?"  
Because you're an idiot.  
We were a couple of kids.  
What a day!  
Tomorrow I have to get up at dawn.  
Do you still have that great house  
by the sea where we used to go?  
Of course, my daughter lives there.  
Lucky her!  
Sorry, we haven't  
seen each other for years  
and I'm falling asleep.  
I'm unforgivable.  
No, you're wonderful.  
And how do you find me?  
Same virtues, same flaws.  
- Excuse me.  
- I bet it's your mother.  
Naturally.  
If I don't answer  
she'll call ten times  
and I'll feel guilty.  
Be right back.  
Mum, what is it at this hour?  
Doesn't Cristina  
have a nursing license?  
No, I can't.  
I can't, I'll talk to you tomorrow.  
I'll just turn it off.

Mother dear, you call me  
all the time, it can't go on!  
I'm always here, I have no life.  
Besides, I never know  
if you're alright or really sick.  
You're my main problem, good grief!  
Gianni, I don't want you to worry,  
so,  
to help you out a little,  
I've taken care of business.  
I sold the deeds to the house.  
Sold? To who?  
To Livia, she insisted.  
So did her daughter.  
It was worth my while.  
I can still stay here  
and I have a little money!  
Understand, a little money!  
Don't take it like that.  
A little money, understand?  
Gianni, I brought you some soup.  
- How are you? You took your pill?  
- Yes.  
So, are you better? Let me see.  
You don't have a fever,  
it's nothing serious.  
Your mother's such a pain. She called  
three times this afternoon.  
Alfonso called too.  
I told them all you were sleeping.  
You did the right thing.  
- What time is it?  
- Five o'clock.  
Now have some soup  
and get some sleep.  
Tomorrow you can go out,  
get some fresh air.  
We'll see.  
What's this? Is your fever back?  
You disappeared!  
I've called for three days  
and you don't answer.  
You're right.  
What an awful day!

I had to defend some asshole  
who didn't deserve it.  
This is my job!  
You're still in pyjamas?  
You're holed up in the house,  
you don't go out anymore.  
I don't want to go out and be  
just another old man on the street.  
I've thought about it too.  
The old times have gone,  
things need to change.  
We used to have more time,  
we could go out...  
We have to pick up the pace,  
get right to the point.  
I've organized something for you.  
Look,  
if you go to this place,  
you'll feel great, no complications.  
It's perfect.  
Thank you, but even there,  
even if I pay a woman,  
it won't work the first time!  
I need a little time  
to get to know her.  
Sure, have tea with her aunt,  
coffee with her father,  
get to know her grandparents,  
the whole family.  
You'll never make headway like that!  
Anyway, I already thought of that  
and got you something  
to solve the problem.  
- What is it, drugs?  
- It's not drugs.  
It'll make me throw up.  
This is the pill of love,  
take it and you're ready,  
one hour and you're on!  
Trust me!  
Where can I go in this heat...  
I'll think it over...  
Carpe diem, do it now!  
Follow my advice, open your mouth!

Don't make me angry.  
Open your mouth and close your eyes.  
Open your mouth.  
Where are you going?  
Didn't you see the sign?  
Do you have a neck injury?  
Yes.  
What breed of dog is that?  
I don't know,  
I even looked it up  
in the encyclopedia.  
And what's yours?  
A toy poodle.  
He's beautiful.  
...even going into extra time.  
Just because it lasts  
an extra half hour...  
What are you doing here?  
Everyone said  
the goal was unstoppable.  
For me it was stoppable.  
- Did you make that, Gia'?  
- No.  
I made this.  
Great! How many of us are there?  
My friend,  
it's my mother's birthday tonight.  
- What a pain!  
- You're telling me!  
We could have watched  
the game tonight.  
I know, but we can't.  
Actually, please,  
we have to set the table.  
- It's only seven o'clock.  
- I know, but it takes time.  
- Get the good plates...  
- Where are they?  
In the cupboard  
with the crystal glasses.  
Good glasses, good plates,  
all deluxe!  
We'll have an aperitif afterwards  
if you help me.

- Forks on the left.

- Come on, it doesn't matter!

Let's do it right.

Knives on the right

and dessert spoons at the top.

Perfect.

- Happy birthday.

- Gianni, what a pleasure!

An extra happy birthday.

Good evening, Mr. Gianni,

my Aunt Ilena.

A pleasure.

Please go in.

A special thank you

for being so generous.

Don't think about the house anymore,

that's already done.

We won't think about it anymore.

You're a real gentleman in every way.

Please, sit down.

Sit down, Mum.

Michi, since Cristina's aunt is here,

could you set another place.

And then tell them to come in

and bring the eggplant.

We won't all fit.

I'll eat in there,

then I can watch the game.

No game!

Gianni my dear, eggplant?

- No, but...

- Eggplant parmesan?

Maybe you didn't remember,

but I can't eat that, it's too rich.

I'm sorry.

Your wife never

remembers my ailments.

I hope she won't be offended,

but I really can't have any.

It's okay, I made it

and nothing's fried.

Well then, I'll have a taste.

Excuse me a moment.

Dad, how long will this thing last?

As long as it takes to eat,  
Grandma just got here.  
Be a good girl!  
Darling, eggplant parmesan?  
I didn't fry a thing!  
Gianni's always so affectionate.  
Unfortunately  
they're not all the same,  
especially those around him,  
don't you think?  
Good evening to everyone.  
My dearest.  
I'm happy to have you here.  
So very glad.  
Seeing you makes me younger.  
Even more?  
Not so old.  
Excuse me, ladies,  
I need to buy cigarettes.  
The tobacco shop's about to close.  
Please start.  
- Couldn't you have gone out earlier?  
- You're right.  
I'll be right back.  
Goal!  
Eggplant.  
As I said before,  
it's not good for me, honey.  
You know I haven't been very well.  
I'll pass and wait  
for the next course.  
Alright, let's begin with Cristina.  
Who is it?  
Gianni, hi!  
- Come in.  
- No...  
You're with friends, no...  
This is Gianni, a really good friend.  
Let me introduce you.  
I'm going out for cigarettes,  
and I wanted  
to take Riccardo with me.  
Okay, but at least have a drink.  
We'll have an aperitif, okay?



- Can I?

- No, it's mine.

You can make another one!

It's great you came!

Thank you, give me Riccardo  
and I'll go.

- I'll leave you.

- Stay.

- Gia'!

- Michelangelo!

What are you doing here?

I've been looking for you all night.

We called the State Police,  
the City Police,

everyone except the Forestry  
Commission and the Child Helpline.

Come on.

Why is this dog with you?

- What time is it?

- Gia', can I ask you something?

I'd love to know

what's going on in your head.