RECENTLY, I sat at Treno’s waiting for never mind who, and waiting and waiting, when a guy two tables away first stared at me, then slowly got up and approaching me with this threatening walk, growled at me:

“Do you mean that? Man? Are you crazy??”

Not belonging to the upper 10,000, not even to the upper 150 million, I am opposed to violence and intelligent enough to be afraid of it. So I politely said, “What?”

“Man, I heard you,” he said, “I heard what you said and I know what you mean.”

Inspired by fear to unprecedented eloquence I took a deep breath and whispered “What? What did I say and what, what do I mean???”

“You said,” he said, “this: [drums on table] and that means: ‘If you are too stupid for words, too incompetent a negotiator to resolve a problem by discourse and discussion, then you must use violence, by free enterprise as terrorists or by organized institutions as secret services, national guards, or a whole army.’ This is what you said, and I know what you mean!”

Now he got me upset and, elongating my neck, I exclaimed: “I never said that, and so, if you simply invent what I am to have said, how can you know what I mean?” Looking first straight into my indignant eyes, then at my nervous fingers (they hadn’t forgotten to wait), he slowly spelled it out:

“Ever since my Boy Scout days I’ve been a dedicated expert at sending and receiving messages coded in the Morse alphabet. So I understand very well what your nimble fingers kept drumming on that tabletop. I told you accurately what your drumming fingers have said, and therefore, I can, at least, conjecture what you mean.”

—followed by a highly dramatic pause.

“Sit down, please, I have to ask you a few questions, and I need your answers.”

“Now, now, now . . .”

“Keep calm, no harm intended. First question: What do I mean?”

“You mean that we should not elect stupid and incompetent people to represent us, so that we no longer use violence wherever we have no business but business.”

“But I don’t mean that at all. I do not think that our elected representatives are stupid and incompetent.”

“Hold it! If you do not think they’re stupid and incompetent, then all you can possibly think is that they must be . . .”

“SSSSHSHSHS!!—Next question: How can I impatiently wait and wait for never mind who, without having a dedicated drummage expert hear what I did not say, and then conjecture from what I did not say, what I mean, just because he heard me say what I did not say?”

“That’s easy: Learn drummage, so you can avoid it, so that no dedicated drummage expert can understand you. —But be careful, my misbegotten friend, there is no drumming which is not drummage! So there!”

“I know what you mean,” I cried excitedly. “You mean, that if I am waiting and waiting for never mind who, and, come to think of it, waiting and waiting for never mind what, and want to avoid speaking drummage—I’ll have to invent new . . .”

“Now, now—”

“New music?”

“—now!!"