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Ants

by Saviana Stanescu

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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ANTS was first produced by the New Jersey Repertory Company, February 7 - March 10, 2013. The performance was directed by Jeff Zinn, with sets by Jessica Parks, costumes by Patricia E. Doherty, lighting design by Jill Nagle, sound design by Merek Royce Press, technical director Michael “Rusty” Carroll. The Production Stage Manager was Jennifer Tardibuono. The cast was as follows:

MIA Maria Silverman
ADAM Michael Samuel Kaplan
KARA Carol Todd

The play was written and developed at the Lark Play Development Center, Playground Program, where an additional round table was directed by Daniella Topol. In 2010, a workshop and public reading was held at the Ensemble Studio Theatre, also directed by Daniella Topol. The cast was as follows:

MIA Polly Lee
ADAM Robert Montano
KARA Maria Striar

In 2012, a workshop and public reading was held at The New Group. The performance was directed by Ian Morgan. The cast was as follows:

MIA Sofia Gomez
ADAM Steven Rishard
KARA Carol Todd

CHARACTERS

KARA – late 30s, attractive, speaks with an accent (any race or ethnicity)

MIA – Kara's younger sister, 29, boyish, speaks with a strong accent (same race/ethnicity as Kara)

DR. ADAM KOHN – Professor of Biochemistry, 48, speaks with a mild accent (any race or ethnicity)

SETTING

A small American town and a University in the same area.
Maybe Connecticut.

TIME

2009 – The Chinese Year of the Ox and the American Year of the Recession.

NOTES

A / signifies the point of overlapping dialogue.

1.

(Spotlight on MIA - downstage, addressing the audience.)

(She constructs her speech carefully, paying attention to her newly found sophistication with the English language. It's intense and weirdly funny.)

MIA. Ants. They never get tired. They never stop. I could watch them forever. Unfortunately, I do get tired sometimes. All those inconveniences of being human: eat, sleep, talk, socialize. I don't socialize much but still. I need 9 hours of sleep daily. I'm below a worker-ant. But I am bigger. In the ants world, I would be a QUEEN. Everybody would work for me. All I'd have to do is reproduce. Kinda boring. Whadda fuck?! – as the Americans put it. Where is your scientific tone?

(composure, scientific tone)

All societies are characterized by struggles for control: which individuals gain the spoils and which toil in the fields. In colonies of social insects this struggle is embodied by a reproductive division of labor. Some individuals (the queens) reproduce, while the workers provide the labor that maintains colony function. The queens are bigger and can live for up to 30 years while workers live from 1 to 3 years. Totally unfair. How is it determined which individuals, as developing larvae, are becoming QUEENS or different types of WORKERS? It is largely based on the NUTRITION they receive. Nutritional and genetic factors contribute in different ways to how big an individual grows... *(change of tone)*

Think big! The Nobel Prize. I want to win the Nobel Prize. I'll be the first one from my country to win it. It's gonna take 15-20 years... Ten generations of worker ants. But this is the good part of being human: we live longer than the ants. But less than the sea turtles.

Anyway. Focus! Americans win Nobel Prizes all the time. But now I am here too. America nurtures me.

(KARA enters.)

KARA. Are you talking to the walls again?

MIA. I'm talking to people. Imaginary people.

(KARA turns the lights on: the living room of their house.

KARA holds a few envelopes.)

KARA. In darkness? You can't "see" imaginary people with the lights on?

MIA. I can't focus with the lights on. I suck at lecturing in English, I suck, I suck, / I suck...

KARA. You can't suck, we speak only English in this house. So you can – how did you put it? – be immersed in English. "Swim" in English. Breathe in English. Dream in English.

MIA. Would you please let me continue my lecture?

KARA. *(ironically)* Oh, excuse my silly interruption, "professor"! I'm honored to have you around. May I humbly ask what is this lecture for? Did you get a teaching job?

MIA. No, it's for a conference.

KARA. A conference? Are they paying you to go?

MIA. A future conference. A possible conference. I must be prepared.

KARA. Of course. An imaginary conference.

