

DEAR ABORIGINES

a play by
ETTA CASCINI

Translated from the Italian by Kay Mccarthy

Special award at the Vallecorsi Theatre Festival



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DEAR ABORIGINES

Play in two parts

by

Etta Cascini

Synopsis The plot is inspired by a true event. The play is structured in two parts in which the stories of the characters are interwoven with the ascent and fall of the protagonist Edmonda. She is 50 and a successful teacher of Sociology at the university. When she meets Massimo, 35, she falls in love with him. In order to win his love she promises him a good job at the university. Massimo has no academic degrees and Edmonda resorts to deceit and blackmail in the same way she did for her own career. Massimo is charmed by Edmonda and leaves his girl friend. When the girl reveals to Edmonda her pregnancy the teacher convinces her to have an abortion. Massimo discovers the tricks and treacheries Edmonda has used to improve her power and he pays her back in the same way. The denouement is deliberately provocative and against the audience prediction.

ILSECOLO XIX (an Italian newspaper) Friday, 18th. Feb. 1994

GENOVA - The Genoese playwright and journalist, Etta Cascini, was awarded a prize at the "Vallecorsi theatrical competition" for the play by her entitled "Dear Aborigines".

For this play, Etta Cascini, the only woman "on the winners' platform", drew inspiration from a case of female careerism: an authentic, by no means isolated, if anything, emblematic, case. It might well fit a number of present-day "women at the top".

The jury stated that its choice fell on "Dear Aborigines" because:

" It tells of the ascent, decline and the well-deserved defeat of an overly-ambitious career-woman. It is an intelligent and witty investigation of the overt and occult risks surrounding today's female world. The characters are well-defined, the play itself full of stimuli."

CHARACTERS

- EDMONDA (Edmo) : about 50, professor of sociology, ruthless, ambitious, always prepared to use others.
- MASSIMO BIANCHI (Max) : 35-year-old librarian. He considers himself a failure. Vain, somewhat childish.
- ANTONELLA : about 20. A sociology student. Edmonda's private secretary and factotum.
- CLARA : about 30. An unemployed sociology graduate. She carries out occasional research on Edmonda's behalf. She is in love with Massimo Bianchi.
- BENITO MORETTI : about 60, a journalist of ordinary talent, a gossip columnist.

THE SCENERY

The stage is divided into two distinct areas where the action takes place in alternating fashion.

To the left Edmonda's office, to the right her bedroom.

Depending on where the action takes place, this area of the stage will be lit up, while the other remains in darkness.

Another possible solution is a revolving stage.

Edmonda's office : a writing-table, bookcases around the walls, chairs.

A sobre, rather masculine environment.

Edmonda's bedroom : a davenport, coloured cushions. A record-player, a carpet, a mirror.

Markedly female environment.

PART ONE

SCENE:

Edmonda's office. Edmonda and ANTONELLA are already on stage.

EDMO is on the telephone while ANTONELLA is arranging some books.

EDMO : (On the phone) But don't you realize that man is just exploiting his position? ... I imagine that means the girl has no choice
The professor and the pupil! An old, old story! ... Romantic? There's no romance
left these days ... Let's be serious, my dear, have
I ever denied a young student anything? Not I... Well, in that case, you don't know me ... Oh, alright then, send her over to me, if you wish ... No, don't thank me. No, for goodness' sake, I'm the one who must thank you.

(Putting the receiver down)

That's power. Power in its most corrupt form.

ANTONELLA : Excuse me, but where shall I put these books?

EDMO : I can't stand these power-mongers. There they sit upon their chairs like so many vultures, awaiting their prey. She's a good student ...
(To Antonella) No, not there. They're to go on the top shelf ...
Continuing on the phone) She admires him a lot, who knows why, and she's always helped him with his research...

ANTONELLA : From research ... straight into the old Prof.'s bed.

EDMO : How sad for a girl ... Do you understand? Nothing's changed.

ANTONELLA : It's such a shame!

EDMO : We women never take advantage of our position ... we're above that.

ANTONELLA : You can say that again!

EDMO : We women have a conscience.

ANTONELLA : It's just when you need to work...

EDMO : Let's be honest. I'll do my best to help her, the poor thing but it won't be easy. Who am I supposed to be? A dispensing machine that churns out scholarships? Just push a button and, voilà, the millions come rolling out ... The coffee?

ANTONELLA : It's ready. (She goes to get the cups and lays them on the table)

EDMO : (Tasting the coffee) But this coffee's cold!

ANTONELLA : I'm sorry, Professor. I'll make some more.

EDMO : No, don't bother. Let's not waste time. Bring me the paper I'm reading at the sociology meeting.

ANTONELLA : I've still got to put it on the hard disc.

EDMO : Leave the computer alone, that's Clara's business. You just print the copies and sent one to the moderator with my visiting-card. here you are. This is the address, sent it off at the earliest.

ANTONELLA : I'll get it done at once, Professor.

EDMO : Edmonda! How many times must I tell you? My name is Edmonda. Cut out all this "Professor" stuff!

ANTONELLA : Yes, Professor, that is, I meant to say ... Edmonda.

EDMO : Antonella, how long have you been here?

ANTONELLA : Three months.

EDMO : Don't you know yet?

ANTONELLA : qat?

EDMO : What we all use first names around here. Here there are no hierarchies! ...

