

# The Mercurian



*A Theatrical Translation Review*  
Volume 3, Number 4 (Fall 2011)

Editor: Adam Versényi  
ISSN: 2160-3316

*The Mercurian* is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary “principles” of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as “spirit”. The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

*The Mercurian* publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation, rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre, as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versényi at [anversen@email.unc.edu](mailto:anversen@email.unc.edu) or by snail mail: Adam Versényi, Department of Dramatic Art, CB# 3230, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3230. For translations of plays or performance pieces, unless the material is in the public domain, please send proof of permission to translate from the playwright or original creator of the piece. Since one of the primary objects of *The Mercurian* is to move translated pieces into production, no translations of plays or performance pieces will be published unless the translator can certify that he/she has had an opportunity to hear the translation performed in either a reading or another production-oriented venue. All material published in *The Mercurian* is protected by international copyright law. Inquiries related to production or reproduction should be directed to the translator of the piece in question.

---

---

# The Mercurian

*Volume 3, Number 4*

## Table of Contents

Editor's Note	3
Uncle Vanya	6
By Anton Chekhov	
New Version by Libby Appel	
From a literal translation by Allison Horsley	
Love the Doctor: Introduction	89
Sarah Brew and Josephine Hardman	
Love the Doctor	93
By Tirso de Molina	
Translated by Sarah Brew and Josephine Hardman	
A Man Walks into a World: Introduction	234
By Henning Bochert	
A Man Walks into a World	239
By Martin Heckmanns	
Translated by Henning Bochert	

---

### Editor's Note:

This issue of *The Mercurian* begins with Libby Appel and Allison Horsley's new translation of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, originally commissioned for performance at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. *Uncle Vanya* concludes the publication of all of Appel and Horsley's translations of Chekhov's major plays in *The Mercurian*. The translations can also be accessed at the website for their Chekhov project, [www.chekhovplays.com](http://www.chekhovplays.com).

Sarah Brew and Josephine Hardman's translation of Tirso de Molina's *Love the Doctor* continues *The Mercurian*'s efforts to provide playable translations of the rich theatrical tradition from the Spanish Golden Age. Brew and Hardman's introduction to their translation discusses the translation and adaptation choices they made in the search for a contemporary theatrically viable translation of a sixteenth-century Spanish text. Their choices can be profitably juxtaposed against Oliver Mayer's much freer adaptations of Cervantes' *entremeses* published in Volume 3, No. 2 of *The Mercurian*.

We end this issue with Henning Bochert's translation of the contemporary German playwright Martin Heckmanns' play, *A Man Walks into a World*. The interrogation of identity created by Heckmanns in the play presents interesting linguistic challenges for a translator that Bochert discusses in his introduction to the play.

Finally, this issue contains an announcement of, and call for participation in, Theatrical Translation as Creative Process: A Conference/Festival, to be held at Duke University and the University of North Carolina in April 2012. Staged readings of a number of translations by members of *The Mercurian* community will be performed. We invite you all to join us!

Back issues of the journal can now be found under "Related Links" on the website of the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, <http://drama.unc.edu/> where we will maintain a permanent web presence.

As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 4, No. 1 will be May 1, 2012.

--Adam Versényi

Advisory Board

Neil Blackadder, Knox College

Catherine Coray, hotINK at the LARK/New York University

Richard Davis, George Mason University/Theater of the First Amendment

Jean Graham-Jones, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

David Johnston, Queen's University, Belfast, N.Ireland

Kirsten Nigro, The University of Texas-El Paso

Caridad Svich, Playwright/Translator

Paul Walsh, Yale School of Drama

## THEATRICAL TRANSLATION AS CREATIVE PROCESS: A CONFERENCE/FESTIVAL:

From April 12-15, 2012 The Mercurian: A Theatrical Translation Review, in conjunction with The Process Series of the Carolina Performing Arts Series, the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, and the Performance and Embodied Research Colloquium and Theatre Studies at Duke University, will hold a conference/festival on theatrical translation as creative process. Please join us!

The Process Series will present staged readings of four theatrical translations: *Huddersfield* by Uglijisa Stilnac, translated and adapted by Caridad Svich; *Vengeance Can Wait* by Yukiko Montoya, translated and adapted by Kyoko Yoshida/Andy Bragen; *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer* by Rebekka Kricheldorf, translated by Neil Blackadder; and *Apocalypse Tomorrow* by Ricardo Monti, translated by Jean Graham-Jones. In addition, there will be readings of *The Divorce Court Judge* and *Dirty Fraud, The Widowed Pimp* by Miguel Cervantes and translated by Oliver Mayer outside of The Process Series.

Andy Bragen, Neil Blackadder, Jean Graham-Jones, and Oliver Mayer will be in residence to rehearse the readings, and will join us to discuss their work as translators in the creative process.

The Conference will be organized following the “Open Space” model in which there are no prepared papers or presentations, but every person attending can propose a topic for discussion. Further information will be provided on the first day of the conference.

Registration and hotel information can be found at:

<http://sites.duke.edu/perc/translationconference/>

Please contact Adam Versényi, [anversen@email.unc.edu](mailto:anversen@email.unc.edu), with any questions. We look forward to seeing you in April!

UNCLE VANYA  
Scenes from Country Life in Four Acts

By Anton Chekhov  
New version by Libby Appel  
From a literal translation by Allison Horsley

Commissioned by  
The Oregon Shakespeare Festival  
Artistic Director Bill Rauch  
Executive Director Paul Nicholson

**Required royalties must be paid every time this play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged.** To purchase acting editions of this play, to obtain stock and amateur performance rights, and for all other inquiries, please contact:

Abrams Artists Agency,  
275 Seventh Ave., 26<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
New York, NY 10001,  
attn: Morgan Jenness,  
[literary@abramsartny.com](mailto:literary@abramsartny.com).

## CHARACTERS

ALEKSANDER VLADIMIROVICH SEREBRYAKOV, a retired professor

YELENA ANDREYEVNA, his wife, 27 years old

SOFYA ALEKSANDROVNA (Sonya), his daughter from his first marriage

MARIA VASILYEVNA VOINITSKAYA, a widow of Privy Councillor, the mother of  
the professor's first wife

IVAN PETROVICH VOINITSKY (Vanya), her son

MIKHAIL LVOVICH ASTROV, a doctor

ILYA ILYICH TELYEGIN (Waffles), an impoverished landowner

MARINA TIMOFEYEVNA, an old nurse

YEFIM, a workman

*The action occurs on SEREBRYAKOV's country estate.*

## ACT I

*A garden. Part of a house with a terrace is visible. On a path under old poplars is a table, laid for tea. Benches, chairs; on one of the benches lies a guitar. Not far from the table is a child's swing. — Between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. Overcast.*

*MARINA (a slow-moving old woman, sits by the samovar, she knits a stocking) and ASTROV (he paces nearby).*

MARINA

*(She fills a glass).* Eat. Eat something.

ASTROV

*(Reluctantly takes the glass)* I'm not hungry.

MARINA

Maybe a little vodka?

ASTROV

No. I don't drink vodka every day. Anyway, it's so hot today.

*Pause.*

Sweetheart, how long have we known each other?

MARINA

*(Pondering.)* How long? God help me, let's see ... You arrived in these parts ... when? ... Sonyechka's mother, Vera Petrovna, was still alive. Two times you came here to help her ... so it must be eleven



years. (*Having thought.*) Well, maybe more.

ASTROV

Have I changed much?

MARINA

Oh, sure. You were so young and handsome. Now you're old and not so good looking anymore.

Besides — too much vodka... (*She makes a "tsk tsk tsk" sound.*)

ASTROV

Yes... In ten years I've become a different man. And why? I work too hard, nyanya. I'm on my feet all day long. I don't get a moment's rest until I'm in bed at night — and then I'm terrified they'll drag me out for another patient. In all these years here, I haven't had a single day off. How could I stay young? And anyway, life is boring, stupid, dirty...it drags you down. And everyone you meet is crazy — honest to God, everyone I know is crazy. Try living among them for a while and you become a crazy person too — no getting away from it. (*Twisting his long moustache.*) Just look, look at this enormous moustache. Stupid moustache. I'm a crazy person, too, nyanya. But the good news is I haven't become a stupid person. Thank God for that. I still have my brains — but I can't seem to feel anything anymore. I don't want anything, I don't need anything, I don't love anyone — only you — I still love you. (*He kisses her head.*) When I was a kid, I had a nyanya just like you.

MARINA

Are you sure you don't want something to eat?

ASTROV

No. In the third week of Lent I was in Malitskoye because of the epidemic — typhus — wall to wall sick people. Filth, stench, smoke, animals lying next to sick people ... calves, pigs ... I was on my feet all day — not a drop of food or water touched my lips and when I finally got home, no rest there either. They brought me a railroad switchman; I put him on the table to operate and he died on me — under chloroform. And can you believe it — it was in that moment my feelings decided to wake up — and I started to believe that he died because of me. I sat down, closed my eyes — and I thought:

will anyone remember us in a hundred or two hundred years? Will anyone speak well of us? No, nyanya, no — we will be forgotten.

MARINA

People won't remember, but God will.

ASTROV

Thanks for that — well said.

*Enter VOINITSKY.*

VOINITSKY

*(He exits from the house; he had a nap after breakfast and has a rumpled appearance; he sits down on the bench, he adjusts his fancy tie).*

Yes...

*Pause.*

Yes...

ASTROV

Good nap?

VOINITSKY

Yes... Very. *(He yawns.)* Ever since the professor and his wife came to live with us, everything is upside down. I fall asleep at all the wrong times, we eat spicy foods, I drink too much wine — it's ridiculous. Sonya and I used to work all day long. Nowadays Sonya works and I eat, drink and sleep. Not good!

MARINA

*(Having shaken her head.)* Yes, it's ridiculous! The professor wakes up at 12 noon, but the samovar boils from early morning, waiting for him. When they weren't around we ate lunch at one o'clock,

like everybody does. But nowadays it's between six and seven. The professor reads and writes all night long, and about two o'clock in the morning, he rings. Now what's that about, my friends? Tea! Sure, wake everyone up and put the samovar on...Ridiculous!

ASTROV

How long are they staying?

VOINITSKY

*(He whistles.)* A hundred years. The professor has decided to settle here permanently.

MARINA

And look — the samovar's been boiling for two hours and they are out for a stroll.

VOINITSKY

They're coming, they're coming... Calm down.

*Voices are heard; from the depths of the garden, returning from a stroll, enter SEREBRYKOV, YELENA ANDREYEVNA, SONYA, and TELYEGIN.*

SEREBRYAKOV

Excellent, excellent... remarkable views.

TELYEGIN

Yes, remarkable, Your Excellency.

SONYA

Tomorrow we'll take a walk in the woods, papa. Does that sound nice?

VOINITSKY

Ladies and Gentlemen, tea!

SEREBRYAKOV

My friends, bring my tea to the study, if you please! I still have work to do.

SONYA

Oh, but you'll love the woods, papa ...

*YELENA ANDREYEVNA, SEREBRYAKOV and SONYA exit into the house;*

*TELYEGIN goes to the table and sits/takes a seat near MARINA.*

VOINITSKY

It's boiling hot today, but our great scholar is in a topcoat, galoshes, with an umbrella and gloves.

ASTROV

Ergo, he takes good care of himself.

VOINITSKY

And did you get a look at her? Beautiful! I've never seen anyone more beautiful.

TELYEGIN

Whether I'm in the fields, Marina Timofeyevna, or wandering in the shady orchard, or just looking at this table, I experience indescribable joy! The weather is charming, the little birds are singing, we all live in peace and harmony — what more could we ask?

*(He accepts a glass.)* I'm deeply grateful to you!

VOINITSKY

*(Dreamily.)* Her eyes... Marvelous woman!

ASTROV

Talk to me, Ivan Petrovich.

VOINITSKY

*(Sluggishly)* What should I say?

ASTROV

Anything new?

VOINITSKY

Nothing. Everything is old. I'm the same as I was — only worse. I've gotten lazy. I grumble all day long like the old clown I've become. My ancient crow of a mother still prattles on about women's emancipation; she's got one foot in the grave, and the other at the edge of an "ennobled new life."

ASTROV

And the professor?

VOINITSKY

And the professor sits alone from morning 'til night in the study and writes.

“Strained mind, strained brow,

No rest will he allow.

Must write all nights, must write all days,

Sadly for him, there is no praise.”

I pity the poor paper! He'd be better off writing his autobiography — now there's a topic! A retired professor, if you don't mind, a dried-up old geezer, a pedantic plodder ... Gout, rheumatism, migraines, a liver swollen with jealousy and envy... This geezer lives on the estate of his first wife, lives here against his will, because he can't afford to live in the city. He whines endlessly about his own misfortunes, even though the truth is, he's been outrageously lucky. *(Irritably.)* Just listen to this luck — son of a village sexton, a seminary student, who somehow got his academic degrees and chairmanship, became “His Excellency”, the son-in-law of a senator, etcetera, etcetera.. But none of that is important. Just listen, there's more — Here's a man who spends twenty-five years reading and writing about art, and actually knows absolutely nothing about art. For twenty-five years he chews

up and digests other scholars' ideas about realism, naturalism and other nonsense; for twenty-five years he reads and writes about stuff smart people knew all along and stupid people never cared about in the first place — so in reality, he has spent twenty-five years chasing his tail around a tree. Yet, have you noticed the conceit! The pretensions! He went into retirement, and there's not a living soul who has heard of him, he's a complete nobody — which means that for twenty-five years he hasn't made the tiniest dent in this world. But look at him: he strides around like a demigod!

ASTROV

I think you're jealous.

VOINITSKY

Yes, I'm jealous! And have you noticed his success with women! Don Juan never had such success! His first wife, my sister, a beautiful, gentle creature, as perfect as the blue sky above, generous, with more admirers than he has pupils, she loved him so, as only purest angels can love. My mother, his mother-in-law, to this day worships him, and yes, to this day he inspires in her wondrous awe. His second wife, a beauty, a clever girl — you just saw her — married him when he was old already, gave him her youth, beauty, freedom, her own brilliance. And for what? Why?

ASTROV

Is she faithful to the professor?

VOINITSKY

Unfortunately, yes.

ASTROV

Why unfortunately?

VOINITSKY

Because that kind of faithfulness is false from beginning to end. There's a lot of empty piousness in her faithfulness, but no logic. Sure, to betray an old husband, whom you can't endure, that's immoral; but to throw away your youth and brilliance, that's — yes, that's "honorable."

TELYEGIN

*(Crying out.)* Vanya, I don't like it when you talk like that. Now, please... when someone is unfaithful to their husband or wife, then that person is capable of disloyalty to his country!

VOINITSKY

*(Irritated.)* Oh, shut up, Waffles!

TELYEGIN

Please excuse me, Vanya. My wife ran away the day after our wedding with her lover, mostly because she couldn't stand to look at me. But I never strayed from my duty. To this day I love her and I remain faithful to her. I help her when I can — I sold my property to pay for her and her lover's children. I lost everything, all my happiness, but I still have my pride. And she? She's gotten old, her beauty has faded, her lover has died... What does she have?

*Enter SONYA and YELENA ANDREYEVNA; a little later MARIA VASILYEVNA enters with a book; she sits and reads; they give her tea, and she drinks it without looking.*

SONYA

*(Hurriedly to the nurse.)* Nyanya dear, there are some peasants here. Go talk to them, and I'll pour the tea... *(She pours tea.)*

*MARINA exits. YELENA ANDREYEVNA takes her teacup and drinks, sitting on the swing.*

ASTROV

*(To YELENA ANDREYEVNA.)* You know I came here to see your husband. You wrote that he's very ill — rheumatism or something — but he seems to be perfectly fine.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Last night he was depressed, he complained about pain in his legs, but today nothing...

ASTROV

And I galloped here thirty-five miles at breakneck speed. Well, never mind, it's not the first time. Oh, alright, I'll stay with you until tomorrow and, maybe, I'll get a good night's sleep for once.

SONYA

Wonderful. You hardly ever stay overnight anymore. Have you had lunch?

ASTROV

No, ma'am.

SONYA

Well you must have lunch! These days we eat lunch between six and seven o'clock.

*(She drinks.)* Uh oh, the tea is cold!

TELYEGIN

The temperature in the samovar has lowered considerably.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Never mind, Ivan Ivanych, we'll drink it cold.

TELYEGIN

Please excuse me, madam... Not Ivan Ivanych, but Ilya Ilyich, madam... Ilya Ilych Telyegin, or, as some call me, Waffles, on account of my pock-marked face. I am Sonyechka's godfather, and His Excellency, your husband, knows me very well. I live here, madam, on this estate, madam... You may have noticed, I dine with you every day.

SONYA

Ilya Ilych is our valued assistant, our right hand man. *(Tenderly.)* Here, godfather, I'll pour you some more.



MARIA VASILYEVNA

Akh!

SONYA

What's wrong, *babushka*?

MARIA VASILYEVNA

I forgot to tell *Alexandre*... I must be losing my mind...today I received a letter from from Pavel Alekseyevich in Kharkov ... He sent his new pamphlet...

ASTROV

Interesting?

MARIA VASILYEVNA

Yes, interesting, but strange somehow. He utterly refutes that which he himself defended seven years ago. It's terrible!

VOINITSKY

There is nothing terrible about it. Drink your tea, *Maman*.

MARIA VASILYEVNA

But I want to talk!

VOINITSKY

We've been talking and talking for fifty years and reading and reading pamphlets. Maybe it's time to be silent.

MARIA VASILYEVNA

My voice seems to annoy you lately, *Jean*. Forgive me, *Jean*, but in the last year you have changed so much that I absolutely don't recognize you anymore... You were a man with definite convictions, a

clear point of view...

