

MARGHERITA

Two Act Opera

By
ANTHONY ERNEST GALLO

ACT 1

ROME 1939 MARGHERITA SARFATTI'S APARTMENT,

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?

BENITO

ONE OF YOUR SECRET LOVERS. YEARS AGO.

MARGHERITA

AT MY AGE? I'M TOO OLD FOR LOVERS.

GO AWAY. I DO NOT KNOW YOU! I'VE BEEN LABELLED AN UNDESIRABLE.
 YOU DO THE BEST IMPERSONATION I HAVE EVER HEARD OF THAT PLEASE LEAVE. I WANT TO SLEEP.
 SURELY THIS IS A DREAM. AH, A SHALLOW LOVE. YEARS AGO.

BENITO

I AM YOUR LOVER. I'M SURE I DO, BECAUSE I AM HE. THE ONE WHOSE BIOGRAPHY YOU WROTE. YOU SEEM ANGRY. I'M NOT A CRAZY POET EITHER.
 AND YOU ARE AWARE THAT HE IS VERY ILL. WE SPENT HOURS TOGETHER (GENTLY) OPEN, OR I SHALL BREAK THROUGH THIS DOOR.

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.

MARGHERITA

A LION? THE EMPIRE HAS NO JUNGLES UNLESS ONE WAS BUILT RECENTLY. I DON'T KISS STRANGERS. I DON'T KISS STRANGERS. I DON'T KISS STRANGERS.

BENITO

GR-R-RR. ETHIOPIA HAS RAIN FORESTS. (BEAT) MAY AM I STILL A STRANGER? I KNOW EVEN THE MOLE BELOW YOUR LOVELY NECK.

MARGHERITA

SURELY YOU HAVE MORE IMPORTANT MATTERS THAN THE MOLE ON MY NECK. WHICH OF IL DUCE'S LIONS ARE YOU? RAS OR ITALIA?

BENITO

BOTH ARE NOW DEAD. I AM THE GHOST OF RAS A LION HAS MUCH TIME. WE HAVE NOT SEEN ONE ANOTHER IN A LONG TIME STOP THIS NONSENSE. IL DUCE DOES NOT BELIEVE IN GHOSTS.

BENITO

YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT. TESTING ME? YOUR FAITHFUL SERVANT.

He removes his mask. The man is Benito Mussolini.

MARGHERITA

OUT OF UNIFORM? AND ABSENT FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS? HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE BUILDING! BENITO, I AM BUSY. TWENTY EIGHT YEARS. IS THERE SOMETHING YOU WANT?

BENITO

SO COLD. AS IF OUR 25 YEARS COUNTED FOR NOTHING WHATEVER HE WANTS, IL DUCE GETS. LIONS DO NOT WEAR UNIFORMS. MATTERS OF STATE. DON'T TREAT ME LIKE A STRANGER. I AM IL DUCE. THAT MUSIC --ARTURO TOSCANNINI? A TRAITOR?

MARGHERITA

OF COURSE. AND HE IS NOT A TRAITOR...THREE YEARS IS A LONG TIME. WHEN YOU ACTUALLY TURNED YOUR BACK ON ME AT LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S FUNERAL.
(BEAT) YOU SHOULD HAVE CALLED FIRST.

BENITO

THE PHONE IS OUT OF ORDER. TRY IT! PROBABLY A POWER FAILURE. IT SHOULD COME BACK ON SHORTLY. ALL THE PACKING?

MARGHERITA

COINCIDENTAL? I USED IT A SHORT WHILE AGO. IT WAS WORKING BEFORE YOU ARRIVED. I'M SENDING SOME THINGS TO MY DAUGHTER IN MILAN.

BENITO

SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE PAINTINGS. LIKE THIS -BOCCIONI. DO YOU NORMALLY TRAVEL WITH YOUR PAINTINGS? AND THIS PAINTING OF JUDITH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT BEHEADING HOLOFERNES? I THOUGHT IT WAS IN A MUSEUM?

MARGHERITA

ONLY A REPRODUCTION. A SELF PORTRAIT BY ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI. NOT A REPRODUCTION. AH, YES. YOU PREFER GERMAN PAINTERS?

BENITO

THE PAINTER OF THE JEWISH MURDERESS BEHEADING THE ENEMY GENERAL AFTER SHE ENTICED HIM INTO BED? BOTH PAINTER AND SUBJECT OBVIOUSLY HATED MEN. I AM NOT AMUSED. I COULD BE AMUSED. YOU PREFER BOCCIONI AND THAT MAN-HATER TO ME?

He touches both paintings with
knife.

BENITO (cont'd)

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

STOP! THESE ARE A PRICELESS PAINTINGS! AND YOU ARE NOT IL WE ARE EITHER IN A DREAM OR YOU ARE AN IMPOSTER. IL DUCE! IL DUCE DOES NOT DRINK! HE CAN NOT TOLERATE ALCOHOL.

