

MARGHERITA

A drama in two acts

By

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Act 1

SCENE 1

Margherita Sarfatti's apartment, Rome 1939. Margherita, age 50, is packing her bags. The home is that of a wealthy woman. The walls are filled with oil paintings, including a portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi and a reproduction of "Judith Beheading Holofernes." A bust of Cesare Sarfatti rests upon a fifteenth century credenza. In the background, the phonograph is playing "Capriccio Italien." A photograph of Arturo Toscanini adorns the wall.

MARGHERITA'S VOICE (O.S.)

I smile while I suffer. The shame! At first I was your slave, And now I am in your soul, in your mind, in your flesh. Patience governs my love. I smile, I suffer. I am only one of many. Can this love go away?

She goes to her jewel box, removes some expensive jewelry and stuffs it in her dress.

She pulls items from her drawer and packs them, then retrieves a large photograph of Il Duce. She spends several moments examining it closely, then throws it into the trash.

BENITO'S VOICE (O.S.)

Kiss me from afar. I am your devoted lion. Always there to dominate you. You are in my heart. I remember the times we spent together. I hold your body to devour you. Now and always. I am tired tonight, but you are in my heart. Come with me.

She hears loud knocking.

MARGHERITA

Who is it?

MUFFLED VOICE

One of your secret lovers.

MARGHERITA

I'm too old for lovers.

MUFFLED VOICE

Too old? Never.

At my age? MARGHERITA

Open up. MUFFLED VOICE

Go away. I do not know you! MARGHERITA

You do. I am your lover. MUFFLED VOICE

I've been labelled an undesirable. MARGHERITA

Not you. MUFFLED VOICE

Bernard Berenson? MARGHERITA

An art critic I am not. MUFFLED VOICE

(Laughing) Why of course. It's you, Gabriele D'Annunzio MARGHERITA

I'm not a crazy poet either. And you are aware that he is very ill. MUFFLED VOICE

You do the best impersonation I have ever heard of that .. MARGHERITA

I'm sure I do, because I am he. The one whose biography you wrote. MUFFLED VOICE

Please leave. MARGHERITA

You seem angry. MUFFLED VOICE

I want to sleep. Surely this is a dream. MARGHERITA

Kiss me from afar. I am your devoted lion. Always there to hold you. You are in my heart. Remember the times we spent together. I hold your body and want to devour you. I hold you. Now and always. I am tired tonight, but you dominate my mind too. MUFFLED VOICE

MARGHERITA

Ah, a shallow love.

MUFFLED VOICE

We spent hours together.

MARGHERITA

Years ago.

MUFFLED VOICE

I hold your body in my mind.

MARGHERITA

Oh?

MUFFLED VOICE

Kiss me from afar. I am your devoted lion

MARGHERITA

Lion? Yes. Devoted? No.

MUFFLED VOICE

Let me show you.

MARGHERITA

Please, go away.

MUFFLED VOICE

(Gently)Open, or I shall break through this door.

MARGHERITA

All right, All right,. Wait till I get the key.

Music ends.

COMMENTATOR

Just a note from the news services. The Mussolini family is spending a joyful holiday together at the family residence. Il Duce and Rachele Mussolini are entertaining their children and small grandchildren. Il Duce stresses family values at this dangerous period in our Nation's history. And now for more music.

Margherita opens the door. The person in a muffled voice enters wearing the mask of a lion.

MUFFLED VOICE

Gr-r-rr.

MARGHERITA

A lion? The Empire has no jungles unless one was built recently.

MUFFLED VOICE

Ethiopia has rain forests. (Beat) May I kiss you.

MARGHERITA

I don't kiss strangers.

MUFFLED VOICE

Am I still a stranger?

MARGHERITA

I don't know who you are.

MUFFLED VOICE

I know even the mole below your lovely neck.

MARGHERITA

Surely you have more important matters than the mole on my neck.

MUFFLED VOICE

A lion has much time. We have not seen one another in a long time

MARGHERITA

You're right.

MUFFLED VOICE

Hoo-hoo-hoo.

MARGHERITA

Stop this nonsense

MUFFLED VOICE

I am the lion.

MARGHERITA

Which of Il Duce's lions are you? Ras or Italia?

MUFFLED VOICE

Both are now dead. I am the ghost of Ras.

MARGHERITA

Il Duce does not believe in ghosts.

MUFFLED VOICE

You know better than that. Testing me?

He removes his mask. The man is Benito Mussolini.

BENITO

Your faithful servant.

MARGHERITA

Out of uniform?

BENITO

Lions do not wear uniforms.

MARGHERITA

And absent for the last three years?

BENITO

Matters of state. Don't treat me like a stranger. I am Il Duce.

MARGHERITA

How did you get into the building!

BENITO

Whatever he wants, Il Duce gets.

MARGHERITA

How I know! Let us hope that continues in the future.

BENITO

You think it may not?

MARGHERITA

What do I know? Benito, I am busy.

BENITO

So cold. As if our 25 years counted for nothing

MARGHERITA

Twenty eight years. Is there something you want?

BENITO

That music --Arturo Toscannini?

MARGHERITA

Of course.

BENITO

A traitor? May I make myself comfortable?

MARGHERITA

Would it make any difference if I said no? And he is not a traitor...

BENITO

What happened to your warmth and...

MARGHERITA

Three years is a long time.

BENITO

When you actually turned your back on me at Luigi Pirandello's funeral.

MARGHERITA

You noticed? With four thousand in attendance? (Beat) You should have called first.

BENITO

The phone is out of order.

MARGHERITA

I used it a short while ago.

BENITO

Try it.

MARGHERITA

It's working!

BENITO

Try it!

She picks it up. No tone.

MARGHERITA

It was working before you arrived.

BENITO

Probably a power failure.

MARGHERITA

Coincidental?

BENITO

It should come back on shortly. All the packing?

MARGHERITA

I'm sending some things to my daughter in Milan.

BENITO

Oh?

MARGHERITA

You seem surprised?

BENITO

Some of your favorite paintings. Like this -Boccioni. Do you normally travel with your paintings?

MARGHERITA

Sometimes. You recognize a Boccioni?

BENITO

Give me some credit. And this painting of Judith in the Old Testament beheading Holofernes? I thought it was in a museum?

MARGHERITA

Only a reproduction.

BENITO

You allow a reproduction among your vast holdings? And the woman in the portrait?

MARGHERITA

A self portrait by Artemisia Gentileschi. Not a reproduction.

BENITO

The painter of the Jewish murderess beheading the enemy general after she enticed him into bed? Both painter and subject obviously hated men.

MARGHERITA

Ah, yes. You prefer German painters?

BENITO

I am not amused. (takes out pocket knife). I could be amused.

He touches both paintings with knife.

MARGHERITA

Stop!

BENITO

(Smiling) You prefer Boccioni and that man-hater to me?

MARGHERITA

These are a priceless paintings!

BENITO

All your paintings are priceless. (Pulls the knife back) You pay thousands of lira for a little bit of oil paint of some horrendously ugly figure or some asinine abstraction, and yet you will walk a mile to save a lira. Mi amore! You will never change. You have not offered me anything to drink.

MARGHERITA

You are not Il Duce!

BENITO

What!

MARGHERITA

Il Duce does not drink! HIS MACHISMO can not tolerate alcohol.

BENITO

Times change. My ulcer is gone.

MARGHERITA

We are either in a dream or you are an imposter.

BENITO

Shall I have you committed?

MARGHERITA

Please put the knife away.

BENITO

I will not harm your paintings. Have I ever treated you with anything but great kindness? And you have not even asked what is in the box?

MARGHERITA

Let me see if there is anything to drink in the kitchen. I believe there is some Chianti left.

BENITO

And no Bordeaux? You must be planning a long journey.

MARGHERITA

Just a short sojourn, really. Certainly your staff must be aware of my comings and goings.

She goes into the kitchen. He opens the red box which contains a blue board with hanging medals.

BENITO

My staff?

MARGHERITA

Your surveillance team.

BENITO

You're thinking "thugs."

MARGHERITA

Not to my beloved Il Duce.

BENITO

How beloved?.

She reenters. He puts the hanging medals in front of her.

BENITO (cont'd)

The Italian government has awarded you 14 medals since 1936.
You have not picked up a single one of them.

MARGHERITA

Here is your drink.

BENITO

Is it poisoned?

MARGHERITA

I'll trade?

BENITO

I have always trusted you.

MARGHERITA

I insist.(She exchanges drinks)

BENITO

You know you can leave whenever you want?

MARGHERITA

Leave?

BENITO

Italia.

MARGHERITA

You want me to leave?

BENITO

Never, it was you who made Italia what it is. And that is
why I have personally brought you the medals.

MARGHERITA

There was a time when...but times have changed.

BENITO

Only on the surface.

MARGHERITA

Even your speech has changed.

BENITO

Oh?

MARGHERITA

Slightly Nordic.. .

BENITO

Not true. (Joking) They now speak with Italian accents.

