

Milena Is a Sex Bomb¹

Alfredo Zucchi

I.

“Relax, Giovà. I’ll get the money somehow. Just get a table in my name. They know me. I told you, I’ll pay. I’m not like you. When I have cash in my pockets, you know the troops get fed.”

Here it is. Fake an accident. Set up a scam. There’s no end of ways. Take some poor devil who’d let you fuck him for 50 euros. Right, just give him the 50 and get him to lend you his name. You open a bank account: you’re building a business. What kind? Cranes? Something in construction? No, you can’t build shit here. So why not something like catering this time? Under Vesuvius or in fucking Nairobi — people’ve got to eat. So, it’s catering. You’ll need cell phones for the business. There’s plenty of deals in high-tech gear. OK, good. To be on the safe side, lose the SIM card, resell the phone for three quarters the list price. After the cost of the SIM card and the lousy 20 euros to open the bank account, you still have a profit. So the business fails. How many of these businesses did you create and kill off in the last month? Two and a half thousand euros, 5 phantom businesses, 7 high-tech items resold on the black market. Oh, the invisible hand of the market! At the foot of Vesuvius, the spirit of capitalism is an acrobat.

“Listen, Giovà, we’ve got to get the money because on Saturday the party’s on us. For all the sluts and leeches.... Yeah. I want a party. No way I’ll miss this one. Antonio Ottaiano is 21 years old! And besides, Naples made it to fourth place. In a month we’ll be in the playoffs for the Champions. The last time you weren’t even born, dickhead!

“We have to work something out, something fast. Can’t hang around waiting for banks or lawyers.... This time we keep it in the family. Don’t you worry. The shop was broken into twice this month, so what’s one more time? ... You know what I mean....

“So spread the word, table for twenty in the club lounge. Champagne. Tell Ciccio to get the magic dust from his friend.”

¹ The project to prepare the translation of Zucchi’s story for publication started with the assumption that we would provide a heavily edited version of the initial translation submitted to the jury (in contrast with the light editing of the Israeli translation); we planned to work in contact with the author and eventually to contact the translator. However, this is a new translation. In the first two sessions (in a pre-workshop meeting with the author to explore processes and later during the introductory workshop), it became clear that the source text would have to be consulted in detail and that the resulting changes would be an entirely new translation. See the three-column file to compare the two versions to the original.

“What’s the matter, Mamma? I was sleeping. What the...? Did Vesuvius blow?”

“I wish it had. At least it would have taken all these bastards with it. We’ve been robbed again. But this time, not a sound.”

“Calm down, Mamma. When did it happen? Last night?”

“Yes, third time this month.”

“So when will you get a real alarm system? Where do you think we live, Switzerland? Anyway, don’t worry. I’ll ask around. Giovanni’s always hanging out in front of that bar across the street. If anybody came out of here, he saw them for sure. We’ll get it back. We’ll sweat it out of them, the shits. I’ll know something by lunchtime.”

The family had been shirtmakers for three generations. The business had been about to go under when *Ciro Ottaiano* finally took charge 20 years ago. Somehow he sensed that fashion was changing, that this half-developed slice of countryside wanted to forget it was a desolate wasteland.

Simplicity certainly wasn’t their thing: high collars, loud colors, ultra-fancy lettering for your personalized monogram below the pocket. The drab towns on the city’s outskirts wanted to flaunt an unmistakable beauty — luxury against the desert. That was the order.

And so over the years, the *Ottaianos* made a name for themselves, bearing the standard of the town’s esthetic revenge. They started out with a tiny shop that became a well-turned out store on the ground floor of the building where the family — *Anna* and *Ciro*, and *Antonio*, their only child — had always lived.

When the first customers from *Naples* ordered four honeycomb shirts, the family knew that the worst was behind them. Home free! They cracked open some bottles.

“*Giovà*, we’re all set. Nobody saw me. Listen, I’ll talk to my mother now. If she comes and asks, tell her.... Exactly, that you saw someone in a black car going to *Naples*.... A *Twingo*? Yeah, and if there really was one parked outside the building, even better. Make up whatever you want, but don’t go too far or we’ll blow it....