BENITO

TIMES CHANGE. MY ULCER IS GONE.

MARGHERITA

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? YOU'RE THINKING "THUGS." THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS AWARDED YOU 14 MEDALS SINCE 1936. YOU HAVE NOT PICKED UP A SINGLE ONE OF THEM.

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

MARGHERITA

I DO NOT WANT THEM. HERE IS YOUR DRINK.

BENITO

IS IT POISONED? I JEST OF COURSE. I HAVE ALWAYS TRUSTED YOU.
YOU KNOW YOU CAN LEAVE ITALIA WHENEVER YOU WANT

MARGHERITA

I'LL TRADE? I INSIST.(SHE EXCHANGES DRINKS) LEAVE?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. TIMES HAVE
CHANGED BUT ONLY ON THE SURFACE.

The phone rings and she answers

MARGHERITA

PECULIAR!. ...YES, THIS IS MARGHERITA SARFATTI.THE
FLIGHT IS CANCELLED?...INCLEMENT WEATHER?...THERE IS NO
INCLEMENT WEATHER! OH.....ARRIVERDICI.ALL FLIGHTS? ..VERY
WELL. THE FLIGHT HAS BEEN CANCELLED! CURIOUS! THE WEATHER IS
QUITE GOOD. I AM ONLY VISITING MY DAUGHTER IN MILAN.

BENITO

HAPPENS ALL THE TIME. THERE'LL BE OTHERS. 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? 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.
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

MARGHERITA PICKS UP PHONE

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. 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. 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

LEAVE THE ETHIOPIANS ALONE. YOU SHOULD HAVE CONQUERED THE
SOUTH OF ITALY RATHER THAN THE NORTH OF ETHIOPIA. PERHAPS
YOU REMEMBER THE INCIDENT.(GIGGLES) 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.
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. CAN I POUR YOU MORE WINE?

BENITO
WATER.

MARGHERITA
I KNEW YOUR STOMACH WOULD BOTHER YOU. GIVE ME A MINUTE. I MUST SPEAK TO THE CONCIERGE. I'LL BE BACK IN A MOMENT.

BENITO
THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY. I SAID STOP!

MARGHERITA
I AM IN MY OWN APARTMENT. GO TO HELL.

He grabs her by the arm.

BENITO
DON'T YOU EVER USE THAT LANGUAGE WITH ME. NOW OPEN THE DOOR.

MARGHERITA
YOU'RE HURTING ME!

Benito lets go. 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. THEN GET THE DOOR AND TELEPHONE REPAIRED. BUT YOU RUN ALL OF GREATER ITALY. CAESAR NOW EVEN HAS HIS COLONIES.

BENITO
CAESAR IS NOT A REPAIRMAN, HOWEVER. RACIAL LAWS YES. INOPERATIVE DOORS NO. DON'T BE AFRAID. TRUST ME! HAVE I EVER BETRAYED YOU! IT'S YOUR BUILDING. NOT MINE. YOU'RE HAVING HOUSING PROBLEMS AND YOU BLAME THE GOVERNMENT OF ITALY.

MARGHERITA
PLEASE LEAVE. I SHALL SCREAM FROM THE BALCONY,

BENITO
HOW CAN I? WE'RE TRAPPED.

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

MARGHERITA

YOU KNEW! WHY. I HATE YOU! I CLOSED MY EYES TOO MUCH. AND I ACQUIESCED! THE DEVIL'S POISON, THE GLAMOUR, AND THE POWER HELD ME. WE WERE YOUNG AND FULL OF IDEALS.

BENITO

FOR THE GOOD OF ITALY. YOU WELL KNEW WHAT WAS GOING ON. YOU COULD HAVE LEFT AT ANY TIME. WE MADE ITALY. WITHOUT YOU I WOULD NEVER HAVE SUCCEEDED. REALITY SETS IN. LET US HAVE ANOTHER DRINK, VELA.

MARGHERITA

IF YOU PLAY THE VIOLIN. IT'S ONLY US THIS TIME. (HANDS HIM A VIOLIN) RACHELE DOES NOT APPROVE OF YOUR DRINKING BUT LET US HAVE A DRINK TO OLD TIMES. DOES SHE HAVE A NEW LOVER? YOU BEAT THE RAILROAD MASTER SO BADLY THAT NO ONE DARE.

BENITO

ARE YOU EMBARRASSING ME AGAIN. ANCIENT HISTORY. WHY BRING UP THAT SUBJECT? MAY I HAVE WATER? THE LAST TIME YOU PUT ME IN THIS POSITION BEFORE TOSCANNINI. THAT FOX. JOIN ME ON THE PIANO? IS THIS THE ONE I GAVE CESARE.

MARGHERITA

YES. SHALL WE DO BRAHM'S CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND VIOLIN? ONE MORE DRINK TO OLD TIMES. ARE YOU ENJOYING THE WATER?