ANTONELLA : Great! However ... I mean... Even here...

EDMO : What?

ANTONELLA : There's always someone on top and someone on the bottom...

EDMO : That is?

ANTONELLA : The boss...

EDMO : Let's do away with bosses!

ANTONELLA : I think bosses are necessary...

EDMO : But don't you understand? Today we are all one against the other. All ready to pounce ruthlessly on each other and for what? For what?
To become the boss...

CLARA : (Entering) Or bump him off!

ANTONELLA : Clara!

CLARA : Good morning to you all. Here I am!

ANTONELLA : So, you haven't disappeared. We expected you last Thursday...

CLARA : I had to go to Rome twice to find these documents.

EDMO : You know perfectly well we're behind time; that means trouble.

CLARA : But now we've got everything. These are the originals. And here's the documentation.

EDMO : At last. Let me see. (Leafing through the file) Is that all?

CLARA : (Pulling out another folder) And here are the statements made by the women who were interviewed.

EDMO : How did they respond?

CLARA : I haven't a clue about the whole thing...

ANTONELLA : (Under her breath) I'd have sworn so much...

EDMO : Antonella?

ANTONELLA : Yes, yes. I'll go and sent off those letters... (Exit)

CLARA : "My father and mother left me free to choose the field of studies I preferred and didn't force me to study".

EDMO : How many housewives gave this answer?

CLARA : Not even one.

EDMO : What?

CLARA : The others gave this answer...

EDMO : The others?

CLARA : Those belonging to the second group... Those who made a success of their careers.

EDMO : Come on now, Clara, don't talk rubbish. You must be mistaken...

CLARA : Not in the least. And what careers! One was even Minister...

EDMO : Minister? Great! The exception that confirms the rule.

CLARA : Not the exception. Eighty-four percent of the successful ones said, "My father and mother left me free ..."

EDMO : (Interrupting) But you've forgotten the hypothesis upon which the inquest was based ... What does the hypothesis say?

CLARA : "If parents fail to set a target for their daughters, girls will have no interest in school or work." That's the hypothesis. Either it's completely wrong or I don't get it...

EDMO : I wish to remind you that it was I who drew up the hypothesis...

CLARA : Exactly...

EDMO : Exactly. Do you see?

CLARA : See what?

EDMO : That I can draw up another.

CLARA : Eh?

EDMO : At this stage I simply shift the emphasis.

CLARA : But if you shift the emphasis the survey will have to be carried out all over again.

EDMO : Don't be silly.

CLARA : I get it. The whole thing will have to be scrapped.

EDMO : Not on your life. We'll just rewrite the questions.

CLARA : But then the answers will no longer coincide...

EDMO : Then, you carry out the survey again.

CLARA : But Edmonda, I interviewed so many women...

EDMO : Well, if you can't get it all done... we can always ... touch up an answer here and there. That is, change the odd point.

CLARA : Change the odd point?... What do you mean?

EDMO : Remove a word here and there ... Add the odd question-mark...

CLARA : I don't think I'd be able ...

EDMO : Why not?

CLARA : I'm sorry, but it's not honest.

EDMO : Clara, how can I explain it to you? I expected far more from you...
I just don't know why I take these young people so much to heart...
I give you a job. I offer you the chance of taking part in an
international survey and you ... you come here and tell
me that you don't think you are able. You come here telling me
what's honest! Me...

CLARA : But I ...
(The telephone rings as ANTONELLA enters with some pills and a glass
of water)

ANTONELLA : It's time for your medicine.

EDMO : (Answering the phone) Hello?
(She drinks the water and swallows a pill, then continues on the
phone) Who's speaking? ... Who? ... Max?... (Her tone changes as she
becomes more interested) Ah, yes, of course, Massimo Bianchi... No,
not at all, I haven't forgotten you. When I promise something ...
But you, you never called ... But why, why reflect? ...
(She beckons to the girls to leave. They obey)
What do you mean by "I'm simply a librarian?" Why simply? ... You've
got great potential, believe me. Oh, these young people! ... But
where are you? ... Down below? ... What are you waiting for? Come
up.
(She puts the receiver down)

EDMO : Antonella! ...Antonella! ... Where are you?

ANTONELLA : (Coming in) did you call?

EDMO : Put these papers away. Make coffee for two. Hot this time! Open the
door and then you may go... Oh, don't forget the cigarettes. And
tomorrow morning, be on time...

(Exit Antonella. Edmonda tries to tidy her desk a bit. Then she
moves an armchair and removes the papers from it.)

(Enter Max, rather bashful. He is carrying the coffee and a bunch of flowers)

- EDMO : (Going over to meet him) Flowers? ... Oh how kind ! I love the language of flowers. They reveal our most secret thoughts...
- MAX : Really? I'm no expert on things like these.
- EDMO : Come in. Sit down here. How much sugar?
- MAX : Two spoons, please ... My field is books. The dust on books, to tell the truth.
- EDMO : I've told you before: you underestimate yourself...
- MAX : Compared to you. You're a celebrity!
- EDMO : Come on, let's not exaggerate ... Very well then, maybe I'm a little better known than you.
- MAX : The chair of sociology at the university... Seven critical essays,
- EDMO : a book on tribal societies, ten publications on...
- EDMO : What, do you keep tabs on me?
- MAX : I catalogued them in the library.
- EDMO : And it makes you mad? ... Because I'm a woman? What difference does it make? A man, a woman. A career! Today anyone might well...
- MAX : I certainly didn't!
- EDMO : But you're young. You have the time.
- MAX : Thirty-five next month.
- EDMO : Well, what are you waiting for then? Take advantage of fortune, pull it by the hair.
- MAX : I just don't seem to be able to meet fortune ... If I recognize it ...
- EDMO : It's right here. Can't you see it?
- MAX : You?
- EDMO : Me and the international sociology congress.
- MAX : But where do I come in?
- EDMO : You'll be my contribution to the world of science.