MIA. *(half-joking)* For when I get the Nobel Prize.

KARA. Right. And I get the Oscar. Until then we've got these...

(KARA waves the envelopes at her.)

MIA. *(teasing)* Letters from your fans?

KARA. Bills - my most faithful fans. You wanna pay them? You're more than welcome. Please, help yourself. Pick one. Gas, Electricity, Cable...

MIA. *(steps away from the bills)* More bills? Already?

KARA. Like you ever notice a month passing. Yes, bills, bills, bills. Fuck them.

(She throws them in the garbage.)

MIA. You don't open them?

KARA. I know what's in there. Mortgage, Gas, Electricity, Cable and TV, my cell phone, YOUR cell phone, YOUR student loan...

MIA. But we need to pay them.

KARA. That's a very profound statement, Mia. Yes, WE do. So you better get a job because...I'm...I can't... I just...I got fired.

MIA. It's a joke, isn't it?

KARA. Yeah, my best joke ever. Joking my life here.

MIA. You mean you really...But you've been working in this factory for like 17 years. You're a good worker. What did your boss say? Why – why you? You said he liked you. He parked his car next to yours all the time so he could talk with you after / program.

KARA. The economy is bad, blah, blah. We all must tighten the belt, make sacrifices, the factory is not working full capacity, the automobile industry is having a hard time so we too, cuz we are supplying for them, blah, blah, something like that. Oh, and he said: you're attractive, you're still young, you'll find something better. I always thought you could do better than this factory, so take this opportunity to advance your goals and your self-esteem. And he kissed me on my cheek. Moron. Selfish moron.

MIA. He's right, you can advance your goals.

KARA. My goals...Wait to hear more. Bad news comes in avalanches...

MIA. Nothing can be totally bad. Our old proverb: a kick in the ass is a step forward! You'll find another job, a better one, where you can really express yourself. Your boss did you a BIG favor!

KARA. Oh, shut up!

MIA. We'll start thinking of a new job for you, an exciting one.

KARA. Too bad...I was kinda thinking to float on your back for a while...

MIA. "Float on your back"? I don't know this expression. You mean swim backwards?

KARA. No, I mean: YOU get a job, I stay home for a while. Figure things out. Give myself Tarot readings. Ask the universe for a truce. Then for a direction.

(KARA takes the bills out of the garbage can and hands them to MIA.)

KARA. They're yours, baby sis. You're the head of the family now.

MIA. OK, you're going to "float on my back"...We have to maintain control of this situation.

(KARA nods. She looks a little pale and sick, but she starts walking around the living room, stopping from time to time to move an object (a vase, a pen, a magazine – anything) 1-2 inches left or right.)

(MIA, unopened bills in her hand, follows KARA with her eyes, like studying a trapped animal.)

KARA. Did you eat?

MIA. No. I waited for you.

KARA. Did you cook anything?

MIA. I had to do some work, the research / on –

KARA. I know, busy busy bee, taking care of your cockroaches, your rats –

MIA. Ants.

KARA. *(pacing the room)* Rats, ants, whatever.

MIA. Take a seat, why are you wandering around like a drunken fly?

KARA. Oh, yeah, believe me: I'd love to drink my brains out and fly away to...China. Antarctica. New Zealand. New...London. No, that's too close. New...Jersey. New-fucking-something. New York!

MIA. Are you depressed?

KARA. When someone is sad or mad or, I dunno, just sick of life, you scientists call it “depression”. You give us pills and send us to the shrink. Like everything can be solved with a pill.

MIA. It can, most of the time.

KARA. OK, OK, Miss Know-it-all, Miss PhD in Biology. I’m too tired / to argue –

MIA. Biochemistry.

KARA. Right. Bio-fuckin’-chemistry. Does it bring any money? Noooo. What a blasphemy to ask!

MIA. I’m applying for a few fellowships.

KARA. (*sinking into a chair*) God knows how difficult it was for me to pay for your master, Mia. Now this PhD thing... You don’t need a PhD to teach in public schools. They need teachers and your English is good enough.