“See you in *Naples* on Saturday.... Yeah, everything’s all set. *Vincenzo*’s booked it, *Ciccio*’s done his bit. We’re just missing the pussy now, and some cock for *Gennaro*. Hey, if that’s what he likes! *Vincenzo* will take care of that too.”

“You there, Mamma? I just saw *Giovanni* and....”

“Come and eat first, *Antò*, then we’ll deal with that. We’ve got pasta and fresh peas from *Uncle Gino*. From his plot down the road. Fresh picked. Smell how wonderful this is!”

“Damn, this looks good! Smooth too. But listen: Giovanni says he saw this man coming out of our gate last night. He had a black Twingo parked about 20 meters down the road from us, on the other side of the street. He drove off towards Naples. Maybe we should check that out. Does Papa know about it?”

“Sure he knows. Wait ’til he gets back tomorrow. You’ll see.”

“Tell him what Giovanni said. I’ll double check with someone else.”

“You just concentrate on finishing university, Antò! Don’t you go looking for trouble. When Papa gets back, just keep quiet and let me do the talking; and then your father and I will decide what to do. Anyway, tell me what you’ve got planned for your birthday on Saturday.”

“Nothing fancy, Mamma; just dinner with my really best friends. A place on Riviera di Chiaia. Having the sea there will make it special enough.”

“Bless you for that. This isn’t the right time to be spending lots of money.”

Money. *Ciro Ottaiano* earned it cent by cent, sweated it out, using initiative, intuition and hard work.

But one way or the other, anyone who has put down roots under *Vesuvius* knows the taste of oppression, whether they’re eating it up or dishing it out — it’s the taste of violence or betrayal.

“Ciro, sit down, leave the bags, I’ll take care of them. I’ve heated up rice and potatoes for you.”

“Thanks Anna, my love. What would I do without you? Sometimes I wonder if it’s worth it ... a month of hard work, and the money’s in the mouth of some piece of shit. My father was right: all the world’s muck is concentrated in these 50 square kilometers.

“Wait, *Ciro*. Don’t say that. You’ll see, we’ll find out who did it and maybe get some of it back. This time will be different. That *Antonio*...”

“Anna. Keep *Antonio* out of this.”

“I told him to think about university. ‘If Papa sees you,’ I said, but *Antonio* says *Giovanni*, that bricklayer friend of his, saw someone coming out of our building that night.”

“What? I swear to God I’ll get them this time, whoever they are.”

“Yeah, plenty, *Giovà*, a sackful of cash.... Tell *Vincenzo* to do his bit: *Ilenia*, *Martina* and that brunette..... Right, *Milena*. I want all three there tomorrow, got that?”

Money. For the young generation, money means something else. Not an end to a long nightmare of desperate poverty, but esthetic emancipation. Not just social revenge,

but refinement of body and soul through hair removal, eyelash extensions, tanning beds. Earthy and androgynous: this is the young Vesuvian man whose forefathers’ hunger taught him to push ahead and never say sorry.

Thus Antonio two nights ago: hands in the closet, keys to the room with the safe, combination lifted from a diary, then down the stairs and into the shop, the deserted rooms, the lock, sounds in the dark — the door opens. Shaking only for fear of getting caught, he pushes in, takes the money and carefully creeps back out.

II.

Saturday. Right there in front of the Ottaiano’s house, a black Twingo, just like the one Giovanni described. Who do they think they are, back here three days after the robbery? Ciro lies in wait, hatching revenge: sitting, nesting, takes a look, and keeps waiting. No police this time, though. When have they ever been of any use? A good friend with a bit of experience will be more than enough.

When a skinny guy gets into the dark car Ciro gives chase, willing him to head for Naples, just like Giovanni said. One small act of revenge will clear the slate.

Antonio makes his entry, slim in grey satin: “Here I am. You know you always have to wait for the VIPs!” The club is packed with people dressed to kill. Upstairs, on the mezzanine, the Ottaiano table salute their bountiful host. The first cork pops. It’s that sparkling wine that goes to your head even before it touches your lips. The girls are raring to go, but a real man takes his time. They can wait. First, let’s review the troops.