MAX : I don't get you.

EDMO : A scholar like me must make young talents known to the world of science. I've already told you: I'll present you officially at the congress. I'll make you famous!

MAX : But I know nothing about sociology, Edmonda.

EDMO : You know my essays, my book, my other publications... You said you knew them, didn't you?

MAX : Only the titles and the filing numbers...

EDMO : That's fine. All you need do is quote them during your paper.

MAX : Alright. But all those names ... What if I get confused?

EDMO : It's not mathematics. What counts is the volume.

MAX : What volume?

EDMO : The volume of words. The length of your speech. The weight of the words. Then the tables...

MAX : Ah yes, the banquets ... La nouvelle cuisine?

EDMO : The round tables! These will become your bread and butter.

MAX : Me, with all those egg-heads?

EDMO : A bunch of hot-air bags, who've come from God knows where ...

MAX : What?

EDMO : Pull, party membership ... Just think, even bed-rooms!

MAX : In that case I too...

EDMO : That's it!

MAX : Yes, but ...

EDMO : But think of your career! You'll be famous. A young and intelligent man like you. You've so many cards to play ... Take this. Read it... (She gives him a file)

MAX : (Reading mechanically) "We are mere sketches, not only as far as the general Man-type is concerned, as far as good and evil are concerned, but also as far as our own individuality is concerned..."

EDMO : Continue. You read it very well. The right tone too.

MAX : But what the devil are you getting at?

EDMO : It's a very famous quotation. Everyone knows it.

MAX : I don't.

EDMO : What are you worried about? The paper's for those at the congress, not for you.

MAX : I want to understand what I'm saying. Is that asking too much?

EDMO : Sociology is a science. Don't forget that. If everyone understood it, what need would there be to teach it?

MAX : What's the use of sociology, I ask...

EDMO : Don't lose your nerve. You'll be great, just wait and see...
Look, read here ... "Football matches". This should suit you.

MAX : (Reading) "The football stadium is the place where the aggressiveness is sublimated into a bloodless battle.
The struggle for victory makes it akin to that ancient fight between males for the conquest of the female. According to sociology, a football match may be compared to sexual intercourse. Scoring a goal is a kind of rape witnessed by thousands of spectators. What does the liberating shout of the crowd mean if not the achievement of a sort of collective orgasm?"
Christ, what do you want to make me say?

EDMO : One moment ... What is a goal then, according to you?

MAX : A ball getting in between the goal-posts.

EDMO : Exactly: getting in between ...

MAX : The pleasure of the game.

EDMO : Pleasure, exactly.

MAX : The best man wins. Fights for his own team. It's also a question of parochialism. Like cheering for your own village church.

EDMO : Which you can see at a distance because of its...?

MAX : Steeple.

EDMO : Well done. Its steeple. You're getting hot. And what is a steeple but a foul phallic symbol when all is said and done.

MAX : The referee whistles fouls. That's what he's there for.

MAX : Fouls and the referee make for greater excitement...

EDMO : I wasn't talking about fouls, I was talking about the phallus. Forget the referee.

MAX : All right.

EDMO : What does _phallus_ mean? It's late Latin.

MAX : Latin? Who remembers Latin?! Phallus.... Ah, yes... the... the male sexual organ.

EDMO : Phallus! A stroke of genius. no? The football match read in sexual-sociological terms. You'll be a resounding success at the congress. You can count on it. You'll become famous!

MAX : Just a moment. I don't believe one word of all this.

EDMO : Come off it. You don't believe in sex?

MAX : What's that got to do with it?

EDMO : Nowadays all people can think of is sex. "Embrace someone and think of nothing else". That's what people say these days.

MAX : Oh, Hell!

EDMO : What have you got against sex? It's ... it's so vital... It's ecological.

MAX : Ecological?

EDMO : Has sex ever spoiled nature? Has it ever polluted?

(The telephone rings)

EDMO : Hello? ... What? ... No, I can't see anyone... No, nobody, do you understand? ... Show him in immediately.
(To Massimo) It's that journalist.

MAX : I'll be off in that case.

EDMO : No, you won't. Wait. The press is so important, my dear. You must be given a hearing.

MAX : You do the talking. You're far better at it.

EDMO : You're the attraction.

MAX : He'll make mincemeat of me in a few seconds.

EDMO : The trouble is you dramatise everything.

MAX : The trouble is I don't dramatise enough. The trouble is I'm a nobody.

EDMO : Oh, you man of little faith ... Wait for me in there (She nods in the direction of the other room)

(MAX leaves. Immediately afterwards the journalist, who during the interview will take notes all the time, enters)

BENITO : Good morning, Edmonda!

EDMO : Come in, come in.

BENITO : Am I too early?

EDMO : You're welcome. Sit down, my dear Moretti.