The phone rings

MARGHERITA

Peculiar!(She Picks up phone). ...Yes, this is Margherita Sarfatti.The flight is cancelled?...Inclement weather?...There is no inclement weather! Oh.....Arriverdici.

BENITO

Problem?

MARGHERITA

The flight has been cancelled.

BENITO

Happens all the time.

MARGHERITA

Curious! The weather is quite good.

BENITO

There'll be others.

MARGHERITA

How is the wine?

BENITO

Quite good, in fact.

MARGHERITA

What will Signora Petacci say about your arriv..

BENITO

She does as told.

The phone rings.

MARGHERITA (cont'd)

Pronto..That flight has been cancelled for several days... All flights? ..Very well.

BENITO

A problem?

MARGHERITA

Of course a problem! You can get the trains to run on time! Can you not do the same for planes?

BENITO

If you were going to Milan, you would take a train. You can not take a train to the United states or South America. Perhaps you're anxious to leave the country?

MARGHERITA

I have tried to schedule an appointment with you often. But you were busy. I must now go on. And I am only visiting my daughter in Milan.

BENITO

Fiametta is not in Milan. She is at Il Soldo..if that is what you still call your estate on Lake Como. And Livio and her children are with her.

MARGHERITA

What have you done to her! Her family!

BENITO

Nothing. Would I harm my Fiametta!

MARGHERITA

Let me call and see.

Picks up phone and immediately recognizes that there is no dial tone.

BENITO

What's the problem?

MARGHERITA

Out of order, again. What are you up to?

BENITO

Phones often go out of order. Because of the labor shortage we have had to hire a lot of Calabrians and Sicilians.

MARGHERITA

What do southern Italians have to do with badly running telephones?

BENITO

I love them. But, you know better than I that they're incapable of doing any work. I'm thinking of sending the Ethiopians in to civilize them.

MARGHERITA

Leave the Ethiopians alone. You should have conquered the south of Italy rather than the north of Ethiopia.

BENITO

God help those who try to help the Southerners Thank God. So many have fled to America with their organized crime. Under Il Duce, organized crime does not survive. In democratic America, they should flourish.

MARGHERITA

Perhaps you remember the incident.(giggles)

BENITO

What incident!

MARGHERITA

The hat! Remember when you spoke in Sicily in 1924, and you could not find your hat which you suspected the Sicilians had purposely hidden.

BENITO

Nonsense.

MARGHERITA

They sent you a letter the week after saying that they had not been able to locate it but that they would return it if and when it was found. The perfect Sicilian insult to a head of state that they did not like. You never forget.

BENITO

It was stolen only because they admired me so much!

MARGHERITA

Can I pour you more wine?

BENITO

Water.

MARGHERITA

I knew your stomach would bother you. Give me a minute.
(walking towards door)
I must speak to the concierge.

BENITO

That won't be necessary.

MARGHERITA

I'll be back in a moment.

BENITO

I said stop!

MARGHERITA

I am in my own apartment.

BENITO

When I say stop, that means stop!

She comes to a stop.

MARGHERITA

Go to hell.

He grabs her by the arm.

BENITO

Don't you ever use that language with me.

MARGHERITA

You're hurting me!

BENITO

(Letting go) Now open the door.

She pushes against him and he against her. Suddenly they kiss.

MARGHERITA

Poisonous fruit sometimes tastes good. Are you playing with my mind. This door was working perfectly before you came.

BENITO

Racial laws yes. Inoperative doors no. Don't be afraid. Trust me!

MARGHERITA

I have!

BENITO

Have I ever betrayed you!

MARGHERITA

Let's begin with the treaty of 1936.

BENITO

Sarcastic again.

MARGHERITA

Then get the door and telephone repaired.

BENITO

It's your building. Not mine.

MARGHERITA

But you run all of greater Italy. Caesar now even has his colonies.

BENITO

Caesar is not a repairman, however.

MARGHERITA

Please leave.

BENITO

How can I? We're trapped.

MARGHERITA

I shall scream from the balcony,

Go ahead.

BENITO

She goes to balcony door, but the door will not open.

MARGHERITA

You knew! Why.

BENITO

You're having housing problems and you blame the government of Italy.

MARGHERITA

I hate you!

BENITO

Why so angry!

MARGHERITA

For being one of your thugs. I closed my eyes too much. And I acquiesced!

BENITO

For the good of Italy. You well knew what was going on. You could have left at any time.

MARGHERITA

The devil's poison, the glamour, and the power held me.

BENITO

We made Italy.

MARGHERITA

Into what?

BENITO

Without you I would never have succeeded.

MARGHERITA

We were young and full of ideals.

BENITO

Reality sets in.

MARGHERITA

In some cases, just viciousness.

BENITO

Let us have another drink, Vela.

MARGHERITA

Rachele does not approve of your drinking.

BENITO

Why bring up that subject? I only want water, anyhow.

MARGHERITA

Does she have a new lover? You beat the railroad master so badly that no one dare.

BENITO

Ancient history. Let us have a drink to old times.

MARGHERITA

I am very tired.

BENITO

Another one!

MARGHERITA

If you play the violin.

BENITO

Are you embarrassing me again. The last time you put me in this position before Toscannini. That fox..

MARGHERITA

It's only us this time. (Hands him a violin)

BENITO

Join me on the piano? Is this the one I gave Cesare.

MARGHERITA

Yes. Shall we do Brahm's concerto for piano and violin?

BENITO

Let us have one more drink to old times.

MARGHERITA

One more drink to old times. Are you enjoying the water?

BENITO

Water is water. Where are the servants?

MARGHERITA

They all had to be dismissed.

BENITO

Why?

MARGHERITA

He asks why!

BENITO

(Picks up letter from table) A letter from one of your lovers.

MARGHERITA

Yes.

BENITO

May I read.

MARGHERITA

No.

BENITO

I recognize the writing. (Reading) Kiss me from afar.

MARGHERITA

..I am your devoted lion. Always there to dominate you. You are in my heart. I remember the times we spent together. I hold your body am ready to devour you. I hold you and own you. Now and always. I am tired tonight, but you in my heart.

BENITO

(Moved)You know it by heart. Forbidden fruit tastes that good? Or your photographic memory at work.

MARGHERITA

Both.

BENITO

May I have the letter?

MARGHERITA

You may.

BENITO

But the writing is yours. These are my words..

MARGHERITA

I beg to differ..

BENITO

Where is the original?

MARGHERITA

Lost.

BENITO

The others?

MARGHERITA

Also lost.

BENITO

Am I to believe that ..

MARGHERITA

I do not have the letters.

BENITO

Ah, perhaps you will find them..In The meantime will you dance with me?

MARGHERITA

Dance!

BENITO

Dance.

MARGHERITA

You're an imposter! Please leave!

BENITO

An imposter?

MARGHERITA

Il Duce does not dance.

BENITO

You have lost your mind. (Puts on a recording) Here is a waltz. Let us dance.

MARGHERITA

When you dance with a wolf, you can only expect to be devoured.

He gently pulls her to him and they begin dancing.

BENITO

You dance more beautifully than ever.

MARGHERITA

Dancing with such gentility.

BENITO

I dance with a queen.

MARGHERITA

Stop! (Begins giggling) Along with 2000 other women in the past. Let us begin with Angelica Balibinoff. And what I hear now is that you are responding to all those women all over Italy who have written letters saying that they want to sleep with you?

BENITO

I beg your pardon.

MARGHERITA

Your staff invites them to your office everyday between two and four in the afternoon. And then they are sent home with a gift for service to the Italian government.

BENITO

Have you been reading American tabloids!

MARGHERITA

As your prisoner, don't I have the right to joke?

BENITO

You are not my prisoner, and you do not have the right to mock.

MARGHERITA

You have only come because you miss seeing me.

BENITO

Yes. If you don't care to dance, let us play our duet. Pour me some wine.

MARGHERITA

Why yes. Do you recognize the wine glasses?

BENITO

Sort of.

MARGHERITA

They belong to my former maid who left them here. She received it as a gift for service to the Italian government. (giggles)

BENITO

Give me that glass!

MARGHERITA

You must promise not to break it. It would be unpatriotic to destroy an item..

BENITO

Give it to me.

MARGHERITA

She gets excited when she sees it.

BENITO

As a part of our patriotism program, we are inviting common Italians to spend time with me after they have written a letter commending what we are trying to do. That's all! Now let us play the one of Albinoni's concertos.

MARGHERITA

One of my favorites.

They begin playing. She plays well, while Mussolini's playing is acceptable. Then the phone rings. They stop.

BENITO

Well pick it up.

MARGHERITA

How strange, it is working again.

BENITO

Well pick it up.

MARGHERITA

Thank you for your permission....Hello...Hello...Are you there? Hung up. Is it your staff? Or that Signorina Petacci. Or perhaps one of the patriotic people.

BENITO

I should put pepper in your mouth.

The phone rings.

BENITO

PICK IT UP.