MIA. Why are you talking like this? I thought you understood. I am working on a revolutionary theory that will change our perception on ant colonies, / it will –

KARA. Fuck the ants! Think about people for a minute. Ants are just little...ugly, small, boring, harmful...too many.

MIA. (*morosely*) What are you saying – I should give up?

KARA. You don’t need that PhD. You’re already over-educated.

MIA. I should be a... loser... who can’t finish what she started?

KARA. Never mind. You only have one more year and you’re done. You’ll be done, won’t you?

MIA. I’ll be an ABD.

KARA. What’s that?

MIA. All but dissertation.

KARA. And you’ll get a job. A real job. A teaching job in a university.

MIA. Maybe. I hope so anyway.

KARA. That professor of yours must help.

MIA. Adam? He will give me a recommendation, of course.

(MIA sits on the sofa. She puts the unopened bills on the coffee table.)

KARA. He must give you more than that. He must hire you. He promised he would let you teach. He did. You told me so.

MIA. I'll have a course to teach next semester, but it's not like he's gonna hire me full-time. I'll have to be an adjunct for a few years. You don't know how things work in academia.

KARA. A few years? But you must get a job, Mia, you must. You're becoming one of those things of yours, the male-bee-parasite, and you're not even a male, you're a girl, you should have a boyfriend, marry a nice American man, solve all our problems.

MIA. Why haven't you married a nice American man and solved all our problems?

KARA. I came here alone, with no English. I had to rely on a stable salary. To send money home. To YOU. I had to work. In a factory. Assembly line... Do you know what an assembly line is? You're there with 80 others, same faces, same gestures...you try to think of something nice, or clever, or sexy, or imaginative. But you can't. Your brain shuts off. You become one of those little metal pieces.

MIA. Your brain shuts off only when you're dead.

KARA. Then what do you call this: alarm, shower, coffee, boiled egg, car, factory, work, work, lunch break – breathe for a moment – work, work, car, back home, shower, dinner, TAROT, TV, bed, sleep. Did I have any time to date? And what is dating anyway – another routine. True love, passion, have disappeared from our lives. This is a world for robots, not for people... You better create clones in your freakin' lab, adult human-clones who have no desire to laugh, to love, to play...This is not a world for children...

MIA. You got laid off. It's not the end of the world. (*trying to joke*) You'll meet a charming Cockroach Prince riding his golden winged rat, and you'll be happy / ever after.

KARA. Stop those silly biology-jokes, Mia! They make me puke. Literally.

MIA. You're being overdramatic.

KARA. I'm being... pregnant!

MIA. Pregnant?!

KARA. Pregnant.

MIA. Like... with baby-to-be?

KARA. Like freakin' pregnant! Do you need a dictionary?

MIA. Wow. We're deep in...soap-opera.

KARA. That's all you have to say?

MIA. What about the classical: Who's the father?

KARA. It doesn't matter. He's married.

MIA. He can still recognize the child. Is he...your boss?

KARA. God, no.

MIA. Someone from work? He must pay child support.
I know that much.

KARA. It won't be any child. I can't afford it.

MIA. Oh, no. Here I have something to say. Your mom instinct will kick in. We'll have a baby in the house! She's gonna be so much fun and / we'll buy her little toys and –

KARA. We can't afford her or him. I lost my job, remember.

MIA. Don't you worry! I'll find something. I'll work at the library, at the admissions office, at the...suicide hotline, anything.

KARA. It's not gonna be enough... we're talking 3500 a month for just the two of us, without the little one. No. I can't afford it.

MIA. Wait! Please wait a few days, a week, two weeks. You'll see, I'll find something.

KARA. You'll need a full-time job. You won't have time for your research.

MIA. I'll find a solution. You don't need to work anymore. You're a queen now. Sit down. Please, we need to take care of the little Pupa.

KARA. Pupa?!

MIA. Baby-ant.

KARA. OK, Mia...It's useless to talk to you. *(beat)* I'm starving. I gotta cook something. Pilaf or mashed potatoes?

MIA. I'll cook. Don't you move.