BENITO : Well, let's get down to business at once. The international sociology congress. What's new this year?

EDMO : The chief novelty is Massimo Bianchi, my assistant.

BENITO : I hope you'll forgive my ignorance but this name is completely new to me. If I'm not mistaken, at the last congress you presented a paper in collaboration with Professor Witzel. A well-known scholar...

EDMO : A brilliant scholar indeed. Everyone knows Professor Witzel. But the trouble is, my dear Moretti, he tends to repeat himself. With great intellectual integrity, but in the end he always comes up with the same theses. Witzel doesn't do any field-work anymore. To tell the truth nobody does field-work anymore. But take young Bianchi, for example, he's a born researcher. He begins with a hypothesis, then he follows it through. This is the American method.

BENITO : Has he worked in the States?

EDMO : It's as if he had.

BENITO : Can I have exclusive coverage of the affair?

EDMO : How dare you? There isn't even the slightest hint of an affair

EDMO : involved!

BENITO : What are you raving about? By affair I meant work, I meant the paper you'll be reading at the congress...

EDMO : No, you meant affair, an affair between me and my young assistant. You journalists are all the same. A bunch of maniacs!

BENITO : Tell me I'm wrong, then!

EDMO : Why don't you go and look for sex among the university top brass. Among the "venerables" who allow their pretty favourites to blaze a sudden and brilliant trail?

BENITO : For example?

EDMO : Go and take a look at the latest assignments. Who got the chairs? Read between the lines.

BENITO : But do you know if ... let's say our dear friend Witzel...?

EDMO : I'm saying nothing. And you, leave that pen alone. If you print as much as a word, one single word, I'll sue you for slander!

BENITO : You want to run me!! If I don't put a bit of zest into it, they'll have me writing death notices.

EDMO : Do you want a little zest? Then write this. Today, many women have achieved posts of importance by working as hard as men. Perhaps, harder. Today, these same women can afford the luxury of having

EDMO : young lovers. Once this was a male privilege only. Think of the attraction of the aging dignitary, of greying temples...

BENITO : Think of the attraction of a full wallet...

EDMO : Today, women too have the same attraction!

BENITO : Beds for all!

EDMO : Very well, you may use that tone if you wish. You won't scandalize anyone anymore.

BENITO : Okay. Don't get your back up. I'll write the article.

EDMO : Mind what you write...

(BENITO exits)

(EDMO fixes her hair, puts on a little lipstick, fetches two glasses and goes into the bedroom where MAX is waiting. The bedroom is lit up, while the office becomes dark)

EDMO : The interview's over. Tomorrow the paper will talk about someone I know.

MAX : (Clapping softly) And all thanks to you!

EDMO : On Tuesday there'll be an official dinner. After the toast, you'll make your speech.

MAX : Goodness, what speech?

EDMO : Only a few words of greeting.

MAX : Two words. You'll have to write something for me...

EDMO : Do you know what you really need?

MAX : What?

EDMO : T o r e l a x.

MAX : It's easy for you.

EDMO : It's the impact of your first congress. It happens to everyone. Just don't think about it. You'll get over it.

MAX : That's what you say!

EDMO : Come on. We'll think about your speech tomorrow. Now: RELAX!

MAX : How can I?

EDMO : I know how. Go and get the champagne in the fridge.

(MAX goes to fetch the champagne. EDMO puts on some romantic music)

MAX : (Returning with the bottle) what are we celebrating? Your birth day?

EDMO : Our partnership.

MAX : Ah, yes. I see. This music's very soft...

EDMO : I meant our working relationship, Max. Don't get any strange ideas.

MAX : (Uncorking the bottle and purring out the champagne) May I say
"Cheers!"?

EDMO : Cheers!

(EDMO sits on the bed. MAX sits at her feet on the rug.)

EDMO : A penny for your thoughts.

MAX : Do you know where I'd hold the damned Congress? In the Maldives!

EDMO : What's so special about the Maldives?

MAX : The Ocean... the palm trees... the white beaches... the natives. You
know, the fascination of the exotic.

EDMO : You're no match for me as far as exotic places are concerned. I've
been at congresses all over the world. Rio de Janeiro, Caracas. Even
Tananarive.

MAX : Where's that?

EDMO : In Madagascar, my dear! And not only congresses, but field-work, work-
shops
too. Did I ever tell you about that tribe of Aborigines?

MAX : What Aborigines?

EDMO : My dear Aborigines, I might say.

MAX : Why yours?

EDMO : I lived with them, studied them for six months. In the north of
Australia. I examined them inside-out. Traditions, taboos, myths. An
enthraling study, my dear. Just think of their mythology, the myth
of the origins. Better still, their courtship ceremony.

MAX : Why, what's it like?

EDMO : The strangest thing is that the women are the ones who take the
initiative.

MAX : Well for the Aborigine men! Those lovely girls all dressed in
flowers.

EDMO : Excuse me, my dear, but I think you've got them mixed up with the
Hawaiians! The Australian Aborigines don't wear flowers.

MAX : What do they wear then?

EDMO : During courtship, nothing.

MAX : Must be an interesting ceremony.

EDMO : Extraordinary. Naturally, it's all very simple. archaic... Basic.

MAX : What do they do?

EDMO : So you'd like me to tell you? Perhaps it would be better if I showed you ... Yes... You'll get it quicker...