VOINITSKY

Oh, yes! I was so clear, no one could see me.

*Pause.*

I was so clear that... oh, maybe I shouldn't make stupid jokes... I am forty seven years old. Until last year I was exactly like you, trying to immerse my mind in scholarly thinking — yes, I was so immersed I couldn't even see my nose in front of my face — and I thought I was being brilliant. But now — if only you knew! I don't sleep at night because I'm so furious that I wasted my time with all that. I lost my chance to live and now I'm too old!

SONYA

Uncle Vanya, please stop!

MARIA VASILYEVNA

*(To her son.)* You are attacking all your former convictions... But they're not to blame, you yourself are! You forget, convictions are nothing in themselves, just words... One must take action, do something...

VOINITSKY

Do something? Not everyone is a *perpetuum mobile* writing machine like your *herr* professor.

MARIA VASILYEVNA

What are you talking about?

SONYA

*(Pleading.) Babushka!* Uncle Vanya! I beg you!

VOINITSKY

I'll be quiet. I'll be quiet and I apologize.

*Pause.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Isn't the weather lovely ... not too hot...

*Pause.*

VOINITSKY

Yes, it's good weather for hanging yourself...

*TELYEGIN tunes his guitar. MARINA walks by the house and calls the chickens.*

MARINA

Chick, chick, chick...

SONYA

Nyanya, why did the peasants come?

MARINA

Always the same, always about that piece of land they want ...Chick, chick, chick...

SONYA

Who're you calling?

MARINA

*Pestruška* is out with her chicks... The crows might snatch them up... *(She exits.)*

*TELYEGIN plays a polka; everyone listens quietly; YEFIM enters.*

YEFIM

Is the doctor here? *(To ASTROV.)* Please, Mikhail Lvovich, some men are here to see you.

ASTROV

Where from?

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

YEFIM

From the factory.

ASTROV

*(Annoyed.)* All right, thanks very much. It looks like I have to go. *(He looks for his hat.)* It's so damn annoying.

SONYA

I'm so sorry. Come back later for lunch.

ASTROV

No, it'll be too late. Where the hell... Where's... *(To YEFIM.)* Get me a glass of vodka, will you?

*YEFIM exits.*

Where the hell... Ah... *(He has found his hat.)* In a play by Ostrovsky there's a man with a big moustache and no talent... that's me. Well, I have the honor, ladies and gentlemen... *(To YELENA ANDREYEVNA.)* If you are in the neighborhood, please come visit me with Sofya Aleksandrovna. I have a small estate, fifty acres, but, if it interests you, it has a model orchard and nursery which you won't be able to find for a thousand miles around here. The State forest is right next to my place ... the forest warden is old, always sick, so, in fact, I spend a lot of my time managing the forest business.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes, I've heard that you love forests. I'm sure you're very helpful, but doesn't it get in the way of your real work? You're a doctor, true?

ASTROV

Only God knows what our real work is.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Is it interesting?

ASTROV

Oh yes, very.

VOINITSKY

*(With irony.)* Very!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(To ASTROV.)* You're still young... well, thirty-six or thirty-seven... I'll bet it can't be as interesting as you say. All those trees... it must be boring.

SONYA

No, it's extremely interesting. Mikhail Lvovich plants new trees every year, and they've given him a bronze medal and a certificate for his good work. He writes petitions to keep them from destroying the old forests. If you just listen to him, you'll agree completely. He says, forests bring grace to the earth, they teach man to understand what is beautiful and they inspire us to appreciate beauty in this world. Forests soften our harsh climate. In countries where there is a mild climate, people are less overwhelmed by the struggle with nature, and therefore men are gentler and more tender — more attractive, versatile, passionate — their speech is elegant, their movement is graceful. In those countries science and art flourish, their philosophy is not gloomy like ours, attitudes toward women are honorable and noble...

VOINITSKY

*(Laughing.)* Bravo, bravo!.. That's all very nice, but I'm not convinced. *(To ASTROV.)* So permit me, my friend, to continue to heat my stove with firewood and build my shed with wood.

ASTROV

You can heat your stove with peat, and build your shed with stones. Well, I'll grant you, there is a

need to chop down some trees, but why eliminate them entirely? Russian forests fall under the axe, billions of trees perish, they ravage the dwellings of wild animals and birds, rivers grow shallow and dry, the magical landscape irrevocably vanishes, and all because we are too lazy to stoop down and pick up the fuel from the ground. *(To YELENA ANDREYEVNA.)* Isn't that right, madam? We must be reckless barbarians if we burn in our stoves that which we can never re-create. Man has been given reason and imagination, so that we may increase what is given to us. But up 'til now, we only destroy, not create. There are fewer and fewer forests, our rivers are drying up, our wildlife is becoming extinct, our climate is changing, and every single day the earth becomes poorer and uglier. *(To VOINITSKY.)* Don't give me that look. Maybe you don't believe me and... and maybe you think I'm crazy, but... When I pass by the woods which I saved from the axe, or when I see a new tree growing that I planted with my own hands, I realize that maybe the climate is just a little bit in my power after all, and if it could possibly make people happier, then I feel as if I have made a small contribution to this earth. When I plant a birch and I see how it grows green and sways with the wind, my soul fills with pride, and I... *(Seeing YEFIM, who has brought a glass of vodka on a tray.)* However... *(he drinks)* it's time for me to go.

VOINITSKY

*(To YELENA.)* He doesn't eat meat either.

ASTROV

Yes, I think it's a crime to kill living things. I must sound very strange to you ...

I have the honor to take your leave. *(He goes to the house.)*

SONYA

*(She takes him by the arm and goes with him.)* When will you be back to see us?

ASTROV

I don't know...

SONYA

In a month?..

*ASTROV and SONYA exit into the house; MARIA VASILYEVNA and TELYEGIN remain by the table; YELENA ANDREYEVNA and VOINITSKY walk to the terrace.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You, Ivan Petrovich, you were impossible! Why did you aggravate Maria Vasilyevna, and talk about *perpetuum mobile*! And today at breakfast you argued with Aleksander again. You are so petty!

VOINITSKY

I hate him!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

There's nothing to hate. He's the same as everyone else. The same as you.

VOINITSKY

If you could just look at yourself — your face, the way you move... so lazy, so idle! It's hard for you to budge, to live, isn't it! Akh, what laziness!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes, lazy and bored! Everyone hates my husband, everyone looks at me with pity: poor darling, she has an old husband! Such sympathy — oh, how well I understand it! It's exactly as Astrov said: you recklessly destroy the forests, and soon nothing beautiful will remain on earth. In the same reckless way, you destroy man, and soon, thanks to you, there will be no truth or purity left, no capacity for self-sacrifice. Why can't you look at a woman with indifference — especially if she isn't yours? The doctor is right — a demon of destruction sits right inside you. You have no pity for the forests, the birds, women — no, not for anything...

VOINITSKY

Cut out the philosophy!

*Pause.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

That doctor has a tired, nervous face. It's an interesting face. Clearly, Sonya is fond of him, she's in love with him, and I understand her. He's been here to see us three times already, but I'm shy and I haven't yet talked with him as I'd like to. I haven't been too nice to him either. He probably thinks I'm awful. Ivan Petrovich, you know why we're such good friends? Because we're both such tedious, boring people! Tedious! Don't look at me like that, I don't like it.

VOINITSKY

How can I look at you differently? I love you. You are my happiness, my life, my youth! I know you'll never return these feelings, but at least permit me to look at you, to listen to your voice...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Be quiet, they can hear you!

*They walk to the house.*

VOINITSKY

*(Walking behind her.)* Permit me to speak of my love, don't drive me away, that's all I need to be happy...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

This is excruciating...

*They both exit into the house.*

*TELYEGIN plucks the strings and plays a polka; MARIA VASILYEVNA writes something in the margins of the pamphlet.*



CURTAIN.

ACT II

*The dining room in SEREBRYAKOV's home. — Night. — In the garden the watchman can be heard tapping.*

*SEREBRYAKOV (sits in an armchair before an open window and dozes) and YELENA ANDREYEVNA (sits beside him and also dozes).*

SEREBRYAKOV

*(Waking up.)* Who's there? Sonya, is that you?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I'm here.

SEREBRYAKOV

You, Lenchka... The pain is unbearable!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Here, your blanket fell. *(She muffles up his legs.)* I'll shut the window.

SEREBRYAKOV

No, I'm suffocating... I was just nodding off, and I dreamt that my left leg was attached to someone else. I woke up with such excruciating pain. No, this is not gout — probably rheumatism. What time is it?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Twenty minutes after twelve.

*Pause.*

SEREBRYAKOV

In the morning go look for Batyushkov in the library. I'm sure we have him.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

What?

SEREBRYAKOV

Look for Batyushkov in the morning. I seem to recall, we have him. Why can't I breathe?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You're tired. This is the second night you haven't slept.

SEREBRYAKOV

They say Turgenev developed angina pectoris from gout. I'm afraid I'm getting it too. Damned, disgusting old age. The devil take it! Now that I'm old, I can't stand looking at myself. And I'm sure all of you must be repulsed by me too.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You make it sound as if it's our fault you got old.

SEREBRYAKOV

But I'm most disgusting to you.

*YELENA ANDREYEVNA walks away and sits at some distance.*

Of course, you're right. I'm not stupid, I understand. You're young, healthy, beautiful, you want to live, and I'm an old man, almost a corpse. True? I understand all too well. And of course, it's a terrible crime I have lived this long. But wait a little, soon you'll be free of me. I won't last much longer.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I'm exhausted... For God's sake be quiet.

SEREBRYAKOV

Yes, everyone is exhausted — all because of me. They're bored, they're wasting their time, they're wasting their youth. I'm the only one who's happy. I'm the only one having a good time. Well, yes, of course!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Be quiet! You've worn me out!

SEREBRYAKOV

Yes, I have worn everyone out! Of course.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(On the verge of tears.)* This is unbearable! Tell me what you want from me.

SEREBRYAKOV

Nothing.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Well, then be quiet. I beg you.

SEREBRYAKOV

It's so strange, Ivan Petrovich talks his head off, or that old idiot, Marya Vasilyevna, and it's just fine, everyone listens, but when I say one word, everyone suddenly feels desolate. Even my voice is offensive. Well, let's assume I am offensive, I'm an egoist, I'm a despot — don't I have the right to be an egoist, even in my old age? Think about it. Haven't I earned it? I ask you, don't I have the right to a comfortable old age, surrounded by my admirers?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

No one is taking away your rights.

*The window bangs from the wind.*

It's very windy, I'll close the window. *(She closes it.)* It'll rain soon. No one's denying your rights.

*Pause; the watchman in the garden taps and sings a song.*

SEREBRYAKOV

All one's life to be dedicated to scholarship, to become accustomed to one's study, to the classroom, to respectable colleagues – and suddenly, for no apparent reason, to find oneself buried in this tomb, every day to deal with stupid people, to listen to insignificant chatter... I want to live, I love success, I love fame, I love action — but here I'm in exile. Every minute I'm longing for the past, watching the success of others, fearing death... I cannot! I don't have the strength! And no one can forgive me for being old!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Wait a little, have patience: in five or six years I'll be old too.

*SONYA enters.*

SONYA

Papa, you sent for Dr. Astrov, but when he came, you refused to see him. That's so rude. You bothered this man...

SEREBRYAKOV

Why do I need your Astrov? He understands as much about medicine as I do astronomy.

SONYA

We cannot send for the entire medical faculty just for your gout.

SEREBRYAKOV

I won't talk to that idiot.

SONYA

As you wish. *(She sits.)* It's all the same to me.

SEREBRYAKOV

What time is it?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Almost one.

SEREBRYAKOV

It's stifling... Sonya, give me the drops from the table!

SONYA

Yes, of course. *(She gives him the drops.)*

SEREBRYAKOV

*(Irritatedly.)* Akh, not these! I can't ask for anything!

SONYA

Please, stop acting like a baby. It may be fine for others, but spare me, please! I don't like it. I don't have time, I need to get up early tomorrow, I have the hay to mow.

*Enter VOINITSKY in a dressing-gown and with a candle.*

VOINITSKY

The storm's coming.

*Lightning.*

Here we go! *Hélène* and Sonya, go to sleep. I came to relieve you.

SEREBRYAKOV

*(Frightened.)* No, no! Don't leave me with him! No. He'll talk my head off!

VOINITSKY

But they've got to get some rest! They didn't sleep at all last night.

SEREBRYAKOV

Let them go to sleep, but you go too. Thank you. I implore you. In the name of our former friendship, just go. We'll talk later.

VOINITSKY

*(With a grin.)* Our former friendship... former...

SONYA

Be quiet, Uncle Vanya.

SEREBRYAKOV

*(To his wife.)* My dear, don't leave me with him! He'll talk my head off.

VOINITSKY

Can you believe how ludicrous this is ...

*MARINA enters with a candle.*

SONYA

You ought to be in bed, Nyanya. It's very late.

MARINA

The samovar is still boiling. You can't exactly expect me to go to bed.

SEREBRYAKOV

No one is sleeping, everybody is exhausted, I alone am in a state of bliss.

MARINA

*(She goes over to SEREBRYAKOV, tenderly.)* What is it, my dear? Are you in pain? My legs ache too, they ache so. *(She adjusts the blanket.)* You've been in pain such a long time. Vera Petrovna, Sonyechka's mother, may she rest in peace, never slept either, she was killing herself taking care of you... She loved you very much ... oh yes ...

*Pause.*

Old people are like children; they want someone to feel sorry for them, but no one feels sorry for the old. *(She kisses SEREBRYAKOV on the shoulder.)* Let's go to bed, my dear ... Let's go, my little boy ... I'll make you some limeleaf tea, I'll warm your legs... I'll pray to God for you...

SEREBRYAKOV

*(Moved.)*. Let's go, Marina.

MARINA

My legs ache too, they ache so. *(She leads him together with SONYA.)* Vera Petrovna was killing herself, always crying... You, Sonyechka, were still little then... Come, come, my dear ...

*SEREBRYAKOV, SONYA, and MARINA exit.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I'm completely exhausted with him. I can barely stand on my feet.

VOINITSKY

You're exhausted with him, and I with myself. This is the third night I haven't slept.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Something is wrong in this house. Your mother hates everything, except her own pamphlets and the

professor; the professor is irritated, he doesn't trust me, he's afraid of you; Sonya is angry with her father, angry with me and hasn't talked to me for two weeks; you hate my husband and openly hold your own mother in contempt; I'm short-tempered and at least twenty times today I started to cry... There is something very wrong in this house.

VOINITSKY

Shall we cut the philosophy, please!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You, Ivan Petrovich, are educated, intelligent, and you must see that the world is not being destroyed by thieves and fires and wars, but rather by hatred, hostility, from all these petty squabbles... You shouldn't add to the noisy grumbling around us, you should be helping to find peace in your own family.

VOINITSKY

Help me find peace in myself! My darling... *(He presses her hand to himself.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Stop! *(She takes away her hand.)* Go away!

VOINITSKY

Soon it'll stop raining, and everything in nature will be refreshed and alive. Only I alone will not be refreshed by the storm. Day and night, I'm strangled by the idea that my life is irrevocably lost – that I'm dead – that I wasted my life – that I spent my life on trifles. Here – take my life, take my love. What good are they to me, what have I done with them? My feelings are dying away in vain, like sun beams falling into a dark pit ... I'm dying.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

When you talk to me about your love, I just go numb and I don't know what to say. Forgive me, I have nothing to say to you. *(She tries to go.)* Good night.



VOINITSKY

*(Blocking her way.)* If you only knew how I suffer from the thought that next to me in this very house another life is dying – yours! What’re you waiting for? What damned righteous morality stops you? Don’t you see...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Intently staring at him.)* Ivan Petrovich, you’re drunk!

VOINITSKY

Possibly, possibly...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Where’s the doctor?

VOINITSKY

He’s here... he’s spending the night. Possibly, possibly... Everything is possible...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Why are you drinking so much?

VOINITSKY

Because it makes me feel alive... Don’t try to stop me, *Hélène*!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You never used to drink so much and you never talked so much... Go to sleep! I’m bored to death with you.

VOINITSKY

*(Pressing her hand.)* My darling... beautiful, marvelous...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(With vexation.)* Leave me alone. This is just disgusting. *(She exits.)*

VOINITSKY

*(Alone.)* She's gone...

*Pause.*

I first met her ten years ago at my darling sister's. She was seventeen, and I was thirty-seven. Why didn't I fall in love with her and propose to her then? It would have been so easy! And today she would be my wife... Yes... Tonight both of us would be awakened by the storm; she would be afraid of the thunder, and I would take her in my arms and whisper: "Don't be afraid, little darling, I'm here." Oh, what marvelous thoughts, how wonderful, I'm laughing... but my God, I'm so mixed up... Why am I old? Why doesn't she understand me? The way she talks, her stupid morality, her silly prattling about making peace in the world... I hate it so much.

*Pause.*

Oh, how I've been deceived! I worshipped that professor, that pathetic, gout-ridden idiot! I worked for him like a slave! Sonya and I squeezed every drop out of this estate; we were like *kulaks*, haggling over vegetable oil, peas, starving ourselves with crumbs, just so we could save a few *kopeks* to send to him. I was so proud of him and his glorious scholarship, I lived for him, I breathed for him! Every word he wrote or uttered seemed like genius to me... God – and now? Now he's retired and it has become perfectly clear that the sum total of his life adds up to nothing. Not one word of his, not a single scholarly word, matters to anyone. A soap bubble! And I've been swindled... I see that now – stupidly swindled...

*Enter ASTROV in a frock-coat, without a waistcoat and without a tie; he is tipsy; behind him is  
TELYEGIN with a guitar.*

ASTROV

Play!