(She's ready to go to the kitchen.)

KARA. I'm not just gonna sit here and ...I'm not a cripple. *(She stands up.)*

MIA. Do your TAROT, read your horoscopes. See what's gonna be pupa's sign.

KARA. Stop call it "pupa"!

MIA. I like it better than "larva".

KARA. Shut up. Go read your books, I'll cook.

MIA. I have a question though: if you didn't want a child, why didn't you just use some...you know...contraceptives?

KARA. Is that what life is? A pack of pills, a YES-NO form, an assembly line with clearly defined questions and answers... *(beat)* I guess I cheated a bit. Maybe I wanted a child but I didn't want to admit it. Or maybe I just wanted to let things happen naturally. To be surprised. To see what questions the universe sends towards me. To open my body to that question and try to answer it.

(KARA feels unexpectedly dizzy and sits on the sofa.)

MIA. See? You have to rest now. *(KARA nods, looking surprised by her need to just sit.)*

KARA. We have pastas, cheese, sour cream. You can make spaghetti carbonara, it's easy.

MIA. I'll make the best spaghetti of your life, my queen!

(MIA walks downstage and addresses the audience.)

2.

MIA. Ants develop through a complete life cycle of egg, larva, pupa, and adult. The egg is tiny, almost microscopic in size. The larva is legless and grub-like, very soft and whitish in color. It is also helpless and depends totally on workers for food and care. The pupa looks somewhat like the adult but is soft, unpigmented, and cannot move around. Some are enclosed in a cocoon, some are not. A newly-emerged adult requires several days for its body to harden and darken. (*change of tone*) I didn't realize Kara was so unhappy. Back home, everybody envies her: she's THE American. She has a nice house, a job...Well, now she lost her job. We'll find something. Pupa must have everything she needs. She will be big and strong, smart and happy. She's on to a good start. She's an American citizen. And she has me around. If I need to turn into a worker-ant for her, I will, I'm telling you, I will.

3.

(The Biochemistry Lab at the University. A microphone/recorder, a computer, etc.)

(ADAM and MIA work together, looking from time to time through a microscope, making notes, recording some observations.)

ADAM. *(into the microphone)* In the ant *Aphaenogaster cockerelli*, we mimicked reproductive cheaters by applying a synthetic compound typical of fertile individuals on nonreproductive workers.

MIA. *(in low voice)* We framed these poor non-reproductive worker-ants...

ADAM. *(into the microphone)* This treatment induced nestmate aggression in colonies where a queen was present. This provides the first direct evidence that cuticular hydrocarbons are the informational basis of policing behaviors, serving a major function in the regulation of reproduction in social insects.

(He gestures to MIA to record her observations.)

MIA. *(into the microphone)* Some ant species are known not only to attack cheating workers, but also to destroy their eggs.

ADAM. *(to MIA)* That's another issue. Focus on THIS experiment. *(into the microphone)* Cheaters are identified through information that is inherently reliable.

MIA. It's not fair!

ADAM. "Some ant species" is not reliable info, you must be very specific in these recordings.

MIA. No, it's unfair for the ants! What we did. Make them seem reproductive cheaters when they are honest workers. I mean they're getting attacked because of us...And they're not even trying to reproduce...

ADAM. Do you have a question here? I don't really see where are you going with this. We've been working

on this project for a year now, you're saying you don't consider it anymore for your dissertation?

MIA. I actually have a...an ethical question.

ADAM. An ethical question? Shoot.

MIA. (*into the microphone*) We applied a synthetic compound typical of fertile individuals to non-reproductive worker ants. We basically framed them. Is that OK, ethically speaking?

ADAM. (*stopping the recording*) Mia! You knew very well what we were doing here when you joined our research team on "reproductive policing in ants colonies".

MIA. Yes, but... We can at least help those ants we framed, now that we've seen they were attacked / and –

ADAM. Help them? How do you suggest to help them? We can't make them queens. It's too late. They don't correspond genetically. They are too small.

MIA. We can help them have "babies".

ADAM. What are we – a fertility clinic?