MAX : I think so.

EDMO : Now, you're a young Aborigine... Sitting on the ground. Just like you... No, stay there . That's it. Then I circle around you, three times. (Taking her shoes off) Then I kneel in front of you...

MAX : But what do I do, Edmonda?

EDMO : Call me Edmo.

MAX : Edmo...

EDMO : You do nothing. Just wait. Motionless. The Aborigine girl brushes your hand, then your arm ... Like this, see ...

(At first EDMO goes through the gestures in a detached fashion, but little by little she becomes heated and passionate and allows her self to be drawn into the erotic game)

EDMO : Then her fingers caress your eyes You close them (MAX does so) Then your ears. Then her fingers run gently through your hair... then she takes a sheaf of erotic herbs and winds them about your neck. (EDMO uses her belt) The scent of the herbs inebriates you... She begins calling you sweet names ... "My man, my love, my master... " You begin feeling like a king. You become her daring ... Oh Baby ...

The lights dim gradually and the volume of the music increases.

A few days have gone by. Lights on the office. Edmonda is seated at her desk. ANTONELLA enters.

ANTONELLA : I've traced the letter we sent to the Honourable Nardi. Here it is.

EDMO : And the answer?

ANTONELLA : There isn't one.

EDMO : Are you sure?

ANTONELLA : There isn't one in the computer.

EDMO : There isn't one in the computer. Are you sure you copied it in?

ANTONELLA : But, Professor, Clara's the one in charge of your correspondence.

EDMO : Send her in to me.

ANTONELLA : She's not here.

EDMO : But it's Thursday.

ANTONELLA : She telephoned. She's not feeling very well.

EDMO : What on earth's wrong with that girl?

ANTONELLA : She's a bit down in the dumps. She works so hard.

EDMO : Works so much? She forgets to copy things into the computer. Refuses to finish her survey. She hasn't rewritten those questionnaires.

ANTONELLA : She works at night.

EDMO : It would be better for her to work during the day.

ANTONELLA : During the day she works as a babysitter.

EDMO : As a babysitter? But hasn't she got a job here?

ANTONELLA : She needs the money.

EDMO : What about the scholarship I got them to give her?

ANTONELLA : They haven't given her a penny yet.

EDMO : Ungrateful. That's what she is. I took her in to work for me when nobody even knew her name. In actual fact, I practically took her off the streets. Nowadays nobody wants a brand new graduate with no experience. There are people with two or three degrees emptying garbage-cans. I've introduced her to everybody. I've involved her in a research project of the highest scientific...

ANTONELLA : She said to call her if you need anything.

EDMO : She lets me down just when I need her most.

ANTONELLA : Shall I call her, Professor?

EDMO : No. Write this.

ANTONELLA : Me?

EDMO : Yes, you. Write : " To the Most Honourable Mario Nardi, M.P...." Use my headed paper. "I am writing to you on behalf of all the members

EDMO : of the YAF to thank you for the extreme generosity shown by you to our association. I wish to draw your attention once more to the fact that this organization, of which I have the honour and the pleasure of being the chairman and founder, is an exclusive philanthropic association." Have you got that?

ANTONELLA : YAF, is that capitals only?

EDMO : Naturally. ah, write Youth Aid Fund in brackets... "Our union aims exclusively at offering financial and moral aid to young students and graduates in financial and employment difficulties." have you got that?

ANTONELLA : "Financial and employment difficulties". Yes. Shall I add greetings?

EDMO : And look up the number of the House.

ANTONELLA : What house?

EDMO : What a stupid question? The House of Deputies.

ANTONELLA : (To herself) How do I know? The House of Deputies. That's not the only house she visits... (Looking for the number)

EDMO : Well?

ANTONELLA : I'm sorry, Professor, I can't find it.

EDMO : Forget it ... When was it you had that accident?

ANTONELLA : What accident?

EDMO : When that car ... that car knocked you down.

ANTONELLA : Ah, that? Six months ago.

EDMO : Is it true that a passer-by came to your aid?

ANTONELLA : He took me to hospital and endorsed the insurance claim.

EDMO : Do you remember who it was?

ANTONELLA : Of course I do. I'll never forget him, even if I live a hundred years. If he ever needs my help ... for any reason...

EDMO : Any reason?

ANTONELLA : Any reason. I owe him my life...

EDMO : I'll save Nardi's life!

ANTONELLA : Oh God, is he in danger?

EDMO : These days M.P.'s are always in danger.

ANTONELLA : The Mafia? He too ? ... Terrorism...

EDMO : What he? Worse. Nardi is a person who takes risks. He travels a lot. By car.

ANTONELLA : I don't get it.

EDMO : Imagine he has an accident.

ANTONELLA : So?

EDMO : I dash to the rescue. And he, out of gratitude ... comes to the
: rescue of the YAF.

ANTONELLA : What's this, a novel? First you need a crash, then you must be on the scene of the accident. That means foreseeing it, then ...

EDMO : A little intuition would do.

ANTONELLA : What do you mean by a little intuition?

EDMO : You know how to drive, don't you? You know the route he takes. You might bump into him. With today's traffic, it's not hard to have an accident.

ANTONELLA : Who, me?

EDMO : (Half jokingly) No, him! Just a little accident...

ANTONELLA : What's it got to do with me?

EDMO : A tiny bump...