TELYEGIN

Everyone is sleeping, sir!

ASTROV

Play!

*TELYEGIN quietly strums.*

*(To VOINITSKY.)* Are you alone here? No ladies? *(His arms akimbo, he quietly sings.)* “Go to the peasant house, go to the fire, there is no place for the master to expire...” The storm woke me. Big storm! What time is it?

VOINITSKY

Who knows.

ASTROV

I thought I heard Yelena Andreyevna’s voice.

VOINITSKY

She was just here.

ASTROV

What a gorgeous woman. *(Looking around at the bottles on the table.)* Medicines, drugs... there’s nothing missing! Kharkov, Moscow, Tuls kaya... Every city is plagued with his gout. Is he really sick or faking it?

VOINITSKY

Sick.

*Pause.*

ASTROV

Why are you so sad today? Pity for the professor?

VOINITSKY

Quit it.

ASTROV

Or maybe, you're in love with the professor's wife?

VOINITSKY

She's my friend.

ASTROV

Already?

VOINITSKY

What does that mean "already"?

ASTROV

A woman can be friends with a man only in this order: first an acquaintance, then a lover, and then finally a friend.

VOINITSKY

Vulgar.

ASTROV

Oh? Yes... it's true – I'm becoming vulgar. I'm drunk. Usually I get drunk like this once a month. And when I'm drunk, I get completely vulgar – and fearless! Everything seems so easy to me! I take on the most difficult operations and do them brilliantly; I make daring plans for the future; when I'm drunk I no longer seem like a freak, and I actually believe I'm bringing some enormous benefit

to humanity ... enormous! And when I'm drunk, I see how valuable my own personal universe is – and the rest of you piddling creatures seem like insects ... microbes. (*To TELYEGIN.*) Waffles, play!

TELYEGIN

Dear one, I would love to play for you with all my soul, but understand – everyone is sleeping!

ASTROV

Play!

*TELYEGIN quietly strums.*

You need a drink. Ooh, I see there's some cognac left. In the morning, we'll go to my place. Rightch'are! I have a medical assistant who never says "right" but "rightch'are". Idiot – rightch'are. (*Seeing SONYA enter.*) Pardon me, I forgot my tie. (*Quickly he exits; TELYEGIN follows.*)

SONYA

And you, Uncle Vanya, you got drunk again with the doctor. A couple of juveniles – hanging around together ... Well, he has always been like that, but what in heaven's name is wrong with you? At your age, you should know better.

VOINITSKY

Age has nothing to do with it. When you don't have a life, you live on soap bubbles. It's better than nothing.

SONYA

Our hay needs to be cut, it rains every day, everything is rotting, and all you can talk about is soap bubbles. You're completely neglecting the farm. I have to work alone, I'm strained to the breaking point... (*Frightened.*) Uncle, you have tears in your eyes!

VOINITSKY

Tears? It's nothing... nonsense... The way you looked at me just now, just like your mother. My sweet... (*Greedily he kisses her hands and face.*) My sister... my sweet, dear sister... Where is she now? If only she knew! Oh, if only she knew!

SONYA

Knew what? Uncle, what?

VOINITSKY

It's so hard... Nothing... Later... Nothing... I'm going... (*He exits.*)

SONYA

(*Taps on the door.*) Mikhail Lvovich! You're not sleeping, are you? Do you have a minute?

ASTROV

(*Behind the door.*) One moment! (*A little later he enters: he is now in a waistcoat and tie.*) What can I do for you?

SONYA

You can drink all you want if you can stand it, but, I beg you, don't let my uncle drink. It's not good for him.

ASTROV

Fine. We won't drink together again.

*Pause.*

I'm going home now. Signed and sealed... The sun will be up by the time they harness the horses.

SONYA

It's still raining. Wait until morning.

ASTROV

The storm's almost over, we just caught a little bit of it. I'm going. And, please, don't send for me again to see your father. I tell him – it's gout, and he says rheumatism; I ask him to lie down, he sits up. And today he wouldn't even talk to me.

SONYA

He's spoiled. (*She looks at the sideboard.*) Do you want to have a bite to eat?

ASTROV

Sure.

SONYA

I love to eat at night. There should be something in the sideboard. People say he was quite a ladies' man all his life, and his ladies have spoiled him. Here, have some cheese.

*They both stand at the sideboard and eat.*

ASTROV

I ate nothing today, only drank. Your father is a difficult personality. (*He takes a bottle from the sideboard.*) May I? (*He drinks a glass.*) We're alone, so maybe I can speak more openly. You know, I don't think I'd last a month in this house, I'd be choked to death... Your father is completely buried in his own gout and in his books, Uncle Vanya in his depression, your grandmother... and finally, your stepmother...

SONYA

What about my stepmother?

ASTROV

To look at her, she's perfection: face, clothes, voice, and soul. She is beautiful, there's no doubt, but... in reality, all she does is eat, sleep, stroll around, and bewitch us all with her beauty – nothing else. She has no responsibilities whatsoever, everyone waits on her... True? An idle life can't be a

good one.

*Pause.*

But maybe I'm being too hard on her. I'm not happy with my life, like your Uncle Vanya, and both of us have become a couple of old grumblers.

SONYA

You're discontented with life?

ASTROV

Well of course I love life in general, but our Russian provincial life is so small-minded and mean – and I hate it with all my soul. As for my personal life, well, there's nothing good there either. You know, when you walk in the dark at night in the woods, and sometimes you're lucky enough to see a small light burning in the distance, then you're not bothered by your weariness, or the darkness, or the prickly branches that scratch your face... I work harder – you know this – than anyone in this district, I'm constantly hit with bad luck, and sometimes I suffer unbearably, but the truth is I see no light in the distance. I have no hope, I don't like people... I haven't loved anyone for a long time.

SONYA

No one?

ASTROV

No one. I feel some tenderness for your nurse – for old times' sake. The peasants are dull, backward, they live in filth, and it's just as hard to talk to the "intelligentsia". All of it exhausts me. I have plenty of nice acquaintances who can't think for themselves and see no further than their own noses – they're just stupid. And the ones who are more intelligent and more interesting are taken up with analyzing themselves with "self reflection"... They bellyache all the time, they hate everyone, they think everyone is beneath them and when they meet you, they label you immediately – "Oh, he's a psychopath, an eccentric, a freak." I love the forest – that's strange; and I don't eat meat – that's really strange. It's impossible to have a true relationship with nature or with people any more – No, that doesn't exist! (*He goes to pour a drink.*)



SONYA

*(She stops him.)* No, please, I beg you, don't drink anymore.

ASTROV

Why?

SONYA

It's not right for you! You're elegant, noble, you have such a gentle voice... And you, more than anyone I know – you're wonderful. Why do you want to be like ordinary people, who drink and play cards? Oh, don't do that, I beg you! You always say that people don't create, but only destroy all that is given to them from God. Why then, why are you destroying yourself? You shouldn't, you mustn't, I beg you, I implore you.

ASTROV

*(Extending his hand to her.)* All right, I won't drink anymore.

SONYA

Give me your word.

ASTROV

Word of honor.

SONYA

*(Strongly pressing his hand.)* Oh, thank you!

ASTROV

*Basta!* I'm sober! You see, I'm completely sober and will remain so until the end of my days. *(He looks at his watch.)* So, let's continue. As I was saying: my time has already passed, it's too late for me... I've grown old, I'm overworked, I've become vulgar, I have no feelings left, and it looks like I'm no longer interested in making attachments. I don't love anyone and... I'm sure I'll never fall in

love again. But what does still touch me, is beauty. I don't seem to be indifferent to it. I have a feeling that if Yelena Andreyevna wanted to, she could turn my head in a day... But you know that's not love, not real love... *(He covers his eyes with his hand and shudders.)*

SONYA

What's wrong?

ASTROV

*(He sighs heavily.)* During Lent a patient of mine died under chloroform.

SONYA

It's time to forget about that.

*Pause.*

Tell me, Mikhail Lvovich... If I had a friend, or a younger sister, and if you knew that she... well, let's just say, she loves you, what would you think?

ASTROV

*(Shrugging his shoulders.)* I don't know. Probably, nothing. I would give her to understand that I cannot fall in love with her... and besides, I don't think about things like that. All right, if it's time to go, I've got to go. Say goodbye, my dear, or we'll keep talking till morning. *(He presses her hand.)* I'll go through the back door, if that's alright, or I'm afraid your uncle will stop me. *(He exits.)*

SONYA

*(Alone.)* He didn't say anything to me... His soul and his heart are completely hidden from me, so why do I feel so happy? *(She laughs from joy.)* I told him: you're elegant, noble, you have such a gentle voice... Should I have said that? His voice trembles, it caresses... I can still feel it in the air. When I tried telling him about a younger sister, he didn't understand... *(Wringing her hands.)* Oh, how awful it is that I'm so plain! How awful! And I know, I know I'm plain, I know, I know... Last Sunday, when we were leaving church, I heard some people talking about me, and one woman said: "She is a kind, generous girl, but it's a pity she's so plain"... So plain...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA *enters.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(She opens the window.)* The storm has passed. What lovely air!

*Pause.*

Where's the doctor?

SONYA

He left.

*Pause.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*Sophie!*

SONYA

What?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

How long are you going to ignore me? We haven't hurt one another. Why should we be enemies?  
Please, enough...

SONYA

Just what I wanted ... *(She embraces her.)* Enough being angry.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Excellent.

*They are both anxious.*

SONYA

Is Papa in bed?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

No, he is sitting in the drawing room... We haven't spoken to each other in weeks, God knows why... (*Seeing, that the sideboard is open.*) What's this?

SONYA

Mikhail Lvovich had something to eat.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

There's wine... Let's drink *Bruderschaft*.

SONYA

Yes, let's.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

From the same glass... (*She raises it.*) So, much better. Well, friends?

SONYA

Friends.

*They drink and kiss.*

I wanted to make up a long time ago, but I was ashamed... (*She weeps.*)

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Why are you crying?

SONYA

It's nothing, no reason – that's just me.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Well, there, there... (*She weeps.*) Silly you, now I've started to cry...

*Pause.*

You're angry with me, because you think I was scheming to marry your father... Please believe me, I swear – I married him out of love. I was captivated by him because of his fame, his brilliance as a scholar. It wasn't real love, I see that now, but it seemed like love then. Don't blame me, please. From the moment we married you have been punishing me with those suspicious eyes of yours.

SONYA

Please, peace, peace! Let's forget about it.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You shouldn't look at people that way – it doesn't suit you. You must believe in others – life is impossible without that.

*Pause.*

SONYA

Tell me honestly, as a friend... Are you happy?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

No.

SONYA

I knew that. One more question. Tell me truthfully – would you have preferred a young husband?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You're still such a baby! Of course I would! (*She laughs.*) Well, ask me anything else, ask...

SONYA

Do you like the doctor?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes.

SONYA

*(She laughs.)* I must look foolish... yes? He just left, but I can still hear his voice and his footsteps, and when I look at the dark window – I see his face. Please let me tell you... Oh, but I'm talking too loud, I'm embarrassed. Come, let's go to my room, we can talk there. Do I look foolish? Truth, now... Tell me something about him...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

What?

SONYA

He's intelligent... He knows how to do everything, he can do anything... He takes care of people, and he also takes care of trees...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Oh, it's a lot more than trees and people, my darling – that man has talent! And do you know what talent means? Boldness, courage, a free mind, a vision... He plants a tree and already he's planning ahead – what this will be in a thousand years. He sees the benefit for humanity far into the future. Such people are rare, we must love them... He drinks, he's a bit coarse – but so what? The truly talented man in Russia can't stay pure. Think about it, what kind of life could this doctor lead! Impassable mud on the roads, frost, blizzards, huge distances, crude, savage peasants, extreme poverty everywhere... And he struggles with all of this every day. It's hard to be pure and sober after forty. *(She kisses her.)* From the bottom of my heart, I'm so happy for you... *(She rises.)* But I'm such a boring person, so worthless, meaningless... In my music, and in my husband's home, in all my relationships – everywhere, in a word, I'm worthless... To tell you the truth, Sonya, when you really think about it, I'm very, very unhappy! *(She paces agitatedly.)* No, there is no happiness for me in this

world. None! Why are you laughing?

SONYA

*(She laughs, covering her face.)* I'm so happy... so happy!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(She goes to the piano.)* I want to play... I would like to play something now.

SONYA

Play. *(She embraces her.)* I can't sleep... Play!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes, soon. Your father's not asleep yet. When he's ill, music irritates him. Go ask. If he doesn't mind, then I'll play. Go.

SONYA

Yes, this minute. *(She exits.)*

*In the garden YEFIM taps.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I haven't played in a long time. I'll play and cry, cry like a baby. *(In the window.)* Is that you tapping, Yefim?

YEFIM'S VOICE

Yep.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Don't tap, the master is ill.

YEFIM'S VOICE

Okay, I'm leaving now! *(He whistles.)* Hey, you, Zhuchka, Zhuchka!

*Pause.*

SONYA

*(Returning.)* He said no...

*Curtain*

### ACT III

*The drawing room in SEREBRYAKOV's home. Three doors: on the right, on the left and in the center. – Day.*

*VOINITSKY, SONYA (they sit) and YELENA ANDREYEVNA (paces around the stage, thinking about something).*

VOINITSKY

*Herr Professor* has expressed the desire that all of us congregate today here in the drawing room at precisely one o'clock in the afternoon. *(He looks at his watch.)* It's a quarter to one. Surely he has an important announcement for the world.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Some kind of business probably.

VOINITSKY

He has no kind of business. He writes nonsense, he grumbles and he's jealous – that's his business.

SONYA

*(With a reproachful tone.)* Uncle!



VOINITSKY

Okay, okay, it's all my fault. (*He points to YELENA ANDREYEVNA.*) Look at her – she prowls around like a lazy tiger. Lovely! Just lovely!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

All you do is buzz buzz buzz – aren't you getting tired of it? (*With melancholy.*) I'm dying of boredom, I have absolutely nothing to do.

SONYA

(*Shrugs her shoulders.*) There's lots to do – if you wanted to.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

What?

SONYA

Help us with the house, teach, take care of people. Lots and lots to do. When you and papa weren't here Uncle Vanya and I were working around the clock.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I have no idea how to do those things. And anyway, they're so boring. It's only in romantic novels that people teach and take care of the peasants. How can you expect me to do those things?

SONYA

And I don't understand how you can't do them. Why don't you try, you might enjoy it. (*She embraces her.*) Don't be bored, my dear. (*Laughing.*) We're all catching your fever. Look: Uncle Vanya does nothing all day long but follow you around like a shadow, I've abandoned my own work and come running to you every minute, just to talk. I've gotten lazy. It's just awful! The doctor used to come here very rarely - maybe once a month. It was so hard to get him to come, but now he's here every day – he's abandoned his forests and his medicine. I think you've cast a spell on all of us.

VOINITSKY

Why are you so bored? (*Animatedly.*) Well, my beauty, my splendid girl, be true to yourself. I'm sure mermaid's blood flows in your veins, so be a mermaid! Let yourself go for once in your life, let yourself fall madly in love – dive headlong into the water, leaving *Herr Professor* and the rest of us standing astonished on the shore!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

(*With anger.*) Do shut up! You are so cruel! (*She tries to leave.*)

VOINITSKY

(*He does not allow her.*) Well, well, my beautiful sprite, forgive me... I'm sorry.

(*He kisses her hand.*) Peace.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You have to agree that an angel couldn't endure your babble.

VOINITSKY

As a token of my desire for peace, I will bring you a bouquet of roses; I gathered them for you this morning... Autumn roses – lovely, sad roses... (*He exits.*)

SONYA

Autumn roses – such lovely, sad roses...

*They both look out the window.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

It's September already. How will we ever get through the winter here!

*Pause.*

Where's the doctor?

SONYA

In Uncle Vanya's room. He's doing some writing. I'm glad that Uncle Vanya left, I need to talk with you.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

About what?

SONYA

About what? *(She lays her head on her chest.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Well, shh, shh... *(She smooths her hair.)* Shh, my dear.

SONYA

I'm so plain.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You have beautiful hair.

SONYA

No! *(She looks around in order to see herself in the mirror.)* No! When a woman is plain, they tell her: "you have beautiful eyes, you have beautiful hair"... I've been in love with him for six years, I love him more than my own mother; the minute I hear him arrive, I can already feel his hand in mine; and I wait at the door, I wait, and I have the feeling that any second now, he will walk in. I come to you to talk about him every spare moment. He's here every day, but he doesn't even look at me, he doesn't see... I'm in agony! I have no hope, none, no! *(In despair.)* Oh, God, give me strength... I've been praying all night... I just need to talk to him, look at him, just be near him... I have no pride left, I can't control myself... Yesterday I even told Uncle Vanya that I love him – I have no shame at all... even the servants – everyone knows I love him, everyone...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Does he?

SONYA

No. He doesn't notice a thing.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(In thought.)* He's a strange man... You know what? Why don't I have a talk with him? I'll be careful – just a hint here or there...

*Pause.*

Really, how long can you live with this uncertainty... Shall I?

*SONYA nods her head "yes".*

Excellent. Either he loves you or he doesn't – it won't be difficult to find out. Don't be embarrassed, my darling, don't worry – I'll be very careful, he won't notice a thing. We just need to find out: yes or no?

*Pause.*

If no, then we can't have him come here again. Yes?

*SONYA nods her head "yes".*

It's easier when he's not around. Let's not put it off, I'll talk to him now. He wanted to show me some kind of drawings... Go tell him that I'd like to see him.

SONYA

*(In strong agitation.)* Will you tell me the honest truth?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes, of course. It seems to me that the truth, whatever it is, is better than living with uncertainty.

Count on me, my darling.