MARGHERITA

(Answering) Ciao..yes. Yes this is Signora Sarfatti. ..Yes. No. Yes. ..Do not call again. (She hangs up)

BENITO

Well?

MARGHERITA

Shall we resume our playing?

BENITO

Well who called?

MARGHERITA

I don't know.

BENITO

WHO CALLED!

MARGHERITA

It was a harassing call. Hopefully they won't call again.

The phone rings again.

BENITO

Well answer it.

MARGHERITA

Why don't you? This way I won't have to answer your questions.

BENITO

Pick it up. Virtually no one knows I'm here.

MARGHERITA

Hello....Yes. HE's here..It's for you

BENITO

(Picking it up) ..At once. Thank you. I will be out momentarily.

MARGHERITA

I thought no one knew you were here.

BENITO

My bodyguard. I must leave, but I shall return. You will be here I hope.

MARGHERITA

Do I have a choice?

BENITO

Why of course. Do you think I would hold you against your will! (He exits)

MARGHERITA

The devil is tempting!

She goes to credenza and picks up wine glass and begins drinking. She sits and relaxes. She picks up telephone and puts it down after hearing no dial, Suddenly a knock is heard at the door. She does not answer. The knocking persists and becomes louder. She tepidly goes to the door. The knocking becomes louder.

MARGHERITA (CONT'D)

Is that you?

VOICE

Yes it is I, whoever that is.(giggles) I telephoned you a moment ago.

MARGHERITA

Who are you?

VOICE

Let me in and I will tell you. The neighbors can hear you, I'm sure.

MARGHERITA

Hold on. This door is behaving strangely today. (She tries key and door opens immediately.)

The man, in his late twenties enters.

VOICE

Signora Sarfatti. James Bullock. Do you have some free time?

MARGHERITA

What can I do for you?

JAMES BULLOCK

We have met. Do you remember?

MARGHERITA

Where?

JAMES BULLOCK

In the United states. Twice. During your grand tour there in 1934.

MARGHERITA

I do not recall.

JAMES BULLOCK

Cambridge, Massachusetts and Washington. I was a reporter for the Washington Post.

MARGHERITA

Right. I forgot, which university is located in Cambridge.

JAMES BULLOCK

(Clears throat) Yale University... And you conquered the United States. You were called the uncrowned queen of Italy.

MARGHERITA

Thank you. I never heard that title. I can no longer claim it in any case.

JAMES BULLOCK

Quite frankly, I'm surprised you're still here.

MARGHERITA

I have been treated very well by the current government.

JAMES BULLOCK

In fact you received an award as recently as last month. I forgot what it was for.

MARGHERITA

So have I. It was certainly not deserved. Oh, Mr. Bullock, please refreshen my memory. Who is the publisher of the Washington Post?

JAMES BULLOCK

(Clears throat) Mr. Ochs. But before we proceed, may I ask you about the gentleman I saw coming out of here?

MARGHERITA

Oh yes. Why do you want to know?

JAMES BULLOCK

Wasn't that Il Duce. I was breathless as I saw the man exit.

MARGHERITA

(Laughing)

No! Of course not.

JAMES BULLOCK

He certainly looked like him.

MARGHERITA

There is some resemblance. But no that was not he. . I have not seen Il Duce in four years.

JAMES BULLOCK

Well, who was it? This would certainly make a risk`e story.

MARGHERITA

The artist Jacobo Benini. He had an argument with his lover. I was trying to console him. Male lover of course. Given the current climate, I hope you will keep silent about all of this.

JAMES BULLOCK

Certainly. I have something which may be of interest to you.

MARGHERITA

Yes?

JAMES BULLOCK

The letters. I have a client who is willing to pay handsomely for them.

MARGHERITA

How handsomely?

JAMES BULLOCK

Well this is open for negotiation. But we must have them immediately. My client is willing to offer the equivalent of one million dollars.

A generous offer.

MARGHERITA

You will accept?

JAMES BULLOCK

No.

MARGHERITA

Is the offer insufficient?

JAMES BULLOCK

Yes.

MARGHERITA

Will you consider 1.5 Million dollars? I understand that Il Duce sent you over a thousand letters between 1911 and 1936.

JAMES BULLOCK

The offer would be considered, but...

MARGHERITA

But?

JAMES BULLOCK

I can not accept.

MARGHERITA

Why?

JAMES BULLOCK

I do not have the letters. They exist solely in the rumor mill. Any letter to me from Il Duce was purely official, because that has been the only type of relation we have ever had. You would only receive correspondence pertaining to the arts, to speeches and articles with which I gave him some assistance, or party matters. I am no longer a member of the Party.

MARGHERITA

But Signora Sarfatti, the whole world knows..

JAMES BULLOCK

The whole world knows wrong..there are many women who are alleged to have had that type of relationship with Il Duce. I am not another elevator mistress. Have you contacted Signorina Petacci? She may have some letters surely.

MARGHERITA

I value my life. Also most people say she can not write or read, and that no correspondence in all probability exists since she is always by Il Duce's side.

MARGHERITA

Why would anyone be interested in those letters if indeed they existed?

JAMES BULLOCK

If letters existed, the American press, both tabloid and mainstream. The German press and government would have an even greater interest, since Mussolini made the statement last week that he had been latently anti-semitic since he was 25 but did not know it. Strange since his first lover Angelica Balibinoff was Jewish, and then you, making for a grand total of thirty years. And who knows. My client will likely sell to the highest bidder, and Himmler and Goebbels may be willing to purchase them to suppress them for any state...

MARGHERITA

The latter perhaps. No German newspaper would publish such letters if they existed. I can not be of any assistance to you. Will you be making the same request to Il Duce?

JAMES BULLOCK

Here is my card if you ever change your mind.

MARGHERITA

I could certainly use the money. (Laughing) Perhaps I should fabricate some.

JAMES BULLOCK

Good day, Signora Sarfatti.

MARGHERITA

Good day. (She opens door and he exits)....It worked this time. Can the afternoon know what the morning never suspected?

Margherita walks around the room examining her paintings and then turns the music back on. In the background we hear Mimi's aria from "La Boheme" She changes the station. The radio commentator comes on.

RADIO COMMENTATOR

..where members of the Italian Government met with several representatives from the German government, including Goebbels, to solidify ties between the two countries. IL Duce expressed his admiration and awe for the German military might, while Goebbels expressed solid support for the third Reich's closest partner.

The Mussolini family spent the day together in celebration of the Count and Countess Ciano's eighth anniversary.

In addition, the family celebrated the eleventh birthday of their son Romano.

She changes the station where Respighi's "Ancient Airs and Dances" is heard. She takes another drink and then vehemently throws her wine glass against the wall. She then throws two other glasses to the wall.

She takes the last remaining glass and pours more wine. She lies down and falls asleep.

SCENE 2

The next morning. Margherita is still asleep. The room is immaculately clean and with flower baskets. The most noticeable change has been that all of the packed bags have been removed. The phone keeps ringing. Margherita does not answer. A knock is heard at the door and she still remains asleep. The knock becomes louder. She opens it and no one is there. Looking around her, she immediately notices the flowers and then realizes that the baggage is missing. She rushes to the closet.

MARGHERITA

All clothing put back perfectly as it was before I packed!

She picks up phone. There is no dial tone. She walks toward credenza again.

MARGHERITA (cont'd)

I don't recall any more wine being out. It'S Bordeaux. My PASSPORT! It's missing!

The phone rings again. She quickly picks it up.

MARGHERITA (cont'd)

Livio. Yes, I'm still here.....It's a complicated story....Fiametta was called in for questioning! When....And did you say she was released?...Livio...Livio...Livio..Are you still there! Livio! Livio!...(The connection is lost).

The phone rings again. She picks it up.

MARGHERITA (cont'd)

Livio. She's been released. Thank God. Please leave the country now...Livio. Livio. Livio!(She puts phone down.)

The phone rings again.

MARGHERITA (cont'd)

Livio! Livio! ...Sorry I thought it was Livio. Who are you?.....Clara Petacci....You don't sound like Clara Petacci....Yes, we only met once...You say we met more than once...I am sorry ...I do not recall... Now what can I do for you. ..(Long pause)I did not call you a whore...Nor would I ever use that language....Not at all!!! Who told you this....You won't say....I'm shocked that you would even call me call me on such a matter....NO, I did not say that I hoped you ;and Il Duce would hang by your feet! I Have no more stature in Rome...Why are you even calling me...I Am sorry....No, I am not planning to go to Argentina. My home is in Milan and Rome!!. Well I am sorry you feel that way...Well good luck to you...Thank you...Perhaps we can have espresso sometime.

There is a knock on the door and she goes to answer. She hesitates, and thinks for a moment. She answers door. Il Duce enters.

BENITO

Are you better rested this morning?

MARGHERITA

A strange morning.

BENITO

Have you decided not to leave town?

MARGHERITA

I awoke to find my bags unpacked and every item put in place exactly where it was before I packed.