MIA. It's just fair to allow them now their... little thing. The parthenogenesis.

ADAM. You must be tired. Take 10 and bring me a veggie sandwich from the cafeteria.

Warm it up a bit. I hate frozen veggies. This is the only thing I couldn't get used to in America: ice in beverages and cold veggies. And I've been here for 24 years now. 25 in August...Bring me a large coffee too! Milk, no sugar, as always. OK, go now, we have to start the new series of tests.

MIA. But, Adam...

ADAM. But-but-but. We are scientists. There's no "but" in science, just "butt".

(*He slaps her ass playfully.*)

Go.

MIA. You're not allowed to do that. That's very...sexist.

ADAM. Yeah, yeah, you're right, I won't do it with the American girls, they'd sue me. But you won't do that,

will you? You were raised differently. In our countries, it wasn't such a big deal to be playful with a woman. It's fun to flirt a bit. It relieves the tension accumulated during work hours. Nothing is more energy-boosting than a pretty woman's scent when she flirts back.

MIA. But I wasn't flirting with you.

ADAM. "But" again? You must be a little more disciplined if you want that course next semester.

MIA. I actually need a full-time job.

ADAM. A full-time job? That's hard to get. But not impossible for a smart girl like you. Go. I and the ants will wait for you. (*joking*) We won't reproduce without you.

(**MIA** *walks downstage.*)

4.

(MIA addresses the audience.)

MIA. The worker ants are biologically capable of a type of parthenogenesis, the process that allows a female to produce offspring without a mate. When they try, however, they produce chemicals called pheromones that their sisters detect with antennas.

It's basically smell, but not really the smell we humans know. More of a scent. A horny ant's scent.

If the colony lacks a queen, workers are permitted to have their own babies. But when a queen is present, only she is allowed to produce the pheromone that signals fertility status. If a worker tries to "cheat," her sisters will physically restrain the disobedient ant from successfully reproducing. Of course, it was important to figure out how they discover the cheaters. But, but, but – enough is enough, we should stop framing those poor ants. *(beat)* It would be much more interesting if we could make them queens. Now, that would be a true revolution in science. Revolution and evolution...

Yes, that's it, from theory to practice: I'll make the worker-ants queens. And I'll get a full-time position, a biiiiiig award, a faaaaaat fellowship, something!

5.

(A motel room, lunchtime.)

(ADAM is getting dressed, KARA is still in bed.)

KARA. The advantage of being unemployed: I don't have to rush to get dressed anymore. I don't have a lunch break anymore. I only have a long stressful unlimited break.

ADAM. You should do something about getting a new job, Kara. I can't hire Mia full-time. Impossible.

KARA. But you must.

ADAM. Must? May I remind you that you're not my...boss.

KARA. If my daddy were the president of the University, you'd lick my toes and sign whatever paper I put in front of you...

ADAM. Leave my wife out of this.

KARA. Sure, leave the "queen of coins" out of this. It's not like I have four kids like her. Two with you, one adopted, one with her first husband – / the lawyer...

ADAM. We agreed not to talk about her.

KARA. And of course I'm not 12 years older than you. To tell you what you "must" do. Didn't she just turn 60?

ADAM. Enough, Kara. Beth is a beautiful person, a wonderful mother, and wife.

KARA. Sure, gimme the positive bullshit speech! You married her for the American citizenship, c'mon, admit it, it's time for you to admit it!

ADAM. I think I was clear with you from the very beginning. I told you I wouldn't leave my family / for this little –

KARA. Yes, yes, you were very clear. Just sex, no feelings.

ADAM. I didn't say "no feelings"...

KARA. What did you tell... Beth? Just marriage, no sex after 55?

ADAM. It's only natural to lose the excitement after 25 years.

KARA. Natural selection – that’s how Mia would call it, all this family-dance to get ahead.

(KARA gets out of the bed, wrapping the sheet around her body.)

ADAM. I’m not going to get angry. You can say whatever you want. You are particularly bitter today. Even bitchy. I understand, you got laid off. It’s not easy. I’ll do whatever I can to help.