SONYA

Yes, yes... I'll tell him that you want to see his drawings ... *(She walks and comes to a stop near the door.)*

No, uncertainty is better... At least there's hope...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Did you say something?

SONYA

Nothing. *(She exits.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Alone.)* Oh, there's nothing worse than knowing someone else's secret and not being able to help.

*(Pondering.)* He's not in love with her – that's obvious, but why shouldn't he marry her? She's not pretty, but for a country doctor, at his age, she'd be a wonderful wife. She's a clever girl, so kind, pure... No, something's wrong, all wrong...

*Pause.*

Poor darling... in this stifling atmosphere where the only people who come into her life are vulgar boors who live to eat, drink and sleep – and then, in comes this handsome, fascinating, intelligent man – and out of the darkness, a bright moon rises. How could she resist such a man... Uh oh, I think I'm a little in love with him myself. Yes, the truth is I'm bored without him – I smile when I think about him... Uncle Vanya says there's a mermaid in my veins. "For once in your life, let go"... Can I? Maybe I could... To fly like a bird far away from all of you, from your dead faces, from your boring conversations – oh, to forget you all exist on this earth... But I'm such a coward, I'm so timid... and it's always my conscience wearing me down... He's here every day, I know why he comes... and I feel guilty, I just want to fall on my knees before Sonya – to apologize, to cry...

ASTROV

*(He enters with a portfolio of maps.)* Hello! *(He shakes her hand.)* You wanted to see my drawings?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yesterday you promised to show me your work... Are you free?

ASTROV

Yes, of course. *(He stretches the maps on the card table and fastens them with drawing pins.)* Where were you born?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Helping him.)* In Petersburg.

ASTROV

And where did you go to school?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

At the conservatory.

ASTROV

Oh, then I don't think this will interest you.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Why? It's true, I don't know much about the countryside, but I've read a great deal.

ASTROV

I have my own desk in the house... In Ivan Petrovich's room. When I'm totally exhausted, completely dead to the world, I leave everything I'm doing and run here. I can lose myself for an hour or two... Ivan Petrovich and Sofya Aleksandrovna click away at their accounts, and I sit beside them at my own table – it's heaven – warm and peaceful. But I don't permit myself this pleasure

often, maybe once a month... (*Showing her the maps.*) Now look here. This is a map of our district, as it was fifty years ago. The dark and light-green colors represent the forests; half of the entire area is dominated by forests. Where the red grid is lying over the green, that shows elk, goats... this shows you all the flora and fauna. In this lake lived swans, geese, ducks, and as the old ones used to say, a mess of birds, millions of them filling the sky as far as you could see. In addition to the villages you see here, look at these small farms, settlements, monasteries, water mills... many, many cattle and horses – you can see that in the light blue. For example, in this tiny village the light blue is particularly heavy – that's because there were whole herds of cattle, and on every farm at least three horses.

*Pause.*

Now look at this one. This is a map of the area twenty-five years ago. You'll notice the forests comprise only a third of the entire area. No more goats, but still elk. The green and light blue are much paler. And so on. Let us move to the third map: this is a drawing of our district today. Notice that the green is only spattered here and there, not throughout, only in spots; the elk have vanished, and the swans, and the woodgrouses... There's no trace of the settlements, small villages, monasteries, and mills. In general, it's a picture of gradual but total degeneration, and obviously in ten or fifteen years it will be complete. You would probably say, this is natural evolution, the old order giving way to the new. Yes, that's true too. However, if these desiccated forests were replaced by highways, railroads, and by factories or schools – then we would see healthier people, richer, more intelligent, but believe me, nothing of the kind is happening. This district is plagued by the same swamps, mosquitoes, the same non-existent roads, poverty, typhus, diphtheria, fires... Yes we have desiccation and degeneration not because of growth and progress but due to stagnation and complete carelessness – when a frozen, hungry, sick man tries to hang onto a shred of life, tries to protect his children, he'll do anything to satisfy hunger and grab some warmth – he'll even destroy everything around him, never thinking about tomorrow... So you see everything is being destroyed and for nothing – for no chance to build a future... (*Coldly.*) I see by your face this is not interesting to you.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I understand so little about this...

ASTROV

There's nothing to understand, it just doesn't interest you.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

To tell you the truth, I've been thinking of something else. Forgive me. I need to interrogate you a little, and I'm embarrassed, I don't know how to begin.

ASTROV

Interrogate me?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes, just a little, but... innocently, I promise. Let's sit!

*They sit.*

This is in regard to someone we both know. We'll speak frankly, as friends – openly. We'll have this little talk and then we'll forget about it. Yes?

ASTROV

Yes.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

It's about my stepdaughter Sonya. Do you like her?

ASTROV

Yes, I respect her.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Do you like her... as a woman?



ASTROV

*(Not at once.)* No.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Just two or three more words – and then we're done. Have you noticed anything?

ASTROV

Nothing.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Takes him by the hand.)* You don't love her, I see it in your eyes... She's suffering... Please understand this and... stop coming here.

ASTROV

*(He rises.)* I'm too old for this... I have no time... *(Shrugging his shoulders.)* When do I have time? *(He is embarrassed.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Oh, what an unpleasant conversation! I'm so upset, I feel as if I was dragging along a thousand pounds. Well, thank God, it's finished. We'll forget it. It'll be as if we never spoke, and... and you will leave. You're an intelligent man, you understand...

*Pause.*

I must be blushing all over.

ASTROV

If only you'd told me a month or two ago, then I, probably, would have thought about it, but now...

*(He shrugs his shoulders.)* And if she is suffering, then, of course... Only I don't understand one thing: why did you need to interrogate me? *(He looks her in the eyes and wags his finger at her.)* You are something!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

What does that mean?

ASTROV

*(Laughing.)* All right, let's say Sonya's suffering, I'll admit that, but why did you have to talk to me about it – why you? *(He prevents her from speaking, animatedly.)* Don't look so surprised, you know very well why I come here every day... You know all too well... Adorable little beast of prey, don't look so surprised, I'm an old hand at this...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(In bewilderment.)* Beast of prey? I don't understand what you're talking about.

ASTROV

Beautiful tigress... You need victims! Here I've been, doing absolutely nothing for a month, putting everything on hold – I drive here every day to find you and you just love it... Well, yes. I'm conquered, you knew this without an interrogation. *(Crossing his hands and bowing his head.)* Tear me to pieces! Eat me up!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Have you lost your mind!

ASTROV

*(He laughs through his teeth.)* You're shy...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Oh, I'm a lot better than you think! I promise you! *(She tries to leave.)*

ASTROV

*(Blocking her way.)* Today I'll leave, I won't stay, but... *(He takes her by the hand, and glances around)...* where shall we see each other? Tell me quickly: where? They might come in here any moment...

*(Passionately.)* What a gorgeous, luscious... One kiss... Just to kiss your beautiful hair...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I swear to you...

ASTROV

*(He prevents her from speaking.)* Why swear? Don't swear. Don't say anything... Oh, what a beauty you are! What hands! *(He kisses her hands.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Oh, please... leave... *(She pulls her hands away.)* You have completely forgotten yourself.

ASTROV

Just tell me where should we meet tomorrow? *(He takes her by the waist.)* It's inevitable, darling, we must meet. *(He kisses her; at the same time VOINITSKY enters with a bouquet of roses and comes to a stop in the door.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Not seeing VOINITSKY.)* Oh, please, leave me alone... *(She puts ASTROV'S head on her chest.)* No! *(She tries to leave.)*

ASTROV

*(He grabs her by the waist.)* Come to the forest tomorrow... around two o'clock... Yes? Yes? Will you come?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Seeing VOINITSKY.)* Let me go! *(In strong confusion she withdraws to the window.)* This is terrible.

VOINITSKY

*(He puts the bouquet on the chair; excited, he wipes his face with a handkerchief and behind the collar.)* It's nothing... Yes... Nothing...

ASTROV

*(Sulking.)* My friend Ivan Petrovich, the weather isn't too bad today. In the morning it was overcast, as if it might rain, but now it's sunny. Really, autumn has been quite beautiful... and the winter crops look good too... *(He rolls up the maps.)* The only problem is the days are getting shorter... *(He exits.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Quickly she crosses to VOINITSKY.)* Please make sure that my husband and I leave here today! Do you hear me? This very day!

VOINITSKY

*(Wiping his face.)* What? Well, yes... fine... *Hélène*, I saw everything, everything...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Nervously.)* Did you hear me? I must leave here today!

*Enter SEREBRYAKOV, SONYA, TELYEGIN and MARINA.*

TELYEGIN

I myself, your Excellency, am not very healthy. I've been feeling ill for two days. My head is simply...

SEREBRYAKOV

Where is everybody? I hate this house. It's like a labyrinth. Twenty-six enormous rooms, and everyone in a different room, so you can never find anyone. *(He rings.)* Ask Maria Vasilyevna and Yelena Andreyevna to come here!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I'm here.

SEREBRYAKOV

I beg you, ladies and gentlemen, take a seat.

SONYA

*(Going to YELENA ANDREYEVNA, impatiently.)* What did he say?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Later.

SONYA

You're trembling? Why? *(Scrutinizing in her face.)* I understand... He said he won't be coming here anymore... yes?

*Pause.*

Say it: yes?

*YELENA ANDREYEVNA affirmatively nods her head.*

SEREBRYAKOV

*(To TELYEGIN.)* One can find peace even with ill-health, but what I cannot abide is this life in the country. I feel as if I've dropped off the face of the earth and landed on some kind of foreign planet. Take a seat, ladies and gentlemen, please. Sonya!

*SONYA does not hear him, she stands, sadly hanging her head.*

Sonya!

*Pause.*

She doesn't hear me. *(To MARINA.)* And you, nurse, take a seat.

*The NURSE sits and mends a stocking.*

Please, friends, Romans and countrymen, lend me your ears. *(He laughs.)*

VOINITSKY

*(Anxious.)* I'm not needed here, am I? May I leave?

SEREBRYAKOV

No, you're needed most of all.

VOINITSKY

How may I help you?

SEREBRYAKOV

Why are you angry?

*Pause.*

If I'm to blame for anything, then forgive me, please.

VOINITSKY

Cut it out. Let's get to the point... What do you want?

*MARIA VASILYEVNA enters.*

SEREBRYAKOV

Here is *Maman*. I will begin, ladies and gentlemen.

*Pause.*

I invited you, ladies and gentlemen, in order to announce that the inspector general is coming. *(He laughs.)* I couldn't resist, but let's get down to business. I have gathered you here, ladies and gentlemen, for serious business. I need to beg your help and advice, and since you are always so helpful and courteous, I am sure to receive it. As you know, I am a scholar who thinks about abstract matters, and I have always been a stranger to anything practical. I simply cannot manage without the assistance of such knowledgeable and experienced people. I call upon you, Ivan

Petrovich, you, Ilya Ilyich, you, *Maman*... *manet omnes una nox*, that is all of us must walk under god; I am old, ill and therefore I feel it is time for me to get my affairs in order, especially those affairs which affect my family. My life is over, I'm not thinking about myself, but I have a young wife and an unmarried daughter.

*Pause.*

It is impossible for me to continue to live in the country. We are not built to live in the country. However, to live in the city without the resources we receive from this estate, is impossible. For example, if we sell the land, then we will lose the annual income. Thus, it is necessary to look for other measures which would guarantee us a permanent, yes, more or less a fixed income. I have thought of one such measure and have the honor to present it for your consideration. Leaving out the details, I will just give you the general outline. Our estate earns an average rate not greater than two percent. I propose to sell it. If we turn the money we earn from the sale into interest-bearing securities, then we will receive four to five percent, and I think, that will produce a surplus of a few thousand, which will permit us to buy a small dacha in Finland.

VOINITSKY

Hold on a minute. Did I hear you right? Repeat what you said.

SEREBRYAKOV

To turn the money we earn from the sale into interest-bearing securities and on the surplus, buy a dacha in Finland.

VOINITSKY

Not Finland... You said something else.

SEREBRYAKOV

I propose to sell the estate.

VOINITSKY

That's it. You're going to sell the estate – now that's a brilliant idea... And where do you plan to put me, my mother and Sonya?

SEREBRYAKOV

We have time to consider the details. Not everything at once, please.

VOINITSKY

Hold on, hold on. Obviously, until this moment I haven't had a sane thought in my head. Until this moment I was crazy enough to think that this estate belongs to Sonya. My late father bought this estate as a dowry for my sister. Up until now I was so naïve, I didn't think we lived under Turkish law. I was under the misapprehension that the estate passed from my sister to Sonya.

SEREBRYAKOV

Yes, the estate belongs to Sonya. No one is arguing that. Without Sonya's agreement I will not think about selling it. Moreover what I propose is only for Sonya's good.

VOINITSKY

This is unbelievable! Either I've lost my mind, or... or...

MARIA VASILYEVNA

*Jean*, do not contradict *Alexandre*. He knows what is good for us better than we do.

VOINITSKY

No, give me water. (*He drinks water.*) Fine, say what you want, whatever you want!

SEREBRYAKOV

I don't understand why you're so excited. I'm not saying that my plan is perfect. If everyone finds it unsuitable, then I won't insist.

*Pause.*

TELYEGIN

(*In embarrassment.*) I, your Excellency, have complete reverence for learning, and I even like to think I have kindred feelings with scholars. My brother Grigoriï Ilyich's wife's brother, maybe you know



him, Konstantin Trofimovich Lakedemonov, has a master's degree...

VOINITSKY

Hold on, hold on, Waffles, we're talking business here. Hold on, later... (*Suddenly grabbing hold of TELYEGIN; to SEREBRYAKOV.*) Yes, here, ask him. This estate was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRYAKOV

Akh, what should I ask him? What?

VOINITSKY

This estate was bought for ninety-five thousand rubles. Our father paid only seventy and had a mortgage of twenty-five thousand. Now listen... This estate could never have been paid for, if I hadn't turned down my inheritance in favor of my sister, whom I ardently loved. And I worked for ten years, like an ox, to pay off the entire debt...

SEREBRYAKOV

I regret that I began this conversation.

VOINITSKY

The estate is finally clear of debt thanks to my personal efforts. And now, when I'm old, you want to throw me out of here on my —

SEREBRYAKOV

I don't understand what you're saying?

VOINITSKY

For twenty-five years I have managed this estate, I slaved away at it, and I sent you every penny, like the most conscientious steward, and in all that time not once did you thank me. All that time — when I was young and even now — I received from you a pitiful five hundred rubles a year — a pittance! — and you never, not once, had the thought to increase that money by one ruble!

SEREBRYAKOV

Ivan Petrovich, how could I know? I'm not a practical man and I don't understand such matters. You could have raised your salary any time you wanted.

VOINITSKY

Why didn't I steal? You all think I'm an idiot for not stealing? Oh sure, that would have been nice. And if I did steal I wouldn't be a beggar now!

MARIA VASILYEVNA

*(Severely.) Jean!*

TELYEGIN

*(Agitated.)* Vanya, my dear friend, don't do this, don't... I'm shaking... Why do you want to ruin a good friendship? *(He kisses him.)* Don't, don't...

VOINITSKY

Twenty five years I've been shut up here with my old mother – stuck ... Every thought, every feeling was about you – only you. In the daytime we talked about you, about your work, we took pride in you, uttered your name with reverence; during the evenings we ruined our eyes reading your journals and books, which I now profoundly despise!

TELYEGIN

Please don't, Vanya, it's not necessary... I cannot...

SEREBRYAKOV

*(Angrily.)* I don't understand, what do you want?

VOINITSKY

You were for us a supreme being, we memorized your articles by heart... But now my eyes are finally opened! I see everything! You write about art, but you understand nothing about it! All your

work, which I worshipped, is not worth one kopek! You sure fooled all of us.

SEREBRYAKOV

Ladies and gentlemen! Stop him, please, please... I'm leaving!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Ivan Petrovich, please shut up! Do you hear me?

VOINITSKY

I will not be silent! (*Blocking SEREBRYAKOV's path.*) Wait a minute, I'm not finished! You ruined my life! I never lived, never... The best years of my life were completely destroyed for your sake! You are my worst enemy!

TELYEGIN

I cannot... cannot... I'm leaving... (*He exits in strong agitation.*)

SEREBRYAKOV

What do you want from me? And what right do you have to speak to me in such a tone? Nonentity! If this estate is yours, then take it, I don't need it!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I'm leaving this hell right now. (*She cries.*) I can't stand it a moment longer!

VOINITSKY

My life is gone! I'm talented, intelligent, courageous... I could have been a Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky... What am I talking about? I'm going crazy. Mother, I'm in despair! Mother!

MARIA VASILYEVNA

(*Severely.*) Listen to *Alexandre*!

SONYA

(*She drops to her knees before the nurse and nestles up to her.*) Nyanya! Nyanya!

VOINITSKY

Mother! What should I do? No, no, don't say it! I know what to do!

*(To SEREBRYAKOV.)* You will never forget me! *(He exits through the center door.)*

*MARIA VASILYEVNA goes after him.*

SEREBRYAKOV

Ladies and gentlemen, what just happened? Keep that madman away from me! I cannot live under the same roof with him! He sleeps in the next room from me... *(He gestures to the center door.)* Let him move to the village, to the outhouse for all I care, or I will move away from here, but I cannot remain in the house with him one moment longer...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(To her husband.)* Let's leave today! We've got to get out of here this minute.

SEREBRYAKOV

That nonentity!

SONYA

*(Kneeling, she turns to her father; nervously, on the verge of tears.)* Please, be kind, papa! Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! *(Holding back despair.)* Please, please be kind. Remember, a few years ago, papa, Uncle Vanya and grandmother translated books for you, re-copied your papers... every night, every night! Uncle Vanya and I worked without rest, afraid of wasting a kopek on ourselves. We sent everything to you... We scrimped on the bread we ate. I'm not saying it right, but you must understand us, papa. You must be merciful!