ANTONELLA : What!?! I'm supposed to bump his car? No, no. I wouldn't even dream of it.

EDMO : Come on Anto, just a tiny tap.

ANTONELLA : Then they suspend my licence.

EDMO : No need to worry, with all the people I know.

ANTONELLA : I don't feel like knocking anyone down. That's final. And I'm simply horrified that you, a professor, should ask me to do such a thing. These are... are Mafia tactics!

EDMO : You've got it all wrong! Come now, silly-billy, I was joking. I was testing your reactions. I wanted to see how far you'd be prepared to go...

ANTONELLA : Oh, I see. I beg your pardon, professor ... I'll just go and get that letter done.

(ANTONELLA looks for the headed paper while EDMO goes into the bedroom to use her private phone. The lights go on in the bedroom.

At the same time the office becomes dark)

(EDMO dials a telephone number. No reply. She tries again, but in vain)

EDMO : What the devil are they up to in the library? They won't even take the trouble to answer.

(Someone knocks on the door)

EDMO : Come in.

(CLARA enters. There is a worried look on her face)

CLARA : Good morning, Edmonda.

EDMO : So, here you are at last. You know I'm still waiting for the questionnaires.

CLARA : I wasn't feeling very well last night.

EDMO : You shouldn't baby-sit. Just look at that face?...

CLARA : I've just been to the doctor's.

EDMO : Well, what did he say?

CLARA : Look ... (She shows EDMO a medical certificate)

EDMO : A health certificate? The usual three days' leave and then sudden recovery... What?! But what does this mean ...?

CLARA : (She starts crying)

EDMO : Here it says you're... pregnant.

CLARA : Ten weeks.

EDMO : And you only tell me now!

CLARA : I didn't know myself...

EDMO : But how did it happen?

CLARA : I must have forgotten to take the pill.

EDMO : Who's he? I mean does the father know?

CLARA : Yes. He works here at the university. But now I'm afraid he's got another woman...

EDMO : Another woman?

CLARA : She's older than him.

EDMO : Well done!

CLARA : Someone who gave him a hand, got him an important post, it seems ...

EDMO : For God's sake, be more explicit.

CLARA : A don in a skirt. Or should I say a skirted don?... A lady don...

EDMO : Is that what he says?

CLARA : He says he felt underrated in his former job.

EDMO : What?

CLARA : Underrated. As a librarian...

EDMO : As a librarian? He felt underrated? ... And so he, he ... Disgraceful!

CLARA : I see you understand my plight...

EDMO : Listen Clara...

CLARA : Yes?

EDMO : What do you intend doing? I mean ... the baby.

CLARA : The baby?

EDMO : The baby... do you want to keep it?

CLARA : Of course I want to keep it ... He must come back to me.

EDMO : Listen dear; allow me to speak to you, woman to woman. Right now don't consider me your teacher, your professor. Just a woman talking to another woman. Look, I've far more experience than you.

CLARA : But you ... have you ever had any children?

EDMO : No, I've never had any children. Sometimes the ways of this world are mysterious. You know what I mean. Some women have ten children, but don't seem able to bring them up, give them an education. Then there are others who would have been able to make scientists, artists out of them...

CLARA : Perhaps you speak out of ... excuse me for saying so ... out of envy?

EDMO : Out of envy? No envy. "They were all my sons", as the famous American playwright said ... I'm a mother... hundreds of times over! My students. My entire life devoted to them... I speak from experience.

CLARA : But it's not the same experience.

EDMO : Don't interrupt, please. When I say experience I mean twenty years of socio-anthropological studies involving adolescents. Didn't you read my treatise?

CLARA : Only the index.

EDMO : (Quoting in a rather melodramatic manner) "On the street corners stand our children, their arms riddled with holes. Alone, in utter despair. Today there is no future, they know that and are afraid. And as we stand there looking on, these young people commit suicide because they have nothing to live for."

CLARA : If that's what the world is like, that's no fault of mine.

EDMO : But you want to bring a child into this world. Have you thought about it?

CLARA : About what?

EDMO : About what?! Pollution. The Amazon rain-forests... the green-house effect... Chernobyl!!! ...To have a child today is utterly irresponsible.

CLARA : But there's also what's known as "maternal instinct".

EDMO : Come off it, now, don't try to give me all that stuff about maternal instinct. There are over five billion of us on Earth today. Too many. We're destroying the planet's resources. Which means that this famous maternal instinct doesn't work all that well... Besides, have you taken ... AIDS into consideration?

CLARA : Are you trying to frighten me?

EDMO : No, no I'm not trying to frighten you ... Listen, CLARA... A child is a sign of selfishness!

CLARA : Selfishness? (She laughs)

EDMO : It's no laughing matter. Aren't you trying to use your child to win back the man who's thrown you over? That's sentimental blackmail, isn't it?

CLARA : (She starts crying again and runs away)

THE ENTIRE STAGE IN DARKNESS

(The lights go up on the office. A week has passed. Antonella is setting the books and papers in order. Rock music can be heard coming from the record-player.)

Antonella What's this stuff (reading titles such as "Handbook of Statistical Sociology"... "The Biological Basis of Sociology")... Utter shit... (Throwing the books to the ground) Who would even look at such books? Only me. Because I'm the fool who must dust them... (She lights a cigarette, listens to the music and sways to its rhythm)

(Max enters)

Max Good morning

Antonella (springing around) Max! You frightened the life out of me... How did you get in?