KARA. Give Mia a full-time teaching position.

ADAM. I can’t do that. She doesn’t have her PhD yet. She’s not even an ABD.

KARA. You are the Chair of the department, you can do whatever you want.

ADAM. Things don’t work like this here, Kara. Back in the old countries, each boss was a little dictator, he could do whatever he wanted: fuck all the pretty employees, hire virgins and fuck them, fire the husbands of the women he wanted to fuck, fuck everybody up and down, left and right. Power, they had power, those bastards. Had I stayed there... I might have become one of them. But I’m not there, Kara, I’m here, we are in America, and there are rules here, that’s why it’s called democracy.

KARA. Blah, blah, blah. *(beat)* What if I was pregnant, what then?

ADAM. You’re saying you don’t take any pills?

KARA. I hate pills. I like things...natural.

ADAM. You should have told me that.

KARA. I’m telling you now.

ADAM. Well, if you are pregnant – but there are 98% chances that you are not as you haven’t gotten pregnant in the last 5 years – however, in the hypothesis of an unwanted pregnancy...

(She looks at him: “unwanted”?)

There are a few solutions: adoption, single-motherhood, abortion...or...I could take the child,

I'm sure Beth wouldn't say no. She's really a generous person. We have a big house, we're not poor...see "the devil is not so dark" as we used to say in the old country.

KARA. Fuck you! I won't give her my child.

ADAM. You started all this "let's have a little tragedy" game. Relax. You're not pregnant.

KARA. How do you know? Is that a scientifically proven fact?

ADAM. Let's say, I don't "smell" any pregnancy.

KARA. Wow, doctor. That's good.

ADAM. I gotta go now. I have a faculty meeting at 2 pm.

KARA. Sure. Good luck.

ADAM. Shall I reserve this room for next week?

KARA. I dunno. I don't think so.

ADAM. I don't have time for games, Kara.

KARA. It's not a game. It's just...I don't "smell" any future for us.

ADAM. OK. You're in a bad mood. It's understandable. I'll call you on Monday.

KARA. Don't call me anymore.

ADAM. (*about to leave the room*) You'll feel better next week, you'll see.

KARA. Give my coldest regards to your "queen".

(*He leaves.*)

6.

MIA. A queen is generally the largest individual in the colony. She has wings until after her mating flight, when she removes them. The workers are sterile, wingless females who build and repair the nest, care for the brood, defend the nest, and feed both immature and adult ants, including the queen. (*change of tone*) Here's my big plan: I'm gonna transform those poor wingless worker-ants we framed as reproductive cheaters into QUEENS. I'm gonna develop a synthetic compound that will make them "smell" like Queens. At least for a while. Until they reproduce. And their eggs automatically become queen's eggs. (*beat*) I'll dedicate my life to finding a compound that makes them queens for life, that's irreversible. This is gonna be my big discovery! I can "smell" the Nobel Prize. For turning workers into queens. For giving them WINGS.

7.

(The living room of KARA's and MIA's house. KARA gives herself a Tarot reading.)

KARA. *(reading the cards as she turns them)* In the Self position: Ten of swords. You're feeling the taste of dust. You've been defeated. That's nothing you can do and it's appropriate to admit it. All right, I admit it. In the Situation position: Wheel of Fortune. You never know what's gonna come. Sometimes you are up, sometimes you are down. Get used to it, ride the wheel with composure. OK. Compose yourself... Four of coins in the Challenges position. Poverty consciousness... Right. Nothing new here.

(MIA enters, throwing her bag on the sofa.)

MIA. Hey.

KARA. Hey.

MIA. What are the cards saying?

KARA. Same old shit: we are poor and aware of it. How was your day? Any news on the job front?

MIA. I went to the Library, to Career Services, to the IT labs, the Campus Administration, the Suicide Hotline, but... *(beat)* It's because I'm a foreign student, I can't get hired even in the admissions office or cafeteria without a green card, can you believe that?

KARA. What's not to believe.