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Anxiously to her husband.)* Aleksander, for God's sake, calm him down... I beg you.

SEREBRYAKOV

Fine, good, I'll talk to him... I'm not accusing him of anything, I'm not angry, but, you have to agree, his behavior is, at the very least, strange. But if you wish, I'll go to him. *(He exits through the center door.)*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Be gentle with him, calm him... *(She exits behind him.)*

SONYA

*(Nestling up to the nurse.)* Nyanya... Nyanya...

MARINA

It's nothing, my little girl. The geese honk, then they stop... They honk – then they stop...

SONYA

Nyanya...

MARINA

*(She strokes her head.)* You're trembling, as if you were freezing! Well, well, little orphan girl, God is gracious. Some lime-leaf tea or maybe a little raspberry, it will pass... Don't grieve, sweet girl...  
*(Glancing at the center door, crossly.)* Shoo you geese, the devil take you!

*Backstage a shot; YELENA ANDREYEVNA is heard crying out; SONYA shudders.*

Oh, no!

SEREBRYAKOV

*(Running in, staggering from fright.)* Stop him! Stop him! He's lost his mind!

*YELENA ANDREYEVNA and VOINITSKY struggle in the doorway.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Trying to take the revolver from him.)* Give it to me! Give it to me, do you hear me!

VOINITSKY

Let go, *Hélène*! Let me go! *(Freeing himself, he runs and looks around for SEREBRYAKOV.)* Where is he?

Yes, here he is! *(He shoots at him.)* Bang!

*Pause.*

I missed. How could I miss again? *(Irate.)* Damn it, damn, damn, damn — *(He smashes the revolver on the floor and falls into a chair in exhaustion.)*

*SEREBRYAKOV is stunned; YELENA ANDREYEVNA leans against the wall, she feels faint.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Get me out of here! Get me out! Kill me, but... don't make me stay here... Get me out!

VOINITSKY

*(In despair.)* Oh, what am I doing? What am I doing?

SONYA

*(Quietly.)* Nyanya! Nyanya!

*Curtain.*

#### ACT IV

*IVAN PETROVICH's room, his bedroom. It is also the estate office. There is a large table with account books and many papers, a writing-desk, bookcases, scales. A slightly smaller table for ASTROV; on this table is his painting equipment; nearby is a portfolio. A cage with a starling. On the wall is a map of Africa,*

*obviously not needed by anyone here. A huge sofa, covered with oil-cloth. To the left – a door, leading to other rooms; to the right – a door to the entrance-hall; beside the right door lies a mat for the peasants to wipe their feet. An autumn evening. Silence.*

*TELYEGIN and MARINA sit across from one another and wind wool.*

TELYEGIN

Please hurry, Marina Timofeyevna, they're going to call us any minute to say goodbye. The horses are ordered already.

MARINA

*(She tries to wind faster.)* There's not much left.

TELYEGIN

They're going to Kharkov. They'll live there.

MARINA

Better that way.

TELYEGIN

They were really scared... Yelena Andreyevna was screaming, "I can't live here one more hour... we must leave..." She says, "We'll live in Kharkov, let's leave immediately and we'll send for our things later..." Can you imagine, they're leaving without their suitcases. It's fate, Maria Timofeyevna, it's fate. They're not fated to live here. Fate... ah, fate...

MARINA

Better that way. My lord, they raised such a racket... ekh, shame on them, shame...

TELYEGIN

Aivazovsky could have painted that scene...

MARINA

I wish I had never seen it!

*Pause.*

Thank the lord we'll begin to live like we used to. Eight o'clock in the morning tea, one o'clock lunch, and in the evening – we'll sit down for supper — everything as it should be for people... Christians. (*With a sigh.*) It's been so long since I've eaten *lapshti*, sinner that I am.

TELYEGIN

Yes, it's been a long time since we've eaten noodles.

*Pause.*

...ages... This morning, Marina Timofeyevna, I was going to the village, and one of the shopkeepers called out to me: "Hey, you, sponger!" It hurt me so much!

MARINA

Don't pay any attention, old friend. We're all sponging off God. All of us, you, Sonya, Ivan Petrovich – we all work hard, all of us... Where's Sonya?

TELYEGIN

In the garden. She's still with the doctor, they're looking for Ivan Petrovich. They're afraid he'll do harm to himself.

MARINA

And where's his pistol?

TELYEGIN

(*With a whisper.*) I hid it in the cellar!

MARINA

(*With a smile.*) You old sinner!

*Enter VOINITSKY and ASTROV from outside.*



VOINITSKY

Leave me alone. (*To MARINA and TELYEGIN.*) Get out, leave me alone for one minute! I can't bear everybody looking at me.

TELYEGIN

This minute, Vanya. (*He exits on tiptoe.*)

MARINA

Goose — honk, honk, honk! (*She gathers the wool and exits.*)

VOINITSKY

Leave me alone!

ASTROV

I'd love to, I wanted to go hours ago. However, I repeat, I will not leave until you give me back what you took from me.

VOINITSKY

I didn't take anything from you.

ASTROV

C'mon — don't make me wait. I should have gone a long time ago.

VOINITSKY

I didn't take anything from you.

*They both sit.*

ASTROV

Really? All right, I'll wait a minute longer, but then, if you don't mind, I'm going to do my best to force you. We'll tie you up and we'll search you. I really mean it.

VOINITSKY

Do as you wish.

*Pause.*

Such an idiot! To shoot him twice and to miss both times! I'll never forgive myself.

ASTROV

The moment you felt like shooting someone, you should have fired at your own head.

VOINITSKY

*(Shrugging his shoulders.)* It's strange. I attempt murder, but no one arrests me, no one takes me to jail. I guess that means they think I'm crazy. *(With an evil laugh.)* Well – I am crazy, but no, they're not crazy – those who pretend to be a professor, an erudite genius, who hide their lack of talent, their mediocrity, their utter heartlessness – they're not crazy. No, nor are those who marry old men and cheat on them. I saw, I saw, how you kissed her!

ASTROV

Yes sir, I kissed her, and this is for you. *(He thumbs his nose.)*

VOINITSKY

*(Looking at the door.)* No, the truth is you're all crazy!

ASTROV

Now that's a stupid thing to say.

VOINITSKY

That's all right – remember I'm crazy – I can say anything I want...

ASTROV

You're not going to get away with this – you're not crazy, you're just a freak. A clown. I used to

think freaks were sick, but now I see it's the normal condition of mankind to be crazy. You're absolutely normal.

VOINITSKY

*(He covers his face with his hands.)* I'm so ashamed! If you only knew how ashamed I am! There's no pain worse than this shame. *(With anguish.)* It's unbearable! *(He bends to the table.)* What should I do? Tell me, what should I do?

ASTROV

Nothing.

VOINITSKY

Give me something! Oh, my god... I'm forty-seven years old; if I live to be sixty – oh god, that's thirteen years. Too long – how will I survive thirteen years? How will I fill them? Oh, I know you understand... *(Convulsively squeezes ASTROV's hand.)* ... you must understand, if I have to live any longer, I'll need to start my life all over again. I have to wake up in the clear, quiet morning and feel that I've started all over again, that my whole past is erased, like smoke. *(He weeps.)* To begin again... Please tell me how... how do I start...

ASTROV

*(Vexedly.)* Oh, to hell with you! New life? Our lives, yours and mine, are hopeless.

VOINITSKY

Really?

ASTROV

I'm sure of it.

VOINITSKY

Give me something... *(Pointing at his heart.)* It's burning here.

ASTROV

*(He cries angrily.)* Stop! *(Softening.)* People who'll live a hundred years, two hundred years from now will despise us for wasting our lives so stupidly and so needlessly – maybe they'll find the secret to happiness, but we... You and I have only one hope – yes, indeed. We hope, that when we're sleeping in our graves, ghosts will visit us, and if we're lucky, they'll be nice ghosts. *(Sighing.)* Yes, brother. For a hundred miles, the only two decent, honest, educated men are you and me. But ten years of this crude, narrow-minded, despicable life has dragged us down; this life with its rotten stink has poisoned our blood, and we've become as vulgar as everyone else. *(Quickly.)* But, please, don't distract me with philosophy. Give me back what you took from me.

VOINITSKY

I didn't take anything from you.

ASTROV

You took a vial of morphine from my medicine bag.

*Pause.*

Listen, if you want to kill yourself, then go into the woods and shoot yourself. But give me back the morphine, or they'll think I gave it to you... It's bad enough I'll have to do your autopsy... Do you think I'll enjoy that?

*Enter SONYA.*

VOINITSKY

Leave me alone.

ASTROV

*(To Sonya.)* Sofya Aleksandrovna, your uncle walked off with a vial of morphine from my medical bag and he won't give it back to me. Please tell him that this... is ridiculous. I have no time for this. I've got to go.

SONYA

Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphine?

*Pause.*

ASTROV

He took it. I'm sure of it.

SONYA

Give it back. Why are you trying to scare us? (*Gently.*) Give it back, Uncle Vanya! I may be as unhappy as you, but I don't give in to despair. We must all accept life as it is given to us – until we die... And you must accept it too...

*Pause.*

Give it back! (*She kisses his hands.*) Dear, sweet uncle, dearest, give it back! (*She weeps.*) You're so good, you mustn't hurt us, you must give it back. You must accept this life, uncle! Please, accept it!

VOINITSKY

(*He takes the vial from the desk and gives it to ASTROV.*) Here, take it! (*To SONYA.*) But we've got to get back to work, right away, right now – we must do something, otherwise I can't... I can't...

SONYA

Yes, yes, to work. First we have to say goodbye, then we'll get to work... (*Nervously she looks through the papers on the table.*) Everything has fallen apart ... everything.

ASTROV

(*He puts the vial in the medical bag and fastens the strap.*) Finally I can go.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

(*She enters.*) Ivan Petrovich, are you here? We're leaving. Go to Aleksander, he wants to say

something to you.

SONYA

Come, Uncle Vanya. (*She takes VOINITSKY by the hand.*) We'll go. Papa and you must make peace. You must.

*SONYA and VOINITSKY exit.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I'm leaving. (*She offers her hand to ASTROV.*) Farewell.

ASTROV

Already?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

The carriage is here.

ASTROV

Farewell.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You promised me, that you'd leave here today too.

ASTROV

I remember. I'm leaving now.

*Pause.*

Are you frightened? (*He takes her by the hand.*) Is it so terrible?

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes.

ASTROV

Then stay! Yes? Tomorrow in the forest ...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

No... It's already decided... And that's why I can look at you so courageously, because we're leaving... I ask one thing of you: please think well of me. I want you to respect me.

ASTROV

Please! (*A gesture of impatience.*) Stay, I beg you. Admit it, you have nothing better to do on this earth, your life is meaningless, you don't do anything, so sooner or later you'll have to give in to your feelings – it's inevitable. So why do it in Kharkov or Kursk. Wouldn't it be better here, in this beautiful countryside... it's poetic, at least... Here in this lovely autumn with the forest and the tumbledown, romantic estates – the way Turgenev wrote about them...

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

You're so silly... I'm a little angry at you, but all the same... I'll remember you fondly. You're an interesting, special man. We'll never see each other again, so why – why hide it? I fell a little in love with you, too. Well, let's shake hands and part as friends. Please think well of me.

ASTROV

(*Shakes her hand.*) Yes, go... (*In thought.*) I know you are a good, sincere person, but there's something strange about you. You came here with your husband this summer, and all of us who work here suddenly threw everything aside to dance attendance on you and your husband's gout. Both of you have infected us all with your idleness. I was completely captivated. I've done nothing for a whole month, and during that time people fell ill, the peasants let their cattle trample on my plantings in the forests... Everywhere you and your husband set foot, destruction follows... I'm joking, of course, but all the same... it's strange... and I'm absolutely sure if you had stayed any longer, the devastation would have been complete. I would certainly perish, and you... well, it wouldn't be so good for you either. Yes, you're leaving. *Finita la commedia!*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(She takes a pencil from his table and quickly puts it away.)* I'll take this pencil to remember you.

ASTROV

It's funny, isn't it... We start to get to know one another and suddenly, with one stroke... we'll never see each other again. I guess it's always like that in this world... Well, since we're alone and before Uncle Vanya comes in with his bouquet of roses, permit me... to kiss you... to say farewell... Yes? *(He kisses her on the cheek.)* Well – here... Fine.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

I wish you all the best. *(Glancing back.)* Oh, the hell with it, for once in my life! *(She embraces him tightly, and both immediately move away from one another.)* I've got to go.

ASTROV

Yes, go, hurry. If the carriage is here, you'd better leave.

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

Yes, I hear them coming.

*They both listen.*

ASTROV

*Finita!*

*Enter SEREBRYAKOV, VOINITSKY, MARIA VASILYEVNA with a book, TELYEGIN and SONYA.*

SEREBRYAKOV

*(To VOINITSKY.)* I can promise you I bear no grudge. After all I've lived through these past few hours, and all I've thought about, I am sure I could write a great treatise for humanity on how one must live one's life. I willingly accept your apology and I ask you to forgive me. Farewell! *(He*



*exchanges three kisses with VOINITSKY.)*

VOINITSKY

You will receive exactly the same amount as you've received in the past. Everything will be as it was.

*YELENA ANDREYEVNA embraces SONYA.*

SEREBRYAKOV

*(He kisses MARIA VASILYEVNA's hand.) Maman...*

MARIA VASILYEVNA

*(Kissing him.) Alexandre, have your photograph taken again and send it to me. You know how dear you are to me.*

TELYEGIN

Farewell, your Excellency! Don't forget us!

SEREBRYAKOV

*(Kissing his daughter.) Farewell... farewell everyone! (Offering his hand to ASTROV.) I thank you for your pleasant company... (To everyone.) I respect your thinking, your enthusiasm, passion, even your little outbursts, but permit an old man to give you one piece of advice as I say farewell: you must get to work, ladies and gentlemen, to work! (General bow.) Best wishes to all! (He exits; MARIA VASILYEVNA and SONYA walking behind him.)*

VOINITSKY

*(He kisses YELENA ANDREYEVNA's hand firmly.) Farewell... Forgive me... We'll never see each other again.*

YELENA ANDREYEVNA

*(Touched.) Farewell, dear friend. (She kisses him on the head and exits.)*

ASTROV

*(To TELYEGIN.) Waffles, tell them to bring my horses.*

TELYEGIN

Sure thing, my friend. *(He exits.)*

*Only ASTROV and VOINITSKY remain.*

ASTROV

*(He takes paints from the table and puts them away in a suitcase.)* So you're not going to see them off?

VOINITSKY

Let them go... I can't. It's too painful for me. I've got to get busy right away... Yes, to work, to work! *(He rummages in the papers on the table.)*

*Pause; bells are heard.*

ASTROV

They're gone. The Professor is probably very happy. He'll never come back here again for love or money.

MARINA

*(She enters.)* They're gone. *(She sits and knits a stocking.)*

SONYA

*(She enters.)* They're gone. *(She wipes her eyes.)* God grant them a safe journey. *(To her uncle.)* Well, Uncle Vanya, let's get started.

VOINITSKY

Yes, work, work...

SONYA

It's been a long time, a long, long time, since we sat together at this table. *(She lights the lamp on the table.)* Oh dear, there's no ink... *(She takes the ink-well, goes to the cupboard and fills the ink.)* But I'm sad

they left.

MARIA VASILEVNA

*(She slowly enters.)* They're gone! *(She sits and plunges right into her reading.)*

SONYA

*(She sits at the table and leafs through the account book.)* Let's work on the bills first, Uncle Vanya – what a mess our accounts are in! Today they sent more bills. Here. You do that one – I'll do this...

VOINITSKY

*(He writes.)* "Dear Sir..."

*They both write in silence.*

MARINA

*(She yawns.)* It's beddy-bye for me.

ASTROV

Such silence. The pens scratch, the crickets sing. It's so warm and comfortable... I don't want to leave.

*Little bells are heard.*

Ah, my horses... Looks like I'll have to say goodbye to you, my friends, to say goodbye to my table and – just go! *(He puts his map in his portfolio.)*

MARINA

What's the hurry? Sit.

ASTROV

Can't.

VOINITSKY

*(He writes.)* "Still remaining two seventy-five in arrears..."

YEFIM *enters.*

YEFIM

Mikhail Lvovich, the horses are ready.

ASTROV

So I hear. *(He hands him his medical bag, suitcase and portfolio.)* Here, take that. See that you don't squash the portfolio.

YEFIM

Yes sir. *(He exits.)*

ASTROV

Well *madame...* *(He goes to say goodbye.)*

SONYA

When will we see you again?

ASTROV

Not before summer, I should think. Definitely not this winter... Of course, if something happens, let me know – I'll come. *(He shakes her hand.)* Thank you for the bread, for the salt, for the kindness... in a word, for everything. *(He goes to the NURSE and kisses her on the head.)* Farewell, old one.

MARINA

You're leaving without tea?

ASTROV

I don't want any, nurse.

MARINA

Maybe, a little vodka?

ASTROV

*(Hesitantly.)* Maybe...

*MARINA exits.*

*(After a pause.)* My trace-horse is limp. I noticed it yesterday, when Petrushka brought him to drink.

VOINITSKY

You'll need to reshoe him.

ASTROV

I'll have to stop at the blacksmith at Rozhdestvennoe. No way to get around it. *(He goes to the map of Africa and looks at it.)* Ah, it must be hotter than hell right now in Africa – must be terrible!

VOINITSKY

Yes, probably.

MARINA

*(Returning with a tray, on which are a glass of vodka and a slice of bread.)* Eat something too.