BENITO

What a coincidence. Strange things often happen. Or does your newfound religion not allow extraordinary things to happen.

MARGHERITA

I have been a Catholic for a decade.

BENITO

That long since you joined the Institute of Sacrosanct Leeches! Perhaps some angel performed a miracle for you.

MARGHERITA

I did not want to unpack. These angels would have to be Fascists.

BENITO

Perhaps you have had too much to drink. Do I notice a filled wine glass. Actually it's almost empty. Are you becoming an alcoholic.

MARGHERITA

How dare you! What are you doing to Fiametta!

BENITO

She is like my own daughter!

MARGHERITA

She was called in for questioning!

BENITO

I have nothing to do with that. Perhaps she was speeding..a traffic violation.

MARGHERITA

Would you like some wine?

BENITO

Yes.

MARGHERITA

I appreciate the sudden attention. But as Italy's Il Duce, don't you have some heavy duties awaiting you? After all, the German murderer was quoted in yesterday's newspaper as saying: "Mussolini is not Italy's Hitler. I am Germany's Mussolini." Heady stuff.

BENITO

What could be more important than Margherita? I am here to rekindle our love.

MARGHERITA

(Hands him wine)And that's all?

BENITO

What else would I need?

MARGHERITA

Drink your wine.

BENITO

You seem saddened this morning.

MARGHERITA

I have a gift for you.

BENITO

Ah, how nice.

She goes to the highboy and pulls out a large brown leather bound volume.

MARGHERITA

For you, caro.

BENITO

Very nice. The Italian Encyclopedia of 1936. Margherita Sarfatti, Editor.

MARGHERITA

I would like to sign it for you. Signing) My last issue, before I was summarily dismissed.

BENITO

Ah, yes. I learned of it only later.

MARGHERITA

Take a look at the dismissal notice on the volume.

BENITO

We do not live in a perfect world.

MARGHERITA

Are you helping to make it mor or less perfect?

BENITO

More than any other Italian.

MARGHERITA

(Picks up her biography of him from the table) Another gift from me. Sarfatti's biography of Mussolini. This book has much lavish praise for you.

BENITO

Trite, but not true. Who has done more?

MARGHERITA

Shall I begin with Dante?

BENITO

What has he ever done for Italy

MARGHERITA

Michelangelo?

BENITO

Michelangelo,! Raphael! Botticelli! All the Great Chefs! Vivaldi!. The list is endless! And what in the hell have they done for Italy!

MARGHERITA

Who has, if they have not?

BENITO

Il Duce has?

MARGHERITA

How!

BENITO

He has restored glory and honor to Rome! Spiritual values count for nothing. Dante, They have lowered our prestige. The world laughs at Italians.

MARGHERITA

You are now turning them into a Germanic people.

BENITO

I am restoring the honor and glory that was Rome.

MARGHERITA

And brought worldwide condemnation.

BENITO

You've been reading too many American newspapers. Look at who's calling the kettle black. I know you may be going to America, but you know Il Duce's third axiom.

MARGHERITA

Remind me.

BENITO

NEVER TRUST THE AMERICANS.

MARGHERITA

Oh!

BENITO

No more hypocritical people in the world. They speak one language and do the exact opposite.

MARGHERITA

Are they the only ones? A simplification.

BENITO

Enslaved a fourth of their population for 250 years, and exterminated the indigenous population. And now they want to make the world safe for democracy

MARGHERITA

They no longer have slaves nor are they murdering Indians.

BENITO

Only because most the Indian population has been exterminated and slavery is no longer needed. Yet let us send a few troops to Ethiopia and they call me a tyrant.

MARGHERITA

Il Duce, you are going too far.

BENITO

Do you know how uncivilized they are!` My observers in the United States tell me that when American children go to the movies on Saturday afternoons every time they see another Indian being killed, the clap and shout for joy.

MARGHERITA

Trying to rationalizes your actions?

BENITO

I am not encumbered by a Catholic conscience. In the last five years you have opposed everything I have tried to do.

MARGHERITA

And your mother named you after an Indian Mexican revolutionary?

BENITO

Let's not get tied up with sentimental history.

MARGHERITA

Where are your ideals from our socialist days The baby named after the Mexican revolutionary is now the enslaver.

BENITO

(Angrily)Enslaver! DON'T EVER USE THAT WORD TO DESCRIBE ME! I have put a whole chaotic nation together. Remember one thing, Vela. Governing Italy is not difficult. It is useless.

MARGHERITA

But you're trying to mix sauerkraut and spaghetti. May I say something to you?

BENITO

Yes, Vela.

MARGHERITA

I hate your guts.

BENITO

Not really.

He grabs her and they kiss for a long period of time.

MARGHERITA

What do you want!

BENITO

You know what I want.

MARGHERITA

(Sardonically) You want me. That is your only reason for being here.

BENITO

Right. What else?

MARGHERITA

Then may I move in with you?

BENITO

Not possible in the current climate.

MARGHERITA

As I expected. Loneliness could not be your reason for being here.

BENITO

The leader is always lonely. I am a lonely man.

MARGHERITA

Don't dismiss Signorina (or Signora!) Petacci. She is always by your side.

BENITO

Keep Clara's name out of this. I can not believe what came back to me. Did you actually say you hoped she and I would hang by our feet?

MARGHERITA

Never.

BENITO

Why the resentment?

MARGHERITA

There is none.

BENITO

Whatever must be must be.

MARGHERITA

If Il Duce and his masters say so.

BENITO

Don't push it. You're teasing me.

MARGHERITA

Then I have nothing you want. Socialist politics was the basis of our love.

BENITO

Not really.

MARGHERITA

You strip me of my honor, ignore me for four years, and then suddenly show up..

BENITO

You sound like a broken record. No one is holding you here against your will.

MARGHERITA

I wish to leave then.

BENITO

Afraid of me?

MARGHERITA

Yes. I am. The racial laws?

BENITO

What I did was for Italy and the Jews.

MARGHERITA

Ha!

BENITO

One must sometimes bend with the wind. I am a survivor.

MARGHERITA

Even the Vatican speaks out against the new laws. A "cheap emulation of Kristallnacht" is ..

BENITO

I don't want to hear what the Broom says.

MARGHERITA

The broom?

BENITO

The Pope. He looks like a broom. Six feet four and 125 pounds. I must do what I must do, and you will see that I am everyone's protector.

MARGHERITA

How?

BENITO

The leader has no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interests.

MARGHERITA

What does that have to do with racial laws?

BENITO

Those were laws passed to be ignored. We Italians know how to pass those laws. You helped me write many.

MARGHERITA

There is still the humiliation. My daughter is married to a Catholic and converted, my son is married to a Catholic and converted, and I converted ten years ago. Yet by the racial laws even my grandchildren are considered Jewish.

BENITO

There will be no Jewish blood shed in Italy.

MARGHERITA

Just humiliation. You caved to the Germans. Why. Afraid of being called the Kosher Fascist again?

BENITO

Don't push it. Remember, Dr. Piperno, my dentist since 1910, is an Orthodox Jew. I would never allow anyone else to work on my teeth. Last April, Vittorio took part in the Mille Miglia motor race. His co-driver is an Italian Jew. And all my children have friends who are Jewish. The doors to our home have always been and will continue to be open to them.

MARGHERITA

Nonsense! You encourage Italian Jews to leave, prohibit the entry of foreign refugees and force out post 1933 arrivals whom you originally welcomed. You know it's wrong!

BENITO

THE TREE MUST BEND. The first lesson you and I learned in our Socialist days. Jewish blood will pour all over France, Belgium, Poland, Denmark, eventually England. But not in Italy. The craziness will end someday. Isn't that enough.

MARGHERITA

As long as Il Duce controls Italy. And when he does not?

BENITO

(angrily)

That can not happen.

MARGHERITA

They will control your bowel movements.

BENITO

Stop!

MARGHERITA

Well what do you want from me..approval?

BENITO

I hardly need your approval. I want what is best for Margherita.

MARGHERITA

I'm confused.

BENITO

All right. I will remove the racial laws.

MARGHERITA

For me.

BENITO

They never did apply to you. And then what happens? We live happily ever after?

MARGHERITA

Not quite. Your northern neighbors might be very upset.

BENITO

And? What might they do?

MARGHERITA

Send forces into Italy.

BENITO

And then what happens to your precious Jews? And more importantly to Il Duce?

MARGHERITA

You have no backbone.

BENITO

Answer my question!

MARGHERITA

The answer is inevitable.

BENITO

Then be logical. And give me credit for doing the right thing.

MARGHERITA

Why not stand up?

BENITO

BECAUSE YOU CANNOT LASSO AN ELEPHANT GOING UPHILL!

In anger he sweeps his arms across the credenza, sending everything, including a statue of Cesare Sarfatti, onto the floor. The statue chips slightly.

MARGHERITA

You destroyed it!

Mussolini then throws other items on the floor.

BENITO

That is what I think of your opinion!

MARGHERITA

You animal!