MIA. I can't be "work-study". Which means I can't really work there, except for research and grants that I could get for my research. And teaching of course, but that's a long shot. It sucks! *(beat)* Anyway, they pay so little – like ten bucks an hour. You work eight hours, the whole day, and you can only buy like what: two books. A waste of time. I can do a lot in those eight hours. I can progress my research. This shitty work situation actually motivates me to focus fully on my research. Time is important, time is progress. *(beat)*

Why don't you say anything?

KARA. I dunno. I guess I'm...paralyzed, I'm just...I dunno.

MIA. What are we gonna do? How much do you have in savings?

KARA. There are four families on our street going through foreclosures, or even more, but they are hiding it... Rich people don't like to admit they got poor, for them it's even worse than for us, they're used to having money... We can lose the house.

MIA. You don't have any savings.

KARA. I have about...4000 dollars. Enough for a month of living, and an abortion.

MIA. No, no... That's not an option.

KARA. It's a necessity.

MIA. But we want a child!

KARA. I don't want it. And I don't wanna talk about it anymore. (*She walks to the window. She wants to avoid the painful topics.*) We need a brighter light in the courtyard.

MIA. What? Oh, yeah. A 100 Watts bulb will do it. That one is a 40.

KARA. (*beat*) The Year of the Ox is said to bring good fortune and prosperity. I guess that's not for us, not for Goats and Rats.

MIA. I thought I was a Tiger in the Chinese horoscope.

KARA. You wish. You're a Goat and I'm a Rat. (*beat*) Your professor is an Ox. This year is gonna be good for him. His wife is an Ox too. Two prosperous Oxen. Good for them.

MIA. How do you know when Adam was born?

KARA. You mentioned he was 48.

MIA. I don't think I did.

KARA. You did. You told me he was 48 and all the gossip about his old fat wife.

MIA. I didn't say she was fat. I've never seen her.

KARA. I know some people who knew him since he came to this country. He changed his name, he cut the last part... he wanted so much to be an American. That's why he married her. Kohn is actually Kohnashevsky..., Kohnjevich, Kohnagamba, something like that.

MIA. You just found out about all that?

KARA. I've known it for years.

MIA. You never mentioned it.

KARA. I wanted you to respect him. He's your boss.

MIA. My professor and my thesis advisor, not my boss.

(Silence.)

KARA. He must give you a teaching position or a grant.

MIA. Why don't you ask the father of the baby to help? That would make much more sense. He impregnated / you.

KARA. He wants to take my baby and raise it with his wife. That's not gonna happen. I'd rather kill him. The baby.

MIA. No! We will take care of her. Or him. But the father must pay.

KARA. *(outburst)* When is that Adam gonna really do something for us!?

(Pause. MIA's revelation.)

MIA. It's his...It's Adam's...

KARA. I'm sorry, Mia, I should have...Anyway. Better to have everything out in the open.

MIA. Since when have you two...

KARA. Five years. More or less.

MIA. It sucks...

KARA. That's how we got you here. He wrote the support letter for your student visa.

(Silence. MIA takes it in.)

MIA. No, I got accepted into the program based on my own merits.

KARA. Of course. He wouldn't have accepted you otherwise. But he was able to accept you instead of other foreign students. The places were limited.

MIA. He liked my paper. He said it was "revolutionary". He really liked my work!

KARA. He did.

MIA. No, I didn't get in because of you, or him, or because you and him, I got in because I'm good! I'm good!

KARA. Of course you're good.

MIA. I need to go out, I need...beer, whisky, something, anything.

KARA. But you don't drink, Mia.

(MIA puts a jacket on.)

MIA. *(heading out)* I'm going to the campus. It's a party there.

KARA. You never go to those parties! Mia! We need to talk, to make some decisions, we are in a shitty situation, / we...

MIA. It's not WE. YOU are in a shitty situation and dragged me down with you. You want to drown both of us. You can't stand swimming alone in your own DO-IT-YOURSELF shit.

(She leaves, slamming the door.)

KARA. Mia! Wait!

MIA. *(off stage)* Where did you put my bike?!

KARA. In the fuckin' garage!

8.