*ASTROV drinks the vodka.*

*Na zdoroye*, dear one. *(She bows low.)* But take a little bread.

ASTROV

No, I'm fine... Good luck. *(To MARINA.)* Don't see me off, nurse. It's not necessary.

*He exits; SONYA goes after him with a candle, to see him off; MARINA sits in her own chair.*

VOINITSKY

*(He writes.)* "On the second of February vegetable oil twenty pounds... On the sixteenth of February

vegetable oil twenty pounds... Buckwheat...”

*Pause. Little bells are heard.*

MARINA

He’s gone.

*Pause.*

SONYA

*(Returning, she places the candle on the table.)* He’s gone...

VOINITSKY

*(Counting on his abacus and making notes.)* Total... fifteen... twenty-five...

*SONYA sits and writes.*

MARINA

*(She yawns.)* God be merciful...

*TELYEGIN enters on tiptoe, he sits by the door and quietly tunes the guitar.*

VOINITSKY

*(To SONYA, running his hand through her hair.)* My child, it’s so painful! If only you knew how painful it is!

SONYA

What can we do, we must go on living!

*Pause.*

We’ll live, Uncle Vanya. We’ll live through many long days, many long nights; we’ll patiently endure all the ordeals that God sends us. We’ll work for others, never knowing rest. And in our old age, when our time comes, we’ll humbly die and there beyond the grave we’ll speak of how we suffered,

how we wept, how we knew bitterness, and God will take pity on us – you and I — Uncle, sweet Uncle, ahead of us is a radiant, wonderful, graceful life, and we'll rejoice. Then we'll look back on our present unhappiness with sadness and tenderness, and with a smile – and we will rest. I have faith, Uncle, I truly believe, truly...

*Sonya is on her knees and she puts her head on his hands; with a weary voice.*

We will rest!

*TELYEGIN quietly plays on the guitar.*

We will rest! We will hear the angels, we will see all of the heavenly diamonds in the sky, we will see how all the evils of the earth, all of our suffering will be covered with mercy – mercy over the entire world. And our life will be as quiet, gentle, sweet, as a caress. I believe, I believe... *(She wipes his tears with a handkerchief.)* Poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you're weeping... *(On the verge of tears.)* In your life you never knew joy, but wait a little, Uncle Vanya, wait a little... We will rest... *(She embraces him.)* We will rest!

*The watchman taps.*

*TELYEGIN quietly strums. MARLA VASILYEVNA writes in the margins of her pamphlet; MARINA knits a stocking.*

We will rest!

*The curtain slowly lowers.*

**Allison Horsley** has served as a dramaturg and/or literary manager for La Jolla Playhouse, Denver Center Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Kitchen Dog Theater, Yale Repertory Theatre, Baltimore's Centerstage, and Dallas Theater Center. Since its La Jolla premiere in 2004, she has been the dramaturg for the Tony-winning musical *Jersey Boys* (Broadway, London, Toronto, Las Vegas, national tours). Allison is currently under commission from Oregon Shakespeare Festival to create new literal translations of Chekhov's major plays for adaptation by Libby Appel, and together they have completed versions of *The Cherry Orchard*, *Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *Three Sisters*, with *Ivanov* coming next year. She holds an MFA from the Yale School of Drama and is an assistant professor of dramatic literature at her undergraduate alma mater, University of Denver.

**Libby Appel** is currently Artistic Director Emerita of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She served as Artistic Director of the festival from 1995 to 2007. Prior to that she was the Artistic Director of Indiana Repertory Theatre from 1992 to 1996. She was the Dean of the Theatre School at California Institute of the Arts from 1981 to 1989 and head of the acting program at California State University Long Beach from 1976 to 1981. She holds a BA from the University of Michigan and an MA from Northwestern University as well as three honorary doctorates from Southern Oregon University, the University of Portland and Willamette University. Ms. Appel was the 2010 recipient of the Stephen and Christine Schwarzman Legacy Award for Lifetime Achievement and Excellence in Theater which she received at the Kennedy Center in D.C.



## LOVE THE DOCTOR: INTRODUCTION

Tirso de Molina's *El amor médico* tells the story of a young woman who circumvents gender barriers with her wit to practice medicine and win the man she claims to love. At the play's heart is a woman who is simultaneously trying to marry a man and practice medicine while she shifts between many disguises. Her success depends on an extensive knowledge in many areas—languages, medicine, love. Jerónima is a clever trickster and improviser, imagined by Tirso as multifaceted and richly complex.

The earliest version of *El amor médico* comes from the *Cuarta parte de las comedias del maestro Tirso de Molina in 1635*.<sup>1</sup> It is dated somewhere between 1619-25, following Tirso's trip to America, though there is no extant manuscript. The play is set around 1497-8, though the addition of Queen Maria of Aragon in this adaptation places the play a bit later in 1500, when the Queen was just eighteen years old.

The play is structured following the Spanish convention of three acts, or *jornadas*. Each act takes place in roughly one day (or 24-hour period), but time elapses between each act. Tirso does not adhere, in this case, to the classical unities of time or place. The first act of the play is set in Seville, Spain, and sets up Jerónima's situation with Gaspar, a guest in her home who has failed to see or talk to her. In the second act, a few days later, the play shifts to Coimbra, Portugal, where Jerónima disguises herself as Doctor Barbosa and starts serving Estefanía, the woman to whom Gaspar is betrothed. In the third act of the play, which takes place several weeks later, Jerónima—through a series of tricks—eventually convinces Gaspar to marry her, and Estefanía to marry her brother

---

<sup>1</sup> Bushee, Alice H. *Three Centuries of Tirso De Molina*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939, p. 93.

Gonzalo, though Jerónima's disguise is found out and she is ordered to return home to Spain and is forced to relinquish her male disguise and stop practicing medicine.

Always a forward-thinking playwright excited by change, Tirso's play poses a challenging yet particularly suitable opportunity for translators. While the choice to complete at least somewhat "faithful" translations always exists, *El amor médico* is especially suitable for translators looking to adapt Tirso in the same way he sought to adapt and modify the rigid dramaturgical structure in which he was writing. Though this play centers on a dynamic, complex character and utilizes the devices of an equally intricate plot, it also has several holes which we found could benefit from dramaturgical surgery. In the same way Tirso adapted what could have been a purely comic end to the play (by reuniting Jerónima with her oppressed role as female in society), so did we adapt and take several liberties with Tirso's play to create what we consider a more fluid and focused story. We've also added and cut several lines from the Spanish, so our text no longer mirrors Tirso's original at the sentence level. Among the largest changes we've made are the following: merging two characters into one, swapping the King character out for a Queen, and changing circumstances at the end of the play.

In the final moments of Tirso's play, Jerónima's true identity is discovered when she learns of her father's death. Jerónima and Gaspar plan to marry, and it is assumed that Jerónima will stop practicing medicine. Our adaptation adds a dimension: the additional character of the Queen of Portugal (who, at this moment in the play is dressed in male attire) demands that Jerónima give up her medical license and position at the university, though in a private moment between the two women the Queen urges Jerónima to continue her practices—whether of medicine or cross-dressing—in Spain. While social order must be restored, these two women—who have experienced

by this point in the play positions of great power in a male-dominated society—understand and acknowledge their slippery, evasive positions in the world. What is perhaps most tragic about Jerónima is that she learns it's not sufficient to just be herself; she must continue to deceive. The fact that Jerónima must disguise herself in the final act of the play, even after she's already revealed herself to Gaspar, becomes something of a political statement; she is not allowed to dress as a man and practice medicine, yet as a woman she can't, either. She must continue to mask her true identity until she unweaves the web of confusion she's created, until social order is restored through her untangling. In this way, Jerónima is the tragic hero of the play. She's become ill—both as a result of love and loss—and is forced to minister to herself. A *mujer varonil*<sup>2</sup> who must hang up her doctor's robes and revert back to her life as a woman, Jerónima becomes the paragon of women—transgressive, progressive, interesting and obscure—and in line with how we think Tirso probably viewed women in his day.

In translating and adapting this play, we've aimed to create a version that honors what the original Spanish says in ways that are easy for an actor to speak. In the introduction to The Comedia in English: Translation and Performance, Susan Paun de García and Donald R. Larson posit that literal translations of *comedias* can “communicate the nuances and complexities” of their source texts, but not always in a manner that “can be spoken trippingly on the tongue.”<sup>3</sup> Since the theatre demands faithfulness to the text, but also flexibility for the actors, the director, the audience, the production

---

<sup>2</sup> Melveena McKendrick defines the *mujer varonil* as “...the woman who departs in any significant way from the feminine norm of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.” McKendrick, Melveena. *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the Mujer Varonil*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Paun de García, Susan and Donald R. Larson, eds. *The Comedia in English: Translation and Performance*. Rochester: Tamesis, 2008, p. 32.

space, et cetera, we have sought to retain those complexities that exist in the Spanish, but in ways that anticipate the demands of performance. In other words, we've searched to find a balance between the give and take of translation, and find distinct ways in the English language to communicate those nuances of the original Spanish. In many cases, this has resulted in some dramaturgical surgery and adaptation to Tirso's original play. Above all, our aim has been to create a performance text which is easy for an actor to speak, and one which honors both what the Spanish says, as well as certain dramaturgical impulses of our own that make the story more comprehensible.

--Sarah Brew and Josephine Hardman

# LOVE THE DOCTOR

by Tirso de Molina

translated and adapted by Sarah Brew

from a literal translation by

Josephine Hardman

## Characters (in order of appearance)

Doña Jerónima

Quiteria, her maid

Don Gaspar

Don Gonzalo, Jerónima's brother

Tello, Gaspar's servant

Doña Estefanía

Ignacio, her father

Maria of Aragon, Queen of Portugal<sup>4</sup>

This translation copyright © 2012 by Sarah Brew and Josephine Hardman

Footnotes prepared by Harley Erdman for the October 2011 production at the University of  
Massachusetts

---

<sup>4</sup> María de Aragon: daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, she was Queen of Portugal, 1500-1517. (She also was the full sister of Catharine of Aragon, who married England's Henry VIII.) The play, though written in the early 1620s, is set c. 1500.

## ACT 1

### ACT 1, SCENE 1

*A room in Doña Jerónima's house, in Seville, Spain.*

*Jerónima and Quiteria enter.*

#### JERÓNIMA

Have you ever seen a more discourteous guest?

He's spent an entire month in our house,

and don Gaspar hasn't realized

a woman is living above him.

If he does know, he's worse than I thought.

How can he call himself a gentleman

if he doesn't bother to get to know me?

He's not even said hello one time,

yet you still defend him.

#### QUITERIA

From what I've observed of him, he's perfect.

On the outside, he's sturdy like a golden pine.

On the inside, he's passionate and bursting with sap.

When I talk to him, he seems honorable.

He dresses himself like a king but

doesn't look like he's tried too hard.

He's quite young, but not so much that you need

to worry he'll play games with your heart;

he's just old enough to be an ideal match

for you, Jerónima.

### JERÓNIMA

You make him sound as perfect as  
the gentlemen in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*.<sup>5</sup>

### QUITERIA

(*Aside*) Strange moods like this have made  
her into an excessively passionate woman.

(*To Jerónima*) You think he's awful only because  
he hasn't come upstairs to visit you.  
If he doesn't know a woman's here,  
can you blame him?<sup>6</sup>

### JERÓNIMA

---

<sup>5</sup> This influential book from the early 1500s laid out ideal qualities for "courteous" gentlemen: bearing, gestures, manner, athleticism, learning, etc. Jerónima's expectations of what is "courtesy" and "courteous" will be referenced later in the play.

<sup>6</sup> Young, unmarried Spanish women lived under the rigid control of their fathers/brothers. It would be socially unacceptable for Jerónima to initiate any contact with Gaspar.

Of course I can!

He's ignored me for an entire month.

It's only because he's an outsider,  
a foolish northerner from Castile,  
that we Sevillians haven't removed him yet.<sup>7</sup>

#### QUITERIA

Castilians are serious and stick to their own business.  
Not everyone is as passionate as you are, Jerónima,  
allowing such petty things as this man to excite you.

#### JERÓNIMA

That's nonsense, Quiteria. It's his duty  
to be curious, given that he is our guest.  
You've mistaken his cold behavior for courtliness.  
Last night I spied him through my window blinds  
going into the courtyard, so I yelled out:  
"Young man, tell me: where is my brother?"  
And without looking up at me he said:  
"Señora, he's left for the Alameda."<sup>8</sup>  
But then, in the most courteous manner,  
he removed his hat and bowed down,

---

<sup>7</sup> Gaspar is from Toledo, in Castile, well north of Seville: a dry, windblown plateau, where people are known to be more aloof, severe. Seville is in Andalucía, the extreme south of Spain, close to the Mediterranean Sea and Africa. It is a lush, subtropical place where people have the reputation of being warmer, more outgoing.

<sup>8</sup> Alameda: a park in Seville.



all the while not acting surprised to hear me.

He knows I'm here yet still ignores me.

*Gonzalo enters.*

GONZALO

I'm going to the Gardens, sister.

*Gonzalo exits.*

QUITERIA

Blame your brother for locking you up.

JERÓNIMA

He is just as bad. Ever since

I refused the husband he chose,

Gonzalo has been avoiding me.

QUITERIA

I can't say his actions surprise me.

You've done nothing but sit in your

room and study. You've taught yourself

Latin, and now you learn Portuguese.

If you had taken your brother's advice,

you could have been married by now.

## JERÓNIMA

I pursue the North Star of my desire—

I do what I want. My father never

stopped me from learning Latin

before he left to fight in Pamplona.<sup>9</sup>

Why must women sew straight lines

when men's needles have no bounds?

Seville celebrates men when they excel

in learning, and especially in medicine.

And aren't the subjects of these lands supposed

to imitate their King's customs and laws?

Queen Isabel has hired a tutor, *La Latina*,<sup>10</sup>

to teach her and her children every day.

I've even heard her daughter Maria of Aragon

learned Latin from this maid, and now

serves as the Queen of Portugal.

Therefore, if our Queen gets to learn

Latin with her maid, I will do the same.

## QUITERIA

Learn Latin with your maid, but imitate

the Queen in all other things she does, too:

---

<sup>9</sup> Pamplona: town in Navarre, in extreme northern Spain, near France. In the early 1500s, Spain was fighting to conquer Navarre, an autonomous kingdom. The point here is: the father is very far away.

<sup>10</sup> *La Latina*: nickname for Beatriz Galindo (1465-1534), Queen Isabella's learned lady-in-waiting and tutor; she also was a physician.

just as your monarch married, so must you.

### JERÓNIMA

If only I had a mate like Ferdinand who let  
me study, I would marry without hesitation.

But marriage is like Algeria:

we women are imprisoned in it.<sup>11</sup>

When I study, I'm free as any man.

Must the prison of marriage

always bar women from learning?

### QUITERIA

I couldn't say; I've not had the luxury

of learning the art of rhetoric as you have.

But tell me: why should a woman study medicine?

### JERMÓNIMA

Because if women studied medicine,

our city would have more healthy people.

Do you think that simply dressing the part

is enough to be called a doctor?

A dedicated mind makes good doctors.

---

<sup>11</sup> Algeria is where many Spaniards were taken captive by Moorish pirates, then ransomed back, often after many years in dungeons. A simile for "bondage."

A veterinarian must take exams for  
days before he's hired to practice.  
But a doctor—who has the power to give  
and take away life—does much less  
before he's granted a license to practice.

QUITERIA

You'll end up just as disrespected  
as all the other doctors in Seville.<sup>12</sup>

JERÓNIMA

As long as I'm not as disrespectful as  
our guest.

QUITERIA

Back to him, are we?

JERÓNIMA

Do you know what I think the problem is?  
I'll bet he's left behind a woman in Toledo,  
and lingering thoughts of her prevent him  
from loving another woman here in Seville.

---

<sup>12</sup> Most doctors were disreputable—these “surgeons” doubled as barbers and traveled from town to town bleeding people for a fee. They had no training and low status.

QUITERIA

That can't be true. If only there had been  
communication between the two of you,  
you wouldn't be suspicious of this fine man.  
Lovesick women like you go mad when they  
imagine what chivalrous deeds a man should do.  
Their musings imprison them in their own minds.  
Besides, traveling always brings new love.

JERÓNIMA

Then let's help him find new love.

QUITERIA

How?

JERÓNIMA

Last night I saw Gaspar shuffling a stack of papers.

QUITERIA

From where did you watch him?

JERÓNIMA

The keyhole.

QUITERIA

Impressive focus! If only you had the key.

JERÓNIMA

Deprivation causes this appetite;  
it's because he hasn't looked at me  
that I've spied on him. Besides,  
I find his disposition peculiar.

QUITERIA

So this is what you call 'practicing medicine'?

JERÓNIMA

No, but in studying his disposition  
I am practicing to become a doctor.  
As he read those papers, his face would change;  
with some he'd laugh, with others he'd sigh.  
Although he read them to himself,  
it seems he's like a lover, for the passion  
in the ink of those letters painted every  
emotion on Gaspar's face, bringing him  
to tears and to laughter all at once.  
And like a lover, he read them over and over.  
I could have watched his face all night,  
but then he blew out the light of his candle.  
I went back to the darkness of my room  
dreaming of his face, yet defeated.

My heart is plagued if from the beginning  
I have nothing to sustain me in this quest  
of love except my dreams. I admit I'm jealous,  
Quiteria, but I will not be at rest until I find  
what lies between those papers' lines.

QUITERIA

But tell me where you saw these papers first.

JERÓNIMA

In the small and unlocked drawer of his desk.

QUITERIA

Then let's go cure your lovesickness using  
the medicine you've studied, for both  
love and sickness are forms of madness.