He then grabs the Cross on the wall and throws it on the floor. The cross is broken into tiny pieces.

BENITO

That's what I think of your new religion.

MARGHERITA

You bastard! Is nothing sacred?

BENITO

Your second religion is more obstreperous than your first.

MARGHERITA

First you condemn me as a Jew, then as a Catholic, while denigrating me to second class citizenship and demote me because of my heritage!

BENITO

You appreciate nothing, you bitch!

MARGHERITA

And you destroyed the statue of the man you said you loved best.

BENITO

(Weeping)

I did! I truly did. (Tries to piece the broken statue together) It will be brought back to new. I will not allow anything to happen to Cesare. My lawyer. My precious lawyer. He saved me how many times.

MARGHERITA

Today he would be a second class citizen.

BENITO

You're getting me angrier again.

MARGHERITA

I want to murder you.

BENITO

But you can't.

MARGHERITA

Because of repercussions to the Jews.

BENITO

But a more important reason.

MARGHERITA

Because it would be suicidal?

BENITO

Because you still love Il Duce.

MARGHERITA

Let me leave the country.

BENITO

The door is open!

MARGHERITA

I'm leaving!

BENITO

Then go.

MARGHERITA

I will. (Goes toward credenza and pulls out ticket) My ticket has expired.

BENITO

You can drive to Milan.

MARGHERITA

Milan?

BENITO

Have you already forgot the lie you told me earlier.

MARGHERITA

What do you mean?

BENITO

Remember you were not going to leave the country. So it was Argentina!

MARGHERITA

Perhaps!

BENITO

Lying little Jewess!

MARGHERITA

Stop this nonsense.

BENITO

All right, Go!

MARGHERITA

It's expired!

BENITO

Exchange it.

MARGHERITA

You know the current regulations. All I want is to leave the country.

BENITO

Your wish will be granted.

MARGHERITA

I can go.

BENITO

Yes, even though you have lied to me.

MARGHERITA

Perhaps you're not as bad as I had thought.

BENITO

I must go now, and. I will be back momentarily. Our love will never end.

MARGHERITA

You play games with my emotions.

BENITO

Hush! My love.

MARGHERITA

I can actually leave.

BENITO

You wear out my patience, Yes! Now let me go. I shall be back shortly. (Exits)

Margherita turns on the radio which is playing Tchaikovsky. A knock is heard at the door. She answers, and a German military major pushes his way in.

MAJOR KARL KLEMMER

Signora Margherita Sarfatti. I am Major Karl Klemmer.

Act 2

SCENE 1

Margherita stands in disbelief facing the German officer.

MAJOR KARL KLEMMER

I am pleased to be in the company of Italy's arbiter of the arts.

MARGHERITA

What are you doing here?

KLEMMER

I am your transportation.

MARGHERITA

My transportation?

KLEMMER

Your transportation? You seem surprised.

MARGHERITA

That you are here so quickly.

KLEMMER

Whatever *Il Duce* wants, *Il Duce* gets.

MARGHERITA

But he only left a moment ago.

KLEMMER

He can act quickly.

MARGHERITA

I am not quite ready to go. I must pack.

KLEMMER

Let me return then. How much time do you need?

MARGHERITA

I'll let you know.

KLEMMER

That appears like a brush off. I am only here to assist you.

MARGHERITA

Why is a German military officer providing an Italian citizen with transportation?

KLEMMER

A personal favor to *Il Duce*.

MARGHERITA

I will remain here.

KLEMMER

You will miss your plane.

MARGHERITA

Once Il Duce comes back I will provide my own transportation.

KLEMMER

Il Duce runs one of the world's great powers. He can not attend to such minor matters, which is why he has asked me to provide transportation.

MARGHERITA

And he has no one on his staff who can provide transportation?

KLEMMER

Shall we say our relationship is personal. He was here a moment ago.

MARGHERITA

Please leave.

KLEMMER

I intend to escort you.

MARGHERITA

I shall scream.

KLEMMER

Scream.

MARGHERITA

I am not coming!

KLEMMER

Then you run the risk.

MARGHERITA

Run the risk!

KLEMMER

Of missing your plane.

MARGHERITA

I can provide my own transportation.

KLEMMER

You have an Italian temper.

MARGHERITA

I am an Italian. I did not hire a German chauffeur.

KLEMMER

You're in perfectly safe hands. Ah! I am awed by your presence.

MARGHERITA

Why!

KLEMMER

Why not. You are the uncrowned queen of Italy.

MARGHERITA

Perhaps was, but certainly not now. Please leave.

KLEMMER

May I have your autograph.

MARGHERITA

What! You must be mad.

KLEMMER

I am one of your greatest fans.

MARGHERITA

You mock me. Now leave.

KLEMMER

Il Duce will not be amused.

MARGHERITA

Leave.

KLEMMER

All right, I warned you!

MARGHERITA

Get out!

KLEMMER

We are allies. Exits)

Margherita picks up the telephone and sees that there is no dial tone. She slams the phone.

MARGHERITA

Bastard!

The door opens and Il Duce comes in. He carries the repaired bust of Cesare and puts it down.

BENITO
What is wrong with you!

MARGHERITA
Leave.

BENITO
What!

MARGHERITA
I said leave.

BENITO
Are you getting senile?

MARGHERITA
You sent a collaborator ...Nazi...here.

BENITO
You are out of your mind.

MARGHERITA
What!

BENITO
I sent no Nazi or any one else.

MARGHERITA
I will not be driven to a concentration camp!

BENITO
No such thing! You are in Italy!

MARGHERITA
Who was that man who came here!

BENITO
I DO NOT KNOW!

MARGHERITA
First you send an American, then a German.

BENITO
You lost your senses! An American!

MARGHERITA
Remember two things, Il Duce. Harvard is located in Cambridge
and Eugene Meyer is publisher of the Washington Post.

BENITO
I am not an expert on American trivia.

MARGHERITA

How did you get the statue repaired at 1 AM?

BENITO

Nothing is impossible. Now we put Cesare in his proper place.

MARGHERITA

That should take but a brief moment.

BENITO

And no ceremony?

MARGHERITA

Have you gone mad!

BENITO

Who calls the kettle black? Have you such little respect for your husband.

MARGHERITA

I loved my husband and well you know it.

BENITO

I did not know that. And you have no guilt?

MARGHERITA

What!

BENITO

Did you really love him?

MARGHERITA

How dare you ask!

BENITO

Did you?

MARGHERITA

Of course.

BENITO

I have my doubts.

MARGHERITA

You who would have forced him out of the country.

BENITO

He was my lawyer.

MARGHERITA

That's now history.

BENITO

And you who now want to expose him as a cuckold.

MARGHERITA

A cuckold!

BENITO

You do not have a conscience! You whine about your Jewish persecution, you now dangle rosaries, and yet you would shame your husband. He treated you like a queen!

MARGHERITA

Many say you treated me like a queen, and look at me now.

BENITO

Let us save your husband's reputation about your indiscretions.

MARGHERITA

My indiscretions!

BENITO

And there have been many.

MARGHERITA

You call our relationship infidelity.

BENITO

What else?

MARGHERITA

He was well aware of what was going on.

BENITO

Oh? I held him in higher respect than that.

MARGHERITA

The hell you did! Isn't the seducer now pitying the dead aggrieved husband. Comic, almost. Maybe surreal. You now weep for a man dead 16 years.

BENITO

Because his wife has no pity!

MARGHERITA

What are you getting at! How about my love and my honor?

BENITO

You can have both.

MARGHERITA

How!

BENITO

You have in your possession certain letters which could shame him before the entire world. You once knew someone named Il Duce?

MARGHERITA

Which one?

BENITO

The one who once committed adultery.

MARGHERITA

Once! For a man who has seduced thousands of women, and fathered at least five known illegitimate children.

BENITO

They don't count. Here I betrayed a friend.

MARGHERITA

For 14 years before his death. Such remorse! Suddenly.

BENITO

And your conscience is clear!

MARGHERITA

Cesare well knew what was going on, and he never once objected.

BENITO

But did he want the whole world to know?

MARGHERITA

The whole world *did* know.

BENITO

A brave man. A discreet man. So we must keep his honor alive.

MARGHERITA

I have.

BENITO

How?

MARGHERITA

What are you getting at?

BENITO

Corrado Alvaro.

MARGHERITA

The Calabrian Writer?

BENITO

There is only one Corrado Alvaro!

MARGHERITA

What about him.

BENITO

He doesn't like me and he was a member of your salon.
Without my approval.

MARGHERITA

A lot of other anti-fascists were also a part of that group.

BENITO

In certain quarters..and even your American ones,,,they say
that Il Duce and all the Fascists weren't enough to keep
Margherita Sarfatti satisfied..That she had to fall back on
the artists for additional satisfaction...

MARGHERITA

You now call me a slut! (She throws a copy of his biography
at his head.

BENITO

I said no such thing,

MARGHERITA

You bastard.

BENITO

Slut!

He slaps her.