Max Through the door. I've got the keys.

Antonella The prof. is not here

Max I didn't come for the prof.

Antonella There's nobody else here. Clara Doesn't work anymore.

Max I know it. But you are here

Antonella But I'm busy... (backing away)

Max Wait a moment... What lovely music! Are you doing field work?

Antonella In what field?

Max The field of music, of dance.

Antonella Who, me? Research on rock music?

Max its fascinating terrain... The singers, audience... Have you even been to the Papillion?

Antonella No. What is it?

Max The new disco, just outside town. Just think of investigation that jungle...

Antonella Do you there?

Max I go there just to see how much dancing influence the lives of young people

Antonella Do you think I'm some kind of fool?

Max What's wrong with tying? Just listen to that rhythm... (He starts dancing, trying too

involve Antonella who respond very reluctantly). That's it. Look... well done!
Come on. (She gets it wrong, He laughs... The record finishes. Max continues holding Antonella close to him)

Antonella Let me go!

Max No... (Continuing to hold her tight)

Edmo (Entering furious) Traitor!

Antonella (she breaks free and rushes out of the room)

Max (Trying to cover up) I swear... we were doing nothing wrong... Edmo!

Edmo (She has not even noticed what happened between Max and Antonella because she is following her own train of thought. She passes Max as if he weren't there, rushing into the bedroom which is lit up at once, while the office becomes dark. Edmo throws herself down on the bed, waving the newspaper she is holding in her hand) He's attacked me...! He wants my head!

Max (Hurrying after her into the bedroom) Edmo

Edmo Worm!

Max I swear, I am not a worm

Edmo He's created a scandal...

Max Who?

Edmo That miserable pen pusher!

Max (Relieved) Ah. But who are you talking about? That journalist?

Edmo Yes, him

Max Benito Moretti! But hadn't you got something on him... something regarding his past?

Edmo It's worth nothing anymore. People like him are not afraid anymore. On the contrary, they even boast of being Fascists, of having been at Salò. You've seen them. They don't care the medal they got from Mussolini, their Fascist trapping... Do you know what? There are no true value left... Morality is dead and gone.

Max There's little you can do if there's no morality. You can't blackmail people anymore...

Edmo Well said! And that's not all. My Aid to Youth Fund is under inquest.

Max But it's a highly moral institution, isn't it

Edmo Highly, but he says there are some irregularities... That is, some of the money can't be accounted for...

Max Rubbish. It'll soon be cleared up, just wait and see.

Edmo I'm sorry for you. Can no longer keep the promise I made you... At least, not for the moment.

Max Does that upset you?

Edmo I'm sorry, Baby...

Max Look, it's better this way. I free me from the sense of dependence... Nobody can say I live off you anymore. Our relationship won't be tainted by squalid interest from now on!

Edmo This I going to be a very bad time for me. I feel the ground slipping from under my feet...

Max Every thing'll iron out, you'll see. I'm sure you'll get over it.

Edmo I don't give up easily, that's true...I'll show him... What does he think? That he can defeat me that easily... It's just that I need time...

Max Don't worry, I'll be right by your side

Edmo I've got this bitter feeling... Like some kind of unbearable burden... I don't really know. For the first time in my life I'm afraid.

Max Afraid? But why?

Edmo I don't know... Maybe because I feel you slipping away from me... I feel I'm going to lose you

Max Who have you taken me for, then? For some kind of whore? I'll never forget what you've done for me. Our alliance...

Edmo Our alliance!... What about the age difference?

Max Where does the Records office fit in? We're talking about love...

Edmo Well, then... do you love me?

Max Have you ever doubted it? I'd never forgive you if you did!

Edmo Come here, Baby. You're the only real thing in my life.

Darkness

(The light goes again in the office. Some time has passed. A few small changes have been made such as the layout of the furniture or the arrangement of the books on the shelves. Antonella is putting the books and papers in order as usual.)

Max (Entering) Am I disturbing anything?

Antonella You haven't been around for some time!

Max I was awaiting for your decision

Antonella I can't make any decisions, at least not right now... We don't really know each other yet.

Max But if I've been around this house for months! I've even lived here

Antonella But you didn't come for my sake. You come for the prof. ... You didn't even notice my presence,

Max How could I? You simply served the coffee, brought Edmo her pills, and then disappeared. Your telephone conversations were monosyllables. I couldn't make out the devil you were. The maid? No, too well-educated. The secretary? No, secretaries don't set tables or fix cocktails.

Antonella I see you've examined me through a microscope!

Max I was well worth my while, But, tell me now, who are you?

Antonella "Laugh not, my gentle lord! I am Cinderella whom the cruel step-mother forces to sweep the cinders from the hearth".

Max You are Cinderella? Then I am Prince Charming, come to carry you far away, on my snow-white steed. Come.

Antonella To be the Princess of your castle?

Max The Princess? More than that...

Antonella The Queen?

Max More, more than that...

Antonella What can that be, my gentle lord?

Max My inspiration, my Muse!

Antonella I get it, your slave. I already serve Edmo.

Max You'll be my assistant. I haven't been sleeping, you know. Edmo gave me the first little push, but now I move on my steam. I've just finished a seminar.

Antonella What seminar?

Max I'm an expert on youth aid programmes.