JERÓNIMA

In matters of love, the doctor can't cure others  
unless she can cure herself.

*They exit.*

ACT 1, SCENE 2

*In the Alcázar Gardens.<sup>13</sup>*

*Don Gaspar and don Gonzalo enter.*

GONZALO

I know while you're here in Seville,  
you must not be missing Castile, Gaspar.  
Here in these lush Gardens of the Alcázar,  
it must be clear why Seville has  
become the heart of Spain's splendor.  
While Castile has but a tiny inland tributary,  
the heart of Seville is linked directly to  
the vein of a mighty river flowing to the sea.

GASPAR

Your observations are correct.  
Seville has proven to be full of  
life in the one month I've been here.  
I've been quite well until I received these.

GONZALO

Letters? Are they from Micaela?  
In the time you've been my guest,

---

<sup>13</sup> Lush royal gardens in Seville, full of mazes and nooks.



I've not been able to persuade you  
to finish telling me what brought you here.  
Let me now be your confidant in this,  
and you'll reap the fortune of our friendship.

GASPAR

I served in royal Toledo<sup>14</sup>  
the most beautiful angel.  
She came from noble ancestry,  
and the name her family gave her,  
Micaela, was proof of her faithfulness.  
For six months time my luck was good  
in the conquest of honest love.  
But in love, as in stormy waters,  
change can become the pilot;  
just when I thought I'd disembark  
upon the sheltered shore of marriage,  
a jealous eastern wind blew  
and returned me to the open sea  
where my suffering was constant  
and my misfortunes drowned me.  
Micaela's mother and brother,  
without even consulting her,  
promised her to a wealthy man, don Jaime.

---

<sup>14</sup> For an alternate, shorter version of this speech, please see appendix of script.

His noble blood and powerful connections  
were enough for me to fear him,  
so I did not protest their decision.

Soon after the match, some rogues were  
gossiping and speaking of my love affairs.

One of them sent don Jaime an  
anonymous letter that went like this:

“Though you’ve been promised  
Micaela’s hand, your marriage will  
bloom too late, for don Gaspar has already

deflowered your lady in his bed.”

They put this note with other letters,  
and when Micaela’s mother read the news,  
the shameful burden killed her.

Jaime, convinced that I had written the letter,  
broke off his engagement with Micaela.

Although I denied the accusation  
that my hand had written this letter,  
Micaela refused to believe me.

She exchanged kindness for contempt,  
sighs of longing for stern silence,  
sweet letters for a cruelty that killed my hope.

She’d not accept apologies,  
nor could I prove my innocence.

One day while at the edge of the Tajo<sup>15</sup>  
I saw in the river the reflection  
of some men who, I've always suspected,  
had reason to renounce don Jaime.  
I approached them in a friendly manner,  
exchanging conversational words,  
all while taking note of the things  
they said that would support what I suspected:  
that they were the rogues who wrote the letter.  
When my suspicions were confirmed,  
I called them cowards for concealing  
their names, for family names  
are what signify one's honor.  
When they argued back, I challenged them  
to sign with steel what they hadn't signed with ink.  
Then, taking out my sword, I quickly  
killed one man and wounded the others.  
Forced out of Toledo by Ferdinand,  
whose punishment leaves no room for favor,  
I now seek shelter in you, my friend.  
But I've recently heard don Jaime  
has pressured Micaela's brother into  
agreeing that the couple marry, after all.  
Don Jaime has also recently ordered  
a group of men to arrest me,  
so I must flee to the East Indies,

---

<sup>15</sup> Toledo's river.

though my first stop is the old  
university town of Coimbra in Portugal,  
where the royal court will grant me  
favours and dispatch me to India.  
Traveling by ship, endless folds of hungry sea  
will drown my memories of love's  
tragedies and restore my fame in battle.

*Tello enters.*

TELLO

Stand back! My sword is aimed  
to thrust at all in these streets!

GASPAR

Restrain yourself, Tello.

TELLO

Ay, let me be!  
I've only come to find and devour a sweet one.  
The Gardens are bursting with their honey breath—  
three or four here, seven more there!  
What a lovely place God has created.  
At least half of what my eyes feast on  
is beautiful!

*Doña Jerónima and doña Quiteria arrive, veiled,<sup>16</sup> in Sevillian bonnets.*

JERÓNIMA

Quiteria! My brother is here.

QUITERIA

And so is Gaspar. But forget them—you need  
to tell me what's going on with these letters.

JERÓNIMA

I had hopes of meeting Gaspar here in disguise,  
but Gonzalo will surely recognize me.

QUITERIA

Your skill in disguising yourself is exceptional.  
But why do you need a disguise to talk to Gaspar?

JERÓNIMA

I must be honest with you, Quiteria.  
This man has entered my soul through  
the most unusual doors that love has  
ever seen. And it all began with disrespect.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> A veil was like a mask for women: it allowed them to go out incognito, and therefore have more freedom of behavior. It was sometimes associated with sexual impropriety and prostitution. Laws were frequently passed prohibiting women from wearing veils.

<sup>17</sup> In the Baroque period, there was a fascination with how love works. Does it enter the soul through the eyes? ("Love at first sight.") Through other senses? Imagination? Tirso frequently deals with this question,

Can you believe that poor manners  
have made me fall in love with him?  
We women, as you know, succumb  
to men when they are arrogant.  
The man who undervalues us—  
we love him unconditionally.  
But the man who desires us—  
we find him irritating and indiscreet.  
We will not let him look at us,  
for love is like an inversed mirror.  
Passionate men freeze us with their heat  
while the frozen men ignite us with their ice.  
If only men knew we felt this,  
how easily they could win us!

Though I've nearly lost all hope,  
I'm glad I spied on him.

#### QUITERIA

Through the keyhole?

#### JERÓNIMA

Not once, but twice.

I waited at his door until he went

out this morning, then snuck into his room,  
raided the drawers of his desk,  
and found a stack of papers from Toledo,  
whose contents revealed that Gaspar  
had loved a lady named Micaela.  
It seems he destroyed her reputation,  
for her letter said he's left her with no honor,  
no husband, and a dead mother.  
You can see how this letter revived  
my hopes and all my suspicions.

QUITERIA

I think they see us.

JERÓNIMA

Then let them not  
recognize us. Let's call for them.

*Jerónima and Quiteria cover themselves. They signal the men.*

GASPAR

Those ladies are calling for us!

GONZALO

That one's quite shapely.

*Jerónima approaches don Gaspar, speaking in his ear.*

JERÓNIMA

I bring important news and letters from  
Toledo, my noble sir.

GASPAR

Has my reputation in love  
followed me all the way from Toledo?

TELLO

*(Aside)* A veiled woman! This must be a challenge.

GONZALO

What news might you have, my lady?

JERÓNIMA

I can't say, for my honor fears I will be recognized.  
Though I'm disguised, those who are familiar  
with my face lurk in these parts.

GONZALO

*(To Gaspar)* I would never let my sister  
Jerónima roam Seville as this woman does.



Strange adventures occur in the Gardens;  
these passageways have witnessed women  
in elaborate and cunning disguises  
arrange promiscuous escapades.

GASPAR

*(To Gonzalo)* Did you hear what she said?  
She has news from Toledo. Though I left  
the city in the dark of night, I'm afraid my enemies  
may have followed me and are now nearby.

GONZALO

Could they have followed you to my home?

GASPAR

They may have.

GONZALO

Then wait here for me, and see  
what information you can get from this lady.  
I'll go home to make sure they've not arrived.

*He exits.*

GASPAR

My lady, I entreat you most humbly

to share with me this news you have.

I lend my ears to your voice.

JERÓNIMA

This courtesy seems to be quite new to you.

TELLO

*(Aside)* She starts with a confrontation?

Perfect. From down here, we have nowhere  
to go but up.

GASPAR

*(To Jerónima)* I don't know why

I've earned this bad reputation.

My behavior has always been honorable.

JERÓNIMA

That's not what I've heard from the woman  
you have offended.

GASPAR

Who is this woman I've offended?

Is it Micaela?

JERÓNIMA

It might be. The woman  
you've offended complains with good reason.  
She's a close friend of mine—  
though not a friend of yours.

GASPAR

If you talk with her frequently, promise  
to bring me some hopeful news from  
this woman in Toledo, for I can't think  
of another privy to such accusations.  
You said that you have letters for me written  
by her hand?

JERÓNIMA

I come as a letter in the flesh.

GASPAR

From Toledo?

JERÓNIMA

From around there.

GASPAR

But you won't tell me who you are?

JERÓNIMA

If I knew you were really interested in  
knowing me, I'd happily invite you to  
come into my home.

GASPAR

I do not understand you.

JERÓNIMA

Well, that's a bad sign.

TELLO

*(To Quiteria)* May I ask for just  
one favor from this covered face,  
whose curtains remain closed  
even during Easter and Holy days?

Are you a servant to this lady?  
Show me a sign, just a small one.

QUITERIA

Don't touch!

TELLO

Oh wool veil, why do you

hide my honey beneath your holy cloth?  
My tongue can already taste your beauty,  
simultaneously sweet and spicy!

*Tello goes to uncover Quiteria. She strikes him.*

JERÓNIMA

Let's get down to business, Gaspar.  
You must know that now Micaela—  
regretting her scornful actions  
and missing you in your absence—  
has kicked don Jaime out of her house  
and is eager to see you again.

GASPAR

Rainbows of fortune emerge from behind  
  
the clouds. Disguised in darkness,  
you bring sunbeams that color my skies  
with joy again! Give me your hands!

TELLO

*(To Quiteria)* And you give me yours,  
even if they're covered with calluses.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Calluses: sign of manual labor (hence, a servant, not a lady).

*Enter don Gonzalo. The ladies move aside.*

GONZALO

Leave this news of your lady here, Gaspar,  
and arm yourself for the bloody course of war.  
Your enemies are here in Seville, and they're  
so enraged they have torn through my house,  
scattering the papers from your desk all over your room.  
I plan to leave Seville at dawn for fear they'll  
hold me hostage, though I'm not yet sure where I'll go.  
Jerónima will need to go to the Convent of Santa  
Clara until it's safe for me to return to Spain.  
My lady, were you my sister I would order you  
back into your home. The streets are dangerous.  
We'll talk more when the sun has set, Gaspar.  
I leave to prepare for my departure.

*Gonzalo exits.*

GASPAR

(*To Jerónima*) This sudden misfortune disrupts  
the beginnings of your good news.  
You see that I'm in danger.  
I've not gotten to know you yet,  
but I must ask this favor now:

that you and your lady go to  
my love, Micaela, and there distract  
her with word of how much I miss her.  
I leave tonight, but if I can  
serve you some way in Portugal,  
send me the terms of this favor.

JERÓNIMA

The favor I want is too long and  
too wide for you to fulfill it.

*Gaspar exits.*

TELLO

(*To Quiteria*) I am the ball and he's the chain;  
where he goes, I go dragging along.

*Tello exits.*

JERÓNIMA

A storm of waves, this is, that  
strives to drown my love for him!  
I'm met with more adversity?

QUITERIA

How should I know? Let's go home

now so your brother doesn't wonder

where we are when he returns.

JERÓNIMA

Does he really love Micaela?

Or does he leave for Portugal because

he can find more love and beauty there?

A foreign, Portuguese woman, perhaps?

My foolish thoughts plot against me!

QUITERIA

Go back to the books that you cherish.

JERÓNIMA

I pray that in their pages I will not perish!

*Exeunt all.*

## ACT 2

### ACT 2, SCENE 1

*A street in Coimbra, Portugal.*<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Coimbra: old university town in northern Portugal. Its university, established in 1290, is one of the oldest in  
**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**



*Enter don Gonzalo, dressed in traveler's clothes, with don  
Gaspar.*

GASPAR

Gonzalo! You're in Portugal?

GONZALO

Gaspar?

GASPAR

How improbably convenient it is to see  
you here.

GONZALO

And how fortunate for both of us!

GASPAR

Give me your arms once again, my friend,  
for now we begin new adventures in this land.

GONZALO

You sailed here shortly after we parted?

GASPAR

I did. No sooner had I boarded a ship in Portugal  
bound for the Indies where I would lead a navy  
than I heard word that my uncle, don Ignacio,  
had just recently moved from his native  
Spain to Portugal, so I jumped ship.

GONZALO

Gulfs of salt seas are not deep enough  
to measure the depths of your fortune.  
So you're to stay with your uncle?

GASPAR

Yes; he favors me as his guest.  
And not just that, I'll also be a lover;  
he gives me the hand of his daughter Estefanía.  
A dispensation will be needed, for she's my cousin,  
though I have heard it's now arranged.<sup>20</sup>

GONZALO

I fear you'll be blamed, at least as a  
frivolous man, if not as a womanizer.  
Micaela, now engaged, has sparked

---

<sup>20</sup> A dispensation from the Pope was required for cousins to marry.

the flame of love in don Jaime.

GASPAR

The sparks of my jealousy would grow if  
they were not extinguished by this new pledge;  
I'm in Portugal now, and I will love Estefanía.  
Don't you know traveling always brings new love?  
My affection for Micaela is now forgotten;  
I'm grateful for her inconstancy.

*(Aside)* But who was the veiled woman  
that spoke to me in the Alcázar?

Her message of Micaela was wrong,  
and it's clear she's not from Toledo.

I must forget about her; the heavens have  
changed my course, and I'm to marry Estefanía.

*(To Gonzalo)* Gonzalo, since you've left the dangers of your home,  
where in Portugal will you find safety?

GONZALO

Now that my sister Jerónima is locked up  
safely in the Convent of Santa Clara, I am free  
to seek in Portugal a promotion in rank from  
King Manuel and the Lady his Queen.

GASPAR

I wish you luck with your present venture.

The court is always rich with opportunity.

GONZALO

I trust I'll thrive in this part of Portugal.

GASPAR

You will, for as we speak, the plague  
itches fiercely in Lisbon, while Coimbra  
is still full of peace and good health.<sup>21</sup>

*Enter Tello*

TELLO

Sir, you're called by our lady Estefanía who  
is no longer the modest one I once knew.  
Her father wishes to relieve the girl of  
maidenhood by giving her hand to you,  
for he can find no other man in Coimbra  
who is able to fill his daughter with the  
tender love he knows you'll thrust upon her.

GASPAR

Would you like to come see her, Gonzalo?

---

<sup>21</sup> Plague was a constant threat to cities in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lisbon, a large urban seaport, would be a breeding ground for disease. Smaller Coimbra, an inland ivory-tower, would be relatively sheltered.

GONZALO

And also to speak with your uncle, don Ignacio,  
whose favor with the King may prove useful.

GASPAR

That's true. Now come and let us admire the  
discretion, beauty, courtesy and grace  
of my cousin, Estefanía.

*Gonzalo and Gaspar exit.*

TELLO

In Portugal, all is like syrupy love.  
Everything is *bota*, everything's *lua*,<sup>22</sup>  
everything's *fidalgo valiente*,<sup>23</sup>  
except there's no way to understand anyone!  
Yesterday a young woman said to me "*traiceme  
do jardim boas boninas  
ollai, e un ramo de cravos.*"  
I was just about to explore the terrain  
of her vast fields, but as I bowed down  
before her, I learned that *cravos*  
are "carnations," not kisses, and  
*boninas* means "flowers," not fingers.

---

<sup>22</sup> *Bota*: boots. *Lua*: glove. Fashion associated with Portugal.

<sup>23</sup> *Fidalgo valiente*: brave gentleman

She immediately sent me out of the house  
to pick flowers, and with the help of a  
second young woman, I plucked petals  
more pretty than I've ever seen in Spain.

*Tello exits.*

## ACT 2, SCENE 2

*Don Ignacio's home in Coimbra, Portugal.*

*Enter Estefanía, Ignacio, Gaspar and Gonzalo.*

### IGNACIO

To see you in my home in Portugal, Gaspar,  
my luck today is boundless as the sea.

The man who never leaves his own land to  
visit others is bad-mannered. This is why I've  
moved my family here from our native Spain.

Such kingdoms as Portugal's provide knowledge,  
and the one who comes to see it and learn  
will always return home ready for all.

There's no knowledge in books as there is

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

in the world, for one always learns more when  
he is not buried deep in the tattered pages of an  
old story. In Portugal you will prosper quickly.

GASPAR

I thank you, uncle, for your kind favor.

IGNACIO

And your friend, here, is of noble blood  
and comes seeking rightful honor?

GASPAR

He does, my lord.

GONZALO

I will not miss Spain if I find  
favor in His Excellence the King of Portugal.

IGNACIO

I will speak with the King today.

GONZALO

When I am blessed with your protection, sir,  
I'm bound to find good fortune everywhere.

*(To Estefanía)* It seems as though with my good luck I will  
soon serve in your country, my lady.

ESTEFANÍA

I'd very much like to see you excel  
in a role that will make Portugal shine.

IGNACIO

It seems, Estefanía, that you're sad.

ESTEFANÍA

My sadness is brought on by these rough times.  
They say the plague torments the whole kingdom.

IGNACIO

If you say this, you're bound to be infected.  
The mind can do more damage than the plague.  
Coimbra is clear, and its river pristine.  
If you wish to distract yourself from this grief,  
spend your days outside and you'll forget your woes.  
Remember, Doctor Barbosa<sup>24</sup> prescribed that you  
walk the fields once every day to get fresh air.

ESTEFANÍA

How can I go out when the Doctor leaves me?  
Solitude always makes me twice as sad.

---

<sup>24</sup> "Barbosa": hairy-faced.



But I will try to fill my thoughts with things  
that cannot make my melancholy worse.<sup>25</sup>  
If for no other reason, I'll do this so  
you don't worry about me.

GASPAR

Now that we've found eternal joy in our love,  
You'll rarely encounter pleasure in other places.  
But surely you can find some joy?