MARGHERITA

Stop.

BENITO

Don't you ever do that again.

He grabs her and holds her closely. She
submits and embraces him.

MARGHERITA

Satan gets his way.

BENITO

Only because I want what is best for everyone.

MARGHERITA

What!

BENITO

For Italy, for Margherita, for Il Duce.. for the Jews...(gazing at the rosary he sees in the room)for the Catholics. I hold the ship together.

MARGHERITA

And what have you done for Catholics?

BENITO

I gave them a home. You would never know that it was I who created Vatican city.. And they have never ceased to criticize me. And they would do more if they could possibly get away with it. (He grabs rosary)What are you doing with a Rosary in this house. Have you gone mad.

MARGHERITA

I never thought I would see a Rosary in Il Duce's hand.

BENITO

But not for long. (he pulls the rosary apart and the beads fall all over the floor.)

MARGHERITA

It was given to me by the Holy Father. You brute!

BENITO

(Picking up each bead.)

This is for the way they treated me in boarding school. This one is for the fat friar who expelled me, and the other one who touched my testicles....This one is for THE BROOM who gives rosaries to Jewish converts.

MARGHERITA

Stop!

BENITO

Why! The Broom loves you more than anyone else.

MARGHERITA

Because I'm a convert?

BENITO

No. He likes your money. I remember when you were anti-clerical. We mocked the bastards together.

MARGHERITA

You are mad.

BENITO

You call ME mad.

MARGHERITA

It is 2:15 a.m. You must return to your quarters.

BENITO

Giving orders?

MARGHERITA

Doesn't HE still call you at 3 every morning. I still can not utter that name.

BENITO

How did you remember?

MARGHERITA

You had better hurry.

BENITO

No one tells Il Duce what to do. You're interested in Hitler's welfare too.

MARGHERITA

Only yours.

A knock is heard at the door.
Margherita opens it and speaks briefly to someone.

MARGHERITA

You're driver is here. An early call from Berlin.

BENITO

Impossible. He's at his summer residence.

MARGHERITA

Come back..with my passport.(Hands him hat)

BENITO

I shall be back in a short while. (Exits)

The phone rings and she puts it down after realizing no one is on the receiving end.

Margherita then goes to drawer and slowly takes out a knife. She examines it thoroughly. A knock is heard on front door.

MARGHERITA

Just a moment. (she puts the knife back into the drawer)Il Duce? (No answer) Il Duce? (No Answer)

The door comes open and Klemmer enters.

KLEMMER

Buon Giorno, Signora Sarfatti. I have returned.

MARGHERITA

Go away.

KLEMMER

Did you ask Il Duce about my presence?

MARGHERITA

I did not. Leave!

KLEMMER

I will take you to your flight.

MARGHERITA

What do you want from me!

KLEMMER

Hear my case?

MARGHERITA

No!

KLEMMER

We do not have time

She hears a knock.

MARGHERITA

Who is it?

JAMES BULLOCK

James Bullock.

MARGHERITA

Please come in.

He enters and seems aghast when he sees Klemmer.

KLEMMER

Good evening, Sir, my name is Major Klemmer.

JAMES BULLOCK

Let me return some other time.

MARGHERITA

Please remain.

KLEMMER

Yes, Mr. Bullock.

JAMES BULLOCK

How do you know my name?

KLEMMER

A well known American journalist.

MARGHERITA

Surprising indeed. I must excuse myself. (Exits)

KLEMMER

(Shouting out) You must come later. I think Signora Sarfatti may want to see you again. (To Margherita). Making a deal?

MARGHERITA

A deal? What kind of a deal!

KLEMMER

Perhaps you might have something to say to him.

MARGHERITA

Get out!

KLEMMER

I have an offer to make you. Do you want to get out of the country?

MARGHERITA

No, I wish to remain here.

KLEMMER

You were ready to depart before Il Duce arrived. All of a sudden you wish to remain.

MARGHERITA

I have changed my mind. I am staying. And what in the hell do I have to gain from coming with you?

KLEMMER

You can leave the country. I'm on your side, Signora Sarfatti. And I can make you an even richer woman.

MARGHERITA

For what!

KLEMMER

I can make you an offer.

MARGHERITA

At three AM!

KLEMMER

My client is willing to pay you two million dollars for the letters.

MARGHERITA

What letters!

KLEMMER

Please.

MARGHERITA

I have no letters.

KLEMMER

Look at me closely.

MARGHERITA

I see you closely enough.

KLEMMER

Then you will recall who I am. Why are you not speaking German?. You speak so well. As I recall seven languages. I only speak five.

MARGHERITA

How do you know all this about me? Oh, the papers. Or the German and Italian intelligence agencies have primed you.

KLEMMER

You really don't recall. The night you said you would never forget. Remember. You were quite passionate.

MARGHERITA

I remember no such meeting.

KLEMMER

Berlin, 1927.

MARGHERITA

Twelve years ago

KLEMMER

The Venetian.

MARGHERITA

I have stayed there.

KLEMMER

Many times. And you preferred pink sheets.

MARGHERITA

I don't even recall who you are.

Klemmer pulls out a watch from his pocket.

KLEMMER

Do you recognize this?

She examines the watch, and recognizes it.

MARGHERITA

Where did you get this watch?

KLEMMER

You gave it to me.

MARGHERITA

I gave this to a young German philosophy student and artist some time ago.

KLEMMER

I am that student.

MARGHERITA

(Examining his face closely) You resemble him only slightly.

KLEMMER

I am now twelve years and 40 pounds heavier. And if you still don't believe me, please recall my one most distinguishing feature.

MARGHERITA

The black scar behind the left ear.

KLEMMER

Take a look.

She examines his ear closely

MARGHERITA

You were not a Nazi then?

KLEMMER

Think back. Our discussions on Kant and Hegel?

MARGHERITA

Who cares. The whole world has changed.

KLEMMER

It was you who changed me.

MARGHERITA

I?

KLEMMER

You' are remembering?

MARGHERITA

Yes. I regret what I did. It seems as if you were providing much resistance. You were a confirmed Marxist.

KLEMMER

And you were the power behind Il Duce.

MARGHERITA

Don't remind me. What brought the change in you?

KLEMMER

I got older. Then there was all that chaos, and he brought order when order and national pride were badly needed in Germany.

MARGHERITA

You are unaware of what is going on?

KLEMMER

I am aware. And it is painful.

MARGHERITA

And as I recall, your mother was part Jewish.

KLEMMER

(Angrily) A LIE! I AM IN NO WAY JEWISH! DON'T YOU EVER SAY THAT AGAIN!

MARGHERITA

I will not.

KLEMMER

And why are you still here, or do you still love that man as I..

MARGHERITA

I do not!

KLEMMER

Oh.

MARGHERITA

Are you a Nazi?

KLEMMER

I am.

MARGHERITA

With the abominations!

KLEMMER

I had an outstanding converter. You..

MARGHERITA

I recall no such thing.

KLEMMER

I argued for socialism and the overthrow by the proletariat.
You said that was old hat and that Fascism was the new way.

MARGHERITA

I thought-ah that is all the past. I have made
mistakes..one which the world will never forgive me for. I
was led a stray..and then even convinced the young and
innocent like you..

KLEMMER

Stop! I was neither young nor innocent when Countess Von
Otto introduced us. You gave me my triumph of the night.
Being with Mussolini's uncrowned queen.

MARGHERITA

That's all I meant to you!

KLEMMER

For one who can barely remember me...

MARGHERITA

Your one night stand!

KLEMMER

At first yes. And then..

MARGHERITA

I should throw you out.

KLEMMER

And then I came to have feelings for you.

MARGHERITA

Even though I was Jewish?

KLEMMER

I did not know at the time, and only found out years later.
I am not anti-Semitic now nor then nor ever.

MARGHERITA

I am no longer young, the years..

KLEMMER

I am now here to return the favor. And I still do have
feelings for you.

MARGHERITA

Then you are not one of Il Duce's agents?

KLEMMER

I am not. You still doubt me?

MARGHERITA

I don't know. What difference would it make.

KLEMMER

Because my conscience has bothered me for many years and I have something to return to you..which will prove for once and for all that I am that same person. (Takes case out of his pocket, and shows her a pearl necklace)

MARGHERITA

Where did you get this? It's been missing for ages.

KLEMMER

I stole it from you that last night ...

MARGHERITA

Bastard! This is the one Il Duce(catches herself)..

KLEMMER

(interrupting) My conscience is now clear. It's yours.

MARGHERITA

I fired my maid over this..

KLEMMER

I'm sorry. But the amends make no difference to..

MARGHERITA

No! Why did you steal!

KLEMMER

I needed the money. You said Il Duce gave them to you and I thought they..

MARGHERITA

Wrong. They were inexpensive..

A knock is heard at the door.
Margherita answers. James Bullock enters

MARGHERITA

It's 3 AM.

JAMES BULLOCK

Have you heard the news?

MARGHERITA

No.

JAMES BULLOCK

Your son's body was found.