(A party on the campus. MIA still has her helmet on.)

MIA. *(to a male student off stage)* Fuck off, that wasn't a kiss, it was a stupid exchange of saliva and I DIDN'T LIKE IT! Nerd!

(She gets outside, drinking a beer. Party music can be heard in the background.)

Male ants are generally winged and keep their wings until death. The male ant's only function is to mate with the queen. Once he does, he dies, generally within two weeks.

(pause, drinking)

Adam Kohn, you are dead! I'm gonna cut cut cut your wings! You don't deserve them, bastard! You have a wife, why did you have to fuck around with my sister? *(drinking)* It's not that I don't like you, I do, I would have liked you as a brother-in-law, I would. But guess what, you are married, stupid! *(pause, drinking)*

That wife of yours, she has it all, hasn't she? She's the real Queen. She has kids, she has money, she has a house. She has you. What do we have? Me and my sister – we have nothing. We have a mortgage and routines and worries and debt. My sister hasn't had a real vacation in 17 years! 17 years of summers in that freakin' factory while you and your wife – and your kids – were laying in the sun in Cancun or...fucking Jamaica. I hate you, Adam Kohn. I hate you!!!

9.

(The Biochemistry Lab.)

(MIA is standing, ADAM is sitting.)

ADAM. OK. What is so important that it couldn't wait? That you didn't prepare the synthetic hydrocarbon?

MIA. I know about you and my sister.

ADAM. Oh, that. That shouldn't interfere with our work here.

MIA. You must help your baby.

ADAM. What baby are you talking about?

MIA. Kara is pregnant. With you. Do you deny that?

ADAM. Wait a minute. This is a strategy to show me that framing non-reproductive ants as cheaters is wrong. I got your point. No need for this new soap-opera. We are not in Hollywood here.

MIA. So you don't want to admit it's your child.

ADAM. Mia, it's not OK to do such things to your professor. Your thesis advisor. I was planning to help you guys, but now...

MIA. But, but, but... now I found out that you cheated on your wife with my sister. That you got her pregnant. We are ... family now. Her baby is your child and my niece. Or nephew. We both have some responsibility in all this.

ADAM. So this is serious. She's really pregnant?

MIA. Yeah, she pukes like every five minutes. You don't wanna be in our home now. We are facing foreclosure, she lost her job, we are in a kinda...desperate situation.

ADAM. Well. This is quite some news.

MIA. So I need you to do two things.

ADAM. I can take care of the baby. I already told that to Kara.

MIA. Liar. You said you didn't know.

ADAM. She presented me with the hypothesis, not the fact.

MIA. We don't want to give the baby to you and your wife. We want 4000 dollars each month, as child support, and we won't even tell your wife. And I want something else too.

ADAM. You are not in the position to negotiate with me.

MIA. I'm not negotiating with you. I'm telling you what's what.

ADAM. Don't piss me off, I want to find a way to support you guys, but / if you piss me off –

MIA. You will do what I'm telling you to do. And more.

ADAM. (*standing up*) This is ridiculous.

MIA. I wrote a sexual harassment complaint. Tomorrow it is going to the dean.

ADAM. What?! You don't have any reasons to complain. I didn't do anything to you. Except slap your ass once or twice. That's not sexual harassment.

MIA. I took the liberty to add some stuff. A "synthetic compound". I said you forced me to give you a blowjob.

ADAM. (*amused*) That's crazy. Nobody will believe you. (*seriously*) I have a certain prestige in this school, why would anyone believe you?

MIA. Because Mary Segal and Megan Kartis accused you of sexual harassment six years ago and you managed to come out clean, to get pushed back in business by your father-in-law, the President of the University. But, but, but – that can't happen again because he retired last year. I did my research.

(*Silence. Finally ADAM takes the whole situation in.*)

ADAM. What do you actually want?

MIA. 4000 dollars each month – baby support.

(*Pause. They look at each other.*)

ADAM. OK.

MIA. And you won't take the baby.

ADAM. That's fine. Perfect. I don't really need a new born. I have grown up children. (*beat*)

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