Benito sees a letter on the desk

BENITO

MAY I READ. 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

YOU KNOW IT BY HEART. FORBIDDEN FRUIT TASTES THAT GOOD? OR YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY AT WORK. BUT THE WRITING IS YOURS. THESE ARE MY WORDS. MAY I HAVE THE LETTER? WHERE IS THE ORIGINAL?

MARGHERITA

I DO NOT HAVE ANY LETTERS.

BENITO

AH, PERHAPS YOU WILL FIND THEM..IN THE MEANTIME WILL YOU DANCE WITH ME?

MARGHERITA

YOU'RE AN IMPOSTER! PLEASE LEAVE! IL DUCE DOES NOT DANCE.

BENITO

AN IMPOSTER? YOU HAVE LOST YOUR MIND. HERE IS A WALTZ. LET US DANCE. WHEN YOU DANCE WITH A WOLF, YOU CAN ONLY EXPECT TO BE DEVoured.

 Puts on a recording. He gently
pulls her to him and they begin
dancing.

BENITO (cont'd)

YOU DANCE MORE BEAUTIFULLY THAN EVER. DANCING WITH SUCH GENTILITY. I DANCE WITH A QUEEN.

MARGHERITA

STOP! 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? 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. AS YOUR PRISONER, DON'T I HAVE THE RIGHT TO JOKE? DO YOU RECOGNIZE THE WINE GLASSES? 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! YOU'VE YOU BEEN READING AMERICAN TABLOIDS! YOU ARE NOT MY PRISONER, AND YOU DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO MOCK. YES. 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.

BENITO

PICK IT UP. VIRTUALLY NO ONE KNOWS I'M HERE.

MARGHERITA
HELLO....YES. HE'S HERE..IT'S FOR YOU

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)

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
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?
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.

MARGHERITA

A generous offer.

JAMES BULLOCK

You will accept?

MARGHERITA

No.

JAMES BULLOCK

Is the offer insufficient?

MARGHERITA

Yes.

JAMES BULLOCK

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

MARGHERITA

The offer would be considered, but...

JAMES BULLOCK

But?

MARGHERITA

I can not accept.

JAMES BULLOCK

Why?

MARGHERITA

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.

JAMES BULLOCK

But Signora Sarfatti, the whole world knows..

MARGHERITA

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.

JAMES BULLOCK

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 more 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

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 chocking 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)

MARGHERITA
What is it?

BENITO
Open it.

She opens the box and pulls out a
rosary.

MARGHERITA
What is this for?

BENITO
A replacement?

MARGHERITA
For what?

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

MARGHERITA
The Il Duce of old.

BENITO
The same Il Duce. Read the inscription.

MARGHERITA

"From his Holiness, Pius the Twelfth.

BENITO

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

MARGHERITA

When can I retrieve the body.

BENITO

He is being sent to your Il Soldo.

MARGHERITA

The estate is closed.

BENITO

Then where shall it be sent?

MARGHERITA

Send it here.

BENITO

His burial site is at I Soldi.

MARGHERITA

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

BENITO

Of course.

MARGHERITA

When?

BENITO

Several weeks, perhaps a month.

MARGHERITA

Why so long?

BENITO

Are you in a hurry?

MARGHERITA

Yes! I am leaving the country!

BENITO

Then you lied to me!

MARGHERITA

You knew from the beginning!

BENITO

Of course I did. I could have you arrested.

MARGHERITA

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

BENITO

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

MARGHERITA

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.

BENITO

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

MARGHERITA

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

BENITO

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!

BENITO

You!

MARGHERITA

Do as you will.

BENITO

Life can be made quite miserable for you.

MARGHERITA

Such as?

BENITO

You will be arrested.

MARGHERITA

For what?

BENITO

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

MARGHERITA

You think the Italian people would be convinced
by that?

BENITO

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

MARGHERITA

And then if the letters were to be revealed?

BENITO

Ah! So you do have the letters?

MARGHERITA

Yes!

BENITO

You will never leave this room.

MARGHERITA

So be it!

BENITO

You will be arrested shortly.

MARGHERITA

Go ahead!

BENITO

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!

BENITO
Return them.

MARGHERITA
You're hurting me.

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

BENITO
You can not separate yourself from me.

MARGHERITA
No, I can not.

BENITO
Nor I you.

They begin kissing again

MARGHERITA
Care for more wine

BENITO
Yes.

MARGHERITA
Have you noticed the pearls I am wearing?

BENITO
No. Should I?

MARGHERITA
I guess not.

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.

MARGHERITA

I do.

BENITO

Then Vela, you win.

MARGHERITA

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

BENITO

That is correct.

MARGHERITA

One last drink.

BENITO

One last drink.

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. We revolutionaries could never have peace in life, but what we've done can never be undone.

MARGHERITA

For better or for worse. 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 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.