MARGHERITA

What?

JAMES BULLOCK

Turn on the radio.

MARGHERITA

(She tuns it on)Why are you interested in the welfare of my son's remains, Mr. Bullock.....

JAMES BULLOCK

As a matter of human principal.

MARGHERITA

And you also want a story?

JAMES BULLOCK

I am interested in your comments. People would like to know.

RADIO COMMENTATOR

And in other news, the remains of one of Italy's greatest war heros, Roberto Sarfatti was discovered in the Italian Alps. Sarfatti died in a heroic air fight in 1918 at the age of sixteen. The body will be flown to his family. Il Duce has decreed that he will receive the highest military funeral...

KLEMMER

Can we be of any assistance.

MARGHERITA

Please leave. I want to be alone.

They hurriedly exit. Margherita goes to luggage and pulls out a photograph of the sculptured tombstone she had erected for her son.

MARGHERITA (cont'd)

At last. An ending. At last. Or is it?

She breaks down crying and then collapses on the couch. The phone rings for a long time.

SCENE 2

The next day. Margherita is asleep on the couch. She is wearing the pearls. A knock is heard at the door. Il Duce opens the door and enters. Margherita is sound asleep. He shakes her. She slowly awakens.

BENITO

You sleep late this morning. Have you heard the news?

MARGHERITA

If true?

BENITO

If true! The bottle is empty. Have you been drinking again.

MARGHERITA

Is it really he?

BENITO

You think I'd fabricate a corpse? I heard about the discovery from my staff.

MARGHERITA

I waited twenty years for the body, and no sign. Your troops searched for the bodies many times during that period, and yet no discovery. Suddenly, the body shows up during a bizarre..

BENITO

And you think that I would stoop to that level?

MARGHERITA

Yes.

He grabs her by the neck and begins choking her.

BENITO

You bitch!

MARGHERITA

Stop, stop. I plead with you!

BENITO

The body is Roberto's.

He pulls a disc from his pocket.

MARGHERITA

What is it!

BENITO

His name disc. Take a look.

MARGHERITA

(Examining closely) It is he!

BENITO

As I told you. And this is also for you.(Hands her a box)

What is it? MARGHERITA

Open it. BENITO

She opens the box and pulls out a rosary.

What is this for? MARGHERITA

A replacement? BENITO

For what? MARGHERITA

You've already forgotten? For the one I stepped on. BENITO

The Il Duce of old. MARGHERITA

The same Il Duce. Read the inscription. BENITO

"From his Holiness, Pius the Twelfth. MARGHERITA

It is yours. He has given me twelve rosaries to date. BENITO

When can I retrieve the body. MARGHERITA

He is being sent to your Il Soldo. BENITO

The estate is closed. MARGHERITA

Then where shall it be sent? BENITO

Send it here. MARGHERITA

His burial site is at I Soldi. BENITO

Times have changed. Will he be given a military funeral? MARGHERITA

Of course.

BENITO

When?

MARGHERITA

Several weeks, perhaps a month.

BENITO

Why so long?

MARGHERITA

Are you in a hurry?

BENITO

Yes! I am leaving the country!

MARGHERITA

Then you lied to me!

BENITO

You knew from the beginning!

MARGHERITA

Of course I did. I could have you arrested.

BENITO

I can read it now: 'Former Uncrowned Queen of Italy Arrested'

MARGHERITA

On espionage and other charges! Like the English say, the charge is more important than the crime itself!

BENITO

And why can I not leave the country which now relegates me to second class citizenship. And mind you, when this is all through, your opposition will never forgive me. I am a banished woman. I have been eyeballed out of society.

MARGHERITA

You dare to predict my downfall! What I always thought. The biographer predicts her biographee's downfall.

BENITO

A biography which you now say is superficial! What do you want? Il Duce!

MARGHERITA

All of the papers which I entrusted to you and which were never returned.

MARGHERITA

I do not have them.

BENITO

Why not!

MARGHERITA

They were returned to you fifteen years ago. And besides there was nothing in there that hasn't already appeared in newspapers a hundred times

BENITO

I have no record of it.

MARGHERITA

Check with your vast bureaucracy.

BENITO

And nothing of importance!

MARGHERITA

Nothing.

BENITO

The Matteoti files are missing.

MARGHERITA

They were returned! And I had nothing to do with that dreadful murder, and you know it!

BENITO

Ha! You were well aware, and the blood is on your hands as well as anyone else.

MARGHERITA

You suddenly care about a man you had murdered 15 years ago!

BENITO

I had nothing to do with it and you know it.

MARGHERITA

Ha! Besides, just one more murder would not make a great difference.

BENITO

Any correspondence you may have in your possession?

MARGHERITA

Such as?

BENITO

Any matters of state.

MARGHERITA

None.

BENITO

You had access to the correspondence.

MARGHERITA

Of fifteen years ago and returned to you. What do you want?

BENITO

I ask you the same. Is it money you're after?

MARGHERITA

Hardly.

BENITO

After all you are worth the equivalent of 5 million American dollars.

MARGHERITA

Are you now insane! What can I possibly demand money for?

BENITO

The letters! The biographical material!

MARGHERITA

Why would I want to sell them?

BENITO

MONEY! REVENGE! HUMILIATION!

MARGHERITA

Do what you will to me. I DO NOT HAVE THEM!

BENITO

I have made a decision. THERE WILL BE A SLAUGHTER IN ITALY.

MARGHERITA

Beginning when?

BENITO

Shortly.

MARGHERITA

And how many do you intend to roundup?

BENITO

Not many. In fact, just one.

MARGHERITA

Who!

You!

BENITO

Do as you will.

MARGHERITA

Life can be made quite miserable for you.

BENITO

Such as?

MARGHERITA

You will be arrested.

BENITO

For what?

MARGHERITA

The headlines themselves would hang you. JEWISH BIOGRAPHER
ACTS AS AGENT FOR FRENCH.

BENITO

You think the Italian people would be convinced by that?

MARGHERITA

Yes. After all you were privy to all that information.

BENITO

And then if the letters were to be revealed?

MARGHERITA

Ah! So you do have the letters?

BENITO

Yes!

MARGHERITA

You will never leave this room.

BENITO

So be it!

MARGHERITA

You will be arrested shortly.

BENITO

Go ahead!

MARGHERITA

Why will you not return the letters?

MARGHERITA
Because they are all I have of you.

BENITO
Blackmailer!

MARGHERITA
Why would I want to blackmail?

BENITO
For the atrocities you perceive.

MARGHERITA
What? A few love letters? Look, if you want them that badly let us trade.

BENITO
Trade?

MARGHERITA
Return the letters I sent you.

BENITO
I don't have them.

MARGHERITA
Did you discard them?

BENITO
No.

MARGHERITA
Where are they?

BENITO
I don't know.

MARGHERITA
Mine too are lost then.

BENITO
Ah! Have you trapped Il Duce?

MARGHERITA
Just let me out of the country!

BENITO
Return what is not yours!

MARGHERITA
Likewise!

Return them. BENITO

You're hurting me. MARGHERITA

Suddenly they find themselves face to face, and begin kissing.

You can not separate yourself from me. BENITO

No, I can not. MARGHERITA

Nor I you. BENITO

They begin kissing again

Care for more wine MARGHERITA

Yes. BENITO

Have you noticed the pearls I am wearing? MARGHERITA

No. Should I? BENITO

I guess not. MARGHERITA

SCENE 3

Several hours later. Margherita and Il Duce are lying on floor beside empty wine glasses and a bottle of wine. Il Duce is sound asleep. Margherita awakens. She looks at Il Duce, and feels that revulsion she has towards him. She deliberately rises and walks towards the credenza. She opens a drawer and slowly pulls out the knife. She looks up to the ceiling fearfully. Il Duce continues sleeping.

She lies beside him,. He turns several times.

She holds the knife to her side. She tries to stab him several times, but finds that she can not do it.

DARK

Margherita is still awake, while Il Duce is sound asleep. She keeps her eye on him, desperately wanting to stab him. She then pulls the knife up and attempts to stab him in the heart. Il Duce awakens quickly and wrests the knife from her.

BENITO

Ah. A murderess. Judith revived. I am not Holofernes, however. I must apologize to you for that.

(He twists her arm.)

MARGHERITA

You're hurting me.

BENITO

Accept my apologies. But I have been observing you for two hours. Il Duce never sleeps.

Twists her arm even more.

MARGHERITA

You're hurting me! Stop!

BENITO

(Smiling) You should not murder me. A biographer should not murder her biographee.

MARGHERITA

Stop.

BENITO

The question is: Should the biographee murder the biographer?

MARGHERITA

Stop!

BENITO

Is the murderess in pain?

MARGHERITA

(Crying) Stop!

BENITO

Are you the reincarnation of Judith?

MARGHERITA

No!

BENITO

(Smiling)And am I your Holofernes?

MARGHERITA

(Crying)Please stop!