Antonella Which means?

Max Does YAF mean nothing to you? Or Mr. Nardi, the M.P.? You see it was all so clear to me, all so perfectly clear! I got introduced into the proper circles. First of all, I found myself a sponsor. Do you know the weakest point in the whole system is? Finding someone with the money. But I've found him. So, now I've got something concrete to offer you. We might call it a salary.

Antonella What kind of salary?

Max The chairman's secretary's

Antonella And who's supposed to be the chairman?

Max A young, very promising scholar. On the way up...Neither bad-looking nor unpleasant. A bit like me...Come on, look Antonella. I've setup an agency. All my own work! My own brain-child! The I.S.S.RE: Institute for sociological Research... Modestly speaking, the chairman is me.

Antonella But what's my role? That of eternal assistant?

Max It's a team set up. If I reach the top, so do you... Don't you understand? We're both young. We'll carry out important research projects...

Antonella Which nobody will read about...

Max We'll read them at an international congress. We're holding this gigantic international congress... Just guess where?

Antonella Where?

Max the Ocean... palm trees ... white sandy beaches ... natives...The Maldives Islands!

Antonella At a congress in the Maldives Islands, me? It's not easy if one is just beginning

Max But we are not just beginning

Antonella I haven't published as much as a page in my life. I've never had the time

Max But you've learned from Edmo. You've written pages and pages of her stuff

Antonella But I remember nothing

Max But the computer remembers, doesn't it

Antonella Of course. All that stuff that's never been printed, all those unpublished reports. I've got it all on my CD.

Max A precious data bank

Antonella One might say the only one of its kind

Max Edmo keeps it under lock and key, naturally?

Antonella In the safe. She's got the combination

Max What about you?

Antonella Me, What?

Max You don't, by any chance, know the combination, do you?

Antonella As a matter of fact, I do. One day I saw her use it.

Max Great girl! Let's shake on it. I knew I could trust you.

Antonella But can I trust you?

Max Something wrong?

Antonella Let's be serious

Max OK, I understand... There are rumours going around me. Maybe my reputation's slightly compromised, but whose isn't? But then, who are the judges? Small-time provincial bigots...

Antonella And am I supposed to be a small-time provincial bigot too?

Max (assuming the tone of the typical gossip) "He's very immoral. A kept man. A womanizer. Just think, he's living with an older woman

Antonella You've got it all wrong. I'm not shocked because you went to bed with Edmo. It's a matter of business, that's what I said to myself. She's using her power to get herself a young lover. He's using his youth to make headway. Give to get. That's what the Romans use to say.

Max Well why are you afraid of joining forces with me, then? I know they've accused me of selling out...

Antonella I don't understand why they're always mixing sex up with morality. In business, everyone gives what they've got. What's morality got to do with all this? In your relationship with Edmo I saw a straightforward, clean business arrangement. The medium of Exchange was sex, but it might just as well have been money, or bonds, shares, a seat in Parliament. In that case nobody would say a word.

Max Continue. You make me feel better

Antonella Let's that in our society sex must never be used in transactions. Otherwise it's immoral. It is prostitution! Fiddlesticks. In this life, ladies and gentlemen, you can trade anything.

Max What a fine sociologist you are. That's the way the world wags... So, what shall we two trade?

Antonella What can you offer me?

Max My youth!

Antonella I'm young too

Max My love!

Antonella Love comes and goes...

Max But what have you to offer?

Antonella I've got the combination

Max Fundamental. The corner-stone of our love. That is, of our future. Better still, of our career

Antonella So, what you done to deserve it?

Max I've been to two international congresses, read papers at them

Antonella Is that all?

Max I've found a sponsor...

Antonella That's not too bad. What else?

Max Wait. What about my field work? Socio-anthropological studies in exotic countries?

Antonella Exotic countries? You?

Max Did I never tell you about the Australian Aborigines tribes? I might well call them my dear Aborigines...

Antonella Why yours?

Max Tribal institutions, family groups, taboos, myths: I've studied them inside-out. A fascinating case story. Just think of the courtship ritual

Antonella What's so special about this rite?

Max It's the women who take the initiative!

Antonella Ah! And you've studied all these women inside-out, have you?

Max Only once. And only from a scientific point of view. You are jealous by any chance, are you?

Antonella Me? Jealous of those Aborigine women? You must be joking. Well, tell me, what's this ritual like?

Max Do you want me to explain? No, it's better if I show you... Yes, but we need some music. (He puts on a record)...Now, you're a young Aborigine girl. I'm sitting here on the ground. Like this. (He squats down on the floor)

Antonella What am I supposed to do?

Max You circle around me, three times. Come on... (She begins circling, showing little enthusiasm) Come on, put more energy into it!... That's it. Now you kneel in front of me... Yes, down on your knees...No, closer. Come here. I won't eat you, you know. Now, give me your hand.

Antonella Why? (Drawing closer)

 (During the scene that follows he guides her. At first she is reluctant, the, little by little she allows herself to be drawn into the game and she became totally involved.).

Max The Aborigine girl strokes the man's hands gently. Then his arms. Her finger brush his eye-lids... his ears...run lightly through his hair. She whispers softly to him "my king, my master"

Antonella My king, my master.

Max Her hands grow more daring, more and more daring...

(During this last line the lights dim slowly, while the music grows louder and louder)

THE END