Vincenzo’s already at the table, huge and out of breath in his puke green suit. Ciccio, high as a kite, handing out rations to the chosen ones while the rest have to beg. Gennaro, huge and horny, his cell phone a map of every tranny in town. And Giovanni, edgy, alert, Antonio’s alter ego and only true confidant. The rest are extras and hangers-on.

Someone signals to the DJ, who shouts out, “Guys! Let’s hear it for Toni Ottaiano. He’s our man. Let’s hear it for the Naples that counts!”

The car is heading to Naples — it’s them, no doubt about it anymore. Ciro follows closely, adrenaline pumping.

Then they turn right, into a housing project just outside Naples, an urban planning marvel of non-existent services and living space, spawned in pain, snatched out of hunger. Ciro and his friend park a few meters from the entrance, block the pedestrian gate — leaving an escape route — and enter the complex. The guy in the dark car finally notices them, starts to turn around, calls for help from friendly cohorts. Ciro’s friend moves in, muttering threats, grabs him by the jacket

“Give us the money you stole or I’ll kill you, right here on your own ground.” Then backup arrives, a horde moving to the syncopated rhythm of a violent rap song blasting from a high tech cell phone wielded by one of the rearguard foot soldiers. The Ride of the Valkyries, gangsta-style.

Ciro’s friend is surrounded, struggles, tries to run away, stumbles. *Ciro* is already in the car.

Naples, the Naples that counts: Chiaia, just a step away from the murky sea. All around are buildings that recall a glorious past. High up, volcanic tufa. On the ground, basalt. Vesuvius made us all. Inside, the disco speaks a global language; only the crowded humanity of the inhabitants gives it a feel of its own. Faces smooth thanks to creams and razor blades, earrings and chains glittering all over. The women’s faces — red, crimson, made up like ancient masks that suggest half-naked bodies ready for sacrifice.

Everybody’s high on the dance floor. Some burlier types hold court at the table like old *capos*. If you want something you have to go to them. Otherwise, they just sit there and move their heads and tap their hands to the music, looking around as if they owned the place. Tonight Antonio has plenty of choices and he wants to take them all, one snort after another. Ilenia’s showing off her rack. Shame about her face, no, not even for a blow job. And those fucking nails, why does she do that? You could do her from behind, though. Martina plays you, lets you buy her drinks, but doesn’t put out. But, Milena, the brunette — she’s a sex bomb.

Two cars smack on *Ciro*’s rear. Damn fast. Get off the main roads, head into the maze of old-town alleys — up, down, wash hung out to dry, hawkers in the way. Fuck, they’re fast, still right on him. *Ciro* speeds up but still they push in.

“At last, an intersection, red light. Now I’ll lose them.”

Hope, *Ciro*, hope right to the end.

Milena is a sex bomb. And the harder she plays to get, the more she turns you on. She knows that too, the bitch. But Antonio can wait no longer. He grabs her by the hand and drags her into the men’s room: everyone’s going to hear this. There, amid sodden paper towels and pools of urine, they tear each other’s clothes to shreds with their teeth, strip by strip, until there’s nothing left but bare skin. Milena’s naked back presses against the cold partition and her whole body shudders twice. Her legs hang in the air on either side of Antonio’s thighs as he pumps into her with no signs of letting up.

“Antò, open up! It’s me, Giovanni!”

“What now, Giovanni? You want a piece of this, you wait your turn. Better still, fuck off and get your own tail, this one’s mine.”

“Antò, your mother’s on the phone, says she’s called you, like, ten times, says she’s really got to talk to you.”

“What the fuck, now? Give me the phone!”

And, standing there, still snug inside the brunette — no warmer place — and yet alone with his mother, he speaks:

“Mamma?”

“Antonio, I warned your father to let things be, but he had to go for them on his own, and the thieves, they chased after his car when he was trying to get away, and ... Antò, Papa’s dead!”

“What do you mean? What the fuck do you mean?”

The brunette slides to the floor and suddenly that warm nest of hers has slipped away too, leaving Antonio with just a memory. And one little dickie bird sitting on no fucking wall at all.

“As sure as I’m your son, Mamma, I swear I’ll find those thieves and kill them!”