BENITO

(Letting go and taking the knife). Ah, Vela. Would you have murdered Il Duce?

MARGHERITA

No.

BENITO

I believe you. This would not be good for Vela. This would not be good for the Jews. Can you read the newspaper headlines "JEWISH MISTRESS ASSASSINATES IL DUCE"? Nothing could please the Germans more.

MARGHERITA

You won't let me go?

BENITO

Maybe shortly.

They kiss.

MARGHERITA

You're the devil.

BENITO

Here is the knife. Put it away. The letters and the other papers?

MARGHERITA

Here is the knife. Do as you wish.

BENITO

It's your property not mine.

MARGHERITA

(Putting it away)Would you like some coffee?

BENITO

Just the letters. You must have at least a thousand.

MARGHERITA

No. One thousand two hundred and seventy eight.

BENITO

Where are they.

MARGHERITA

They are out of the country.

BENITO

My agents will retrieve them. Switzerland?

MARGHERITA

No.

BENITO

Where!

MARGHERITA

Can I believe that a man who deems himself the world's greatest leader will spend two days trying to retrieve some silly old love letters.

BENITO

FOR THE HONOR OF ITALY, FOR THE HONOR OF MARGHERITA, FOR THE HONOR OF CESARE, FOR THE HONOR OF ROBERTO. Il Duce will do anything....

MARGHERITA

Cesare is dead! Margherita's honor has already been destroyed, let alone the humiliation. And the Italy that has survived thousands of invasions, civil wars, plagues and even Il Duce can certainly survive a few love letters.

BENITO

Then why!

MARGHERITA

If revealed to the world, the letters will show how much of your ideology and intellectual formation was due to the influence of a woman and a Jew!

BENITO

Let's not get into that again.

MARGHERITA

Your only concern is your prestige and the Rome-Berlin Axis. Given Hitler's anti-Semitism, the appalling contradictions will make the you and the Nazis the laughing stock of the world!

BENITO

Perhaps wishful thinking on your part. (he begins departing)

MARGHERITA

I still love you.

BENITO

Then return the letters. Do you need my love to be in writing?

MARGHERITA

No. The letters are mine.

BENITO

And if I charge you with treason?

MARGHERITA

The letters will be released.

BENITO

Then you really have lied!

MARGHERITA

Yes. Partly for the love, mostly for the hatred.

BENITO

Is there no honor among us?

MARGHERITA

And can you not trust me with the letters?

BENITO

No one is ever trusted

The phone rings, and Margherita picks it up .

MARGHERITA

That's right. Thank you. Barring any obstacles I will be there.
(Turning to Il Duce) Roberto's body is ready to be taken to North of Asiago May I go?

BENITO

Of course.

MARGHERITA

Truly?

BENITO

Of course.

MARGHERITA

Escorted.?

BENITO

Only if you wish.

MARGHERITA

Il Duce, for the last time. Why have you spent all this time here?

BENITO

To be with you as much as to get the letters.

MARGHERITA

You do have feelings for me then?

BENITO

Yes. This time you can go.

MARGHERITA

With no letters in return?

BENITO

Right. Because I believe in my heart you will never dishonor that Italian hero you are burying, nor Italy

MARGHERITA

I know the rest.

BENITO

There was another reason why I came.

MARGHERITA

Yes?

BENITO

To do the right thing. You were dismissed without notice. I came to say good bye in a proper way to the one who gave me the support I needed when I needed it.

MARGHERITA

And dropped when convenient.

BENITO

Do you want the relationship resumed?

MARGHERITA

That would depend..

BENITO

No contingencies..

MARGHERITA

They would never allow it and well you know it!

BENITO

I can not give up Italy's alliance to preserve our relationship. Italy comes before Il Duce, Margherita, Rachele, Clara, Cesare..All.

MARGHERITA

Let us have our last wine together.

BENITO

Shall I pour.

MARGHERITA

Please do.

Il Duce pours wine.

BENITO

And what gives you the idea that I will release you?

MARGHERITA

A murderer you are, and no one can verify that better than I. Much blood on your hands, but always with reason. A senseless murderer you are not.

BENITO

Meaning?

MARGHERITA

That you are going to allow me to go to my son's funeral.

BENITO

And then?

MARGHERITA

And then leave the country.

BENITO

You overestimate my humanity.

MARGHERITA

But there can be honor among us.

BENITO

And?

MARGHERITA

That the letters will never be released while you are alive. And only perhaps after you are dead.

BENITO

And if you die first.

MARGHERITA

They can not be released.

BENITO

Then you expect honor among us.

I do.

MARGHERITA

Then Vela, you win.

BENITO

But I have lost all else. And we will never meet again.

MARGHERITA

That is correct.

BENITO

One last drink.

MARGHERITA

One last drink.

BENITO

They drink and kiss.

MARGHERITA

But before I go, there is one letter I have for you (She pulls it out of her dress)

BENITO

I can see from here that it is not my writing.

MARGHERITA

Look closer (Brings the letter closer to his eyes)

BENITO

Rachele's writing.

MARGHERITA

Yes.

He tries to grab the letters and she pulls back.

BENITO

I want that letter.

MARGHERITA

I will read it to you and then you may have it to do with as you would.

BENITO

Read!

MARGHERITA

Dated February 7, 1928.

BENITO

When I was ill?

MARGHERITA

And I visited you.

BENITO

Rachele was upset.

MARGHERITA

And she expressed this in the letter, which I am giving you. But let me read you only the last line. "And because of your shameless visit, he burned all the letters you have sent him for the past seventeen years."

BENITO

Give it to me.

MARGHERITA

And I believe she was telling the truth.

BENITO

She lied. She could not have destroyed all those letters. There must have been a thousand.

MARGHERITA

Three thousand five hundred and seventy two letters. I had to send three for each one you sent. You accused me of spending too much time with my own husband and my family. I was to be Il Duce's and only Il Duce's. And then you signed the treaty of..

BENITO

Stop. You will not dictate foreign policy.

MARGHERITA

Where are they then?

BENITO

I don't know. And had she burned that many letters, she could have set all of Rome on fire for the second time.

MARGHERITA

You have no justice. (beat) Somehow, I think Vela is still in your heart somewhere.

BENITO

Sometimes.

MARGHERITA

I wish I could say I wish you the best.

BENITO

Il Duce is till in your heart. Then let us do the tango. They like the tango where you are going. And you have no choice.

He pulls her to him and they begin the tango, but Il Duce's steps are wrong.

MARGHERITA

May I show you?

BENITO

Like in 1911.

MARGHERITA

The tango is much more interesting than socialism. Let's begin. T-A-N-G-O. T-A-N-G-O.

She leads briefly and then Il Duce learns and takes over. They passionately tango for nearly two minutes.

MARGHERITA (cont'd)

And does Il Duce notice my white pearls.

BENITO

Yes of course. You always wear nice jewelry. But should you wear such expensive jewelry while travelling?

MARGHERITA

I shall remove them when I leave. And, yes, your letters do have 97 unflattering references to Adolph Hitler. How times have changed! But the world will never see them.

BENITO

Thank you. (beat) Margherita taught me much.

MARGHERITA

Let me get out of the dream. I no longer have a driver.

BENITO

You will be driven.

MARGHERITA

By the Nazi?

BENITO

I don't know who you mean.

MARGHERITA

Klemmer?

BENITO

He is an imposter and blackmailer who was trying to get the letters from you. He has been arrested.

MARGHERITA

You're telling the truth?

BENITO

Would I lie to you?

MARGHERITA

Then who?

BENITO

Mr. Bullock. An English driver.

MARGHERITA

And one of your intelligence operatives?

BENITO

(Smiles and winks) Arriverderci. (Begins to leave and then stops.) And if you land in England, don't spend too much time with Churchill. He reeks with alcohol and tobacco. (exits)

MARGHERITA

He doesn't live in Argentina.

BENITO

Remember, Vela, you are his equal.

MARGHERITA

Equal!

BENITO

You will go down in history as the Jewish Mother of Fascism.

MARGHERITA

Fascism with racism is the world's worst government. Fascism without racism is the world's best government.

BENITO

Arriverdci, cara mia .

Margherita goes to her purse and pulls out a photograph of Il Duce. She attempts to tear it and realizes she can not. Then she goes back to the desk and pastes it together again. She then notices a package which had been left by Il Duce. She opens it.

MARGHERITA

(To herself) Il Duce! Documentation for M. Sarfatti's entry into France!

EPILOGUE

The stage is dark.

RADIO COMMENTATOR

And in Rome, Margherita Sarfatti, onetime mistress, confidant, and biographer of Benito Mussolini, died in Rome at the age of 81, outliving her onetime lover by sixteen years. Mussolini himself was hung by his feet with his more famous mistress, Clara Petacci, by his side in 1945 as they tried to cross the Italian border.

BENITO (O.S.)

And the letters, the letters! Margherita got them to America. They are still in a private vault in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania today in 2003, and never to be released. After all, Margherita really was a woman of honor. Yes, she was.

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