ESTEFANÍA

When one lives in a place that has no joy,  
she can't expect to be happy, Gaspar.  
Sorrow is my hostess, and I don't know  
of a guesthouse that must provide its guest  
with something it does not already have.  
Guests must leave if they're displeased with their host.

GASPAR

Your somber mood sparks love in me.  
Love cries when it sees eyes filled with tears,  
and smiles when it sees eyes filled with laughter,  
for love is like a mirror, reflecting all.

---

<sup>25</sup> It was widely held that there were four "humors" or temperaments: choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, and sanguine. These were seen as tied to bodily fluids and combinations of hot/cold and dry/moist. A melancholic's fluids were excessively cold and dry, and therefore needed re-balancing. Much of Barbosa's upcoming diagnoses are founded in this theory.

And like the sea, love is emblued only  
when it reflects the vaulted world around it.

ESTEFANÍA

Forgive me if I stop responding to you.

GASPAR

I mean to serve you, and not to offend.

IGNACIO

Let's leave her, for this melancholy is  
a habit she's learned from her mother.

She was often consumed by grief, and  
although I know she loved me very much,  
it was pure luck when I could console her.  
Perhaps the Doctor can help.

*He exits.*

GASPAR

*(Aside)* How quickly her night darkens my sun!  
The dawn of my luck has only just risen,  
yet my desires are already clouded.  
And she is to be my wife!

GONZALO

*(Aside)* Estefanía is so beautiful!

The sunlight of her soul fills my heart  
with abundant joy! Though she's promised  
to Gaspar and my success depends on  
keeping in his good company, I love  
this woman and she must be my wife.

*Gaspar and Gonzalo exit.*

ESTEFANÍA

Imagination, you're a tyrant!  
They've gone and left me alone with you.  
Tell me, why in my distress do you  
tempt me to have such lustful thoughts?  
Why must you entertain such madness  
when my mind finds misery with such ease?  
How can you hit your target  
in the darkness of night when  
you miss it in the light of day?  
Are all my audacious wishes now  
directed to this dark end? I love a doctor?  
Be quiet! To speak this is insanity.  
How can love be called a cure  
when it's a sickness in itself?  
Love destroys our willpower and  
makes us its servants. But soon after

love heals our bodies, it withdraws,  
leaving us to minister to ourselves.  
What kind of inhuman medicine is this?  
What kind of remedy can love be,  
that cures plagues but is itself a plague?  
It sickens while it heals! If only  
my father had never received this doctor.  
If he had never taken my pulse  
I'd not be punished by this disease  
of love which, upon the briefest contact  
with my veins, sets my heart ablaze!

*Enter Ignacio, Gaspar, Gonzalo, and Tello.*

IGNACIO

Doctor Barbosa is on his way.  
I love my daughter very much,  
and her sadness forces me to  
take the very best care of her.

GASPAR

I cannot blame you for being concerned,  
for who would not worry at the sight of  
an eclipsed sun, burning, yet buried in snow?

GONZALO

We'll all get sick if she can't get well.

GASPAR

And I will love her more than any other.

TELLO

We'll run a hospital that worships women!

IGNACIO

*(To Estefanía)* You'll only get more melancholic if you're alone.

Why don't you spend the day out in the countryside?

ESTEFANÍA

There's no promise of remedy in that.

The fields make me sad just like music does.

IGNACIO

What's the source of your sadness?

ESTEFANÍA

I don't know. Nothing seems to relieve it these days.

IGNACIO

You look pale.

ESTEFANÍA

I feel like such a bad daughter.

To keep you from worrying, I'll hide these things.

Every night when I sleep, palpitations wake me.

I'm full of such anger it hurts to breathe.

The ache in my heart causes such anguish.

TELLO

Palpitations? It must be a fake illness like *egocentritis*.

IGNACIO

Tello, your jokes used to cure my daughter's  
sadness when she was a poor, melancholic child.

Go ahead, try once more.

TELLO

I fear that my  
humor has dried up in my old age.  
The most effective cure for all virgins like  
her consists of four injections of a husband  
at night, but not a single dose of mother-in-law  
to deal with the next morning.

ESTEFANÍA

Someone get rid of him!

TELLO

I hit a nerve?

ESTEFANÍA

If you don't leave, I will!

TELLO

I see I did.

Call me the bitch doctor, and the doctor is out.

*He exits, then enters again.*

TELLO

The doctor is in.

ESTEFANÍA

Bring him to me!

IGNACIO

Let him in.

*Tello exits. Enter Jerónima disguised as a doctor wearing a long sotanilla,<sup>26</sup> a cape with hood, gloves, and pants.*

---

<sup>26</sup> A long, black robe worn by scholars.

JERÓNIMA

Let God be upon this house,

*amantes et amentes.*<sup>27</sup>

GONZALO

*(Aside)* This doctor's face is

familiar to me. Perhaps he's from Spain.

IGNACIO

You arrive in good time, doctor. You see,

my daughter is not well.

JERÓNIMA

What could be wrong?

She's beautiful.

GASPAR

Does beauty affect health?

JERÓNIMA

You do not know? When the four humors are

balanced, they give shape to beauty.

---

<sup>27</sup> Latin: "lovers and lunatics."



This is what the famed Galen of Pergamon<sup>28</sup>

calls *ad pondus*,<sup>29</sup> for he proposes

the human temperaments are

counterbalanced by bodily humors.

When blood enters the liver, it's disguised in white,

but when it leaves, it's dressed in red

in order to nourish all organs *cum sanguine*.<sup>30</sup>

The body takes on the color and quality

of that which it feels, for each organ

searches for its loving mirror image,

until *pallor mortis*<sup>31</sup> takes hold of the body.

This is why women of nobility are delicate

and the most prone to illness.

GASPAR

I've heard that.

JERÓNIMA

This sick and gloomy quality in them

will easily produce melancholy.

And, even if it fails to make them sick,

it will still fatigue their disposition—

---

<sup>28</sup> Galen: famed Roman physician/philosopher who put forth the theory of the four humors.

<sup>29</sup> Not clear what *ad pondus* means, beyond what Jerónima paraphrases.

<sup>30</sup> Latin: "with blood."

<sup>31</sup> Latin: "postmortem paleness"

perhaps more in some than in others—  
because it increases their production of bile,  
cools all their organs down to a deep freeze,  
and causes incurable diseases.

If this lady does not distract herself  
and if she should go on in such sadness  
and solitude, she will grow much sicker.

*Imaginatio* is the central  
principle to *facit casum*.<sup>32</sup>

It is best for her to preempt this dark  
depression by taking precautions now.

ESTEFANÍA

Don't waste your words and aphorisms.  
Just check my pulse.

*Jerónima feels her neck.*

JERÓNIMA

Your pulse is heavy.

ESTEFANÍA

(*Aside*) Loving blood, tell him what my illness is.

Use my mouth as an artery in this,

---

<sup>32</sup> *Imaginatio facit casum*: Latin axiom, "Imagination makes it so."

for it is linked directly to my heart.

JERÓNIMA

A quiet vein. Give me another one.

*Jerónima puts her ear to Estefanía's breast.*

GASPAR

*(Aside)* To watch a doctor touch that which I'm denied!

What a fortunate occupation!

GONZALO

*(Aside)* My God,

I think her illness must be contagious,

for it is starting to cling to me, too.

JERÓNIMA

Does anything hurt?

ESTEFANÍA

My heart.

JERÓNIMA

Right now?

ESTEFANÍA

No. It only hurts when I'm alone...

*(Aside)* without you!

JERÓNIMA

And what else do you feel when you are sick?

ESTEFANÍA

I feel as though I'm drowning...

*(Aside)* in my love!

*(To Jerónima)* I don't know. Something is bothering me.

JERÓNIMA

When you spit?

ESTEFANÍA

No. When I speak.

JERÓNIMA

Perhaps it is mucus from the pituitary glands.

ESTEFANÍA

My palms feel like they're on fire.

Whatever I touch, they ignite in flames.

Feel, feel.

*She gives Jerónima her hands.*

JERÓNIMA

Holy imbalance!

ESTEFANÍA

I burn like Troy.

JERÓNIMA

What surprise! You have a deficit in your liver,

but excess bile makes you choleric.

You're aggravated, burning in your heart!

ESTEFANÍA

Yes, yes!

JERÓNIMA

Now listen to me, my lady,

It's in your best interest to prevent this;

my diagnostic knowledge tells me so.

First, you must follow a diet that will

remove this excess heat and bile.

ESTEFANÍA

Speak to me in vernacular, doctor.

## JERÓNIMA

Take note of what I say you must now eat:  
begin with food that's between dry and wet.

*Verbi gratia*,<sup>33</sup> turkey, chicken, pork,  
pheasant, veal, and rabbit, but not pigeons.  
Request that pots and pans be filled with these:  
green cilantro, white watercress, and blue  
borage<sup>34</sup> with peppermint. When mixed together,  
These foods will balance your temperature.  
Forget onions; you'll have no more of those.  
All fish you eat must be dry and roasted,  
and only from the river—not a lake or pond.  
Sauces must be fragrant, but without pepper.  
At night you must eat roasted pears and eggs,  
and you must drink two drops of red wine,  
very watered down. To avoid fatigue,  
exercise regularly. With all this,  
your melancholia should be cured.  
I hope to God you get well very soon,  
for I wish to see your joy restored and  
your rosy cheeks in full bloom.

---

<sup>33</sup> Latin: "for example"

<sup>34</sup> Borage (also called "Starflower"): Mediterranean herb.

ESTEFANÍA

Wait, doctor!

If my well-being means this much to you,  
you must stay here for my recovery.

Everything falls to your authority.

*(Aside)* Oh, if only he understood me!

JERÓNIMA

I gave you instructions for a reason.

Now you must be the one to implement.

ESTEFANÍA

But my good health rests only in your hands.

IGNACIO

How do you feel, daughter?

ESTEFANÍA

My health improves  
when I am standing next to the doctor.

GASPAR

Rather than studying from textbooks in school,  
this boy spent his stipend on doctor's clothing.

JERÓNIMA

The threads of a man's clothing are stronger  
than the rods of a prison cell, Gaspar; they  
hold much power and give him great authority.

#### GASPAR

I fear Doctor Barbosa is too young to prescribe,  
for he is still without the authority of a beard.  
His age is not that of a good doctor.

#### JERÓNIMA

Skill in the sciences comes not with age.  
Even the great Aristotle himself cannot  
answer: why is wit greater in youth?  
The Roman goddess Minerva,  
known to the Greeks as Athena,  
painted her face so as to look young,<sup>35</sup>  
and she became the symbol of wisdom.  
At nineteen, Augustus triumphed.<sup>36</sup>  
At thirty-two, Galen achieved the  
laurel and crown of Apollo.<sup>37</sup>  
And I don't expect you to belittle

---

<sup>35</sup> The legend referenced here is unclear.

<sup>36</sup> Julius Caesar's nephew, Augustus, was given the title "Caesar" (Great One) while still a teenager.

<sup>37</sup> See previous note on Galen. "Laurel and crown" is used poetically here, to imply the peak of wisdom. (Apollo, who bestowed these honors, was god of medicine.)



me for my small stature, either,  
since the wise man credits it:  
Plato says as weight increases,  
intelligence diminishes. The most  
overweight man is exceptionally humid,  
and there's nothing like humidity—  
of the four humors—to destroy  
rationality and erase the potential  
of our reason and memory.  
What I lack in physique, I make up  
for in spirit. The honest coat of a doctor  
demands authority and respect, and even  
more when it heals such pleasant patients.

ESTEFANÍA

Tell me what makes the perfect doctor.  
The very sound of your voice pleases me.

JERÓNIMA

One must be amiable and speak well,  
smell sweet as a woman and dress the part.  
All of these things make patients less nervous.  
If a doctor came to see a patient  
poorly dressed, even more poorly spoken,  
he'd never raise the spirits of his patient.  
Doctors must first heal inner illnesses,

ones that affect the soul, not the body.

ESTEFANÍA

What truth is this! I feel like a new woman!

Check my pulse again.

JERÓNIMA

The change is astounding!

ESTEFANÍA

What do you think?

JERÓNIMA

I think that you are healed.

ESTEFANÍA

My color?

JERÓNIMA

Jasmine and rose.

ESTEFANÍA

And my palms?

JERÓNIMA

Cool.

ESTEFANÍA

My breath?

JERÓNIMA

Lemon flower and apples.

ESTEFANÍA

My disposition?

JERÓNIMA

Divine.

ESTEFANÍA

My balance?

JERÓNIMA

Miraculous.

ESTEFANÍA

Take these two diamonds.

*She gives them to Jerónima.*

GASPAR

*(Aside)* If this is medicine and not love,

I know nothing of either.

JERÓNIMA

I will return tonight to see you.

ESTEFANÍA

Where are you going?

JERÓNIMA

To meet my sister.

Escaping the plague in Lisbon, she comes  
to Coimbra to seek life.

ESTEFANÍA

Your sister?

GONZALO

*(Aside)* He has a sister?

GONZALO/ESTEFANÍA

*(Aside, separately)* A new lover for Gaspar.

JERÓNIMA

Mine, and your servant.

ESTEFANÍA

She arrives today?

JERÓNIMA

I suspect she is already at my home.

ESTEFANÍA

She's young?

JERÓNIMA

And has a pretty face.

ESTEFANÍA

A maiden?

JERÓNIMA

A vigilant one.

ESTEFANÍA

But I won't see her?

JERÓNIMA

If you wish to see her, then she will come  
to serve you, but only after you have  
rested for a few days.

ESTEFANÍA

Does she have a name?

JERÓNIMA

Doña Marta de Barcelos.

ESTEFANÍA

And you are Doctor Barbosa.

JERÓNIMA

I'll bring my sister to you.

*(To Ignacio)* Your lordship must protect me,

for at this time my good name,

honor, and fortune are at stake.

IGNACIO

How is this so?

JERÓNIMA

Some passionate

supporters have urged me to put myself

in the running for a prestigious, endowed seat

at the University. This afternoon I will

give a lecture on medicine.

IGNACIO

How wonderful!

JERÓNIMA

I have some young supporters, and even  
some esteemed elders on the faculty who  
have the power to vote. With the weight  
of their authority on my side, the balance  
of opinion will help me win the seat.

Tomorrow I'll read an opposition<sup>38</sup>  
and declare my candidacy for the seat;  
I hope that you will go with me.

IGNACIO

I will.

And if you need an extra vote...

JERÓNIMA

Please, no.

Justice is the only support I'll need,  
and I know the wise must never bribe.

(*To Ignacio*) A few words in private with you, señor?

Your daughter must take one more precaution,

---

<sup>38</sup> Official declaration of candidacy for prestigious university seat. Medicine was part of a classical university education, where "scientific" texts by Aristotle, Galen, and others were studied. These learned "philosophical doctors," so to speak, enjoyed prestige, unlike low-status traveling surgeons.

for at this time she's not quite fully healed;  
although she is in love with Don Gaspar,  
any rushed decisions when she's this sick  
will only delay her healing process.

IGNACIO

I'll see everything's taken care of. Return tonight?

JERÓNIMA

With what I've said: ingest and digest.  
Go with God.

ESTEFANÍA

Bring your sister to visit me, Doctor.

*Exit Jerónima and Estefanía.*

IGNACIO

The doctor is remarkably skilled.

GONZALO

He's smart, indeed, for being so young.

GASPAR

But such youth in medicine brings danger.



IGNACIO

He's held in high opinion in Coimbra,  
and I am satisfied to have him here.  
We'll see his skill in Estefanía's health.

GONZALO

A sick man can make great improvements  
when he places his trust in the care of a doctor.

GASPAR

I wouldn't give him my pulse.

IGNACIO

No? Why not?

GASPAR

He's too young to have endured  
the vigilance of perpetual learning  
that becoming a doctor demands.

IGNACIO

You don't like him.

GASPAR

*(Aside)* It must be clear I'm  
jealous of this man.

IGNACIO

What has he done to you?

GASPAR

What? You think such a tiny doctor could hurt me?

IGNACIO

When he forbids you from the thing you love,  
you'll learn he's cruel.

GASPAR

I'm not his patient;  
how can he forbid me from anything?

IGNACIO

I must not hide what he's prescribed for you.  
You know, Gaspar, that women seek no more  
safety than the shelter of marriage.

GASPAR

Right.

IGNACIO

In trying desperately to achieve this,  
women become so distressed they cannot sleep.

The doctor says that since I've blessed your marriage,  
my daughter loves you with such intensity that  
the fire of passion in her heart prevents resting.  
The excess blood her body is producing  
has made her melancholic once again.  
We are to relieve her of this distraction  
until the plague is over. We'll try to  
divert her attention, and you must not  
spend time with her alone.

GASPAR

What?

IGNACIO

If she rests now, her love will be conserved  
for better times. This order you must follow, Gaspar,  
for I will obey everything Doctor Barbosa prescribes.

*He exits.*

GONZALO

*(Aside)* For this prescription, I'll give many thanks!  
I love his daughter with such jealousy,  
with wild and fierce, yet discreet, passion.  
Gaspar is blocked from Estefanía,  
and I owe this doctor many favors,

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

for now he also brings a sister to Coimbra.  
(*To Gaspar*) 'The more delayed, the more delight.  
Your promised love will be more beautiful.  
Estefanía, now sad, will be healed.  
If you desire to become her lord,  
have patience and follow this doctor's word.

*He exits.*

GASPAR

My love begins to fear I'm jealous  
of this young Doctor Barbosa.  
When Estefanía can't see him, she's sad,  
and she's full of joy when he's around.  
When he touches her arteries,  
they communicate their woes.  
The door that closes before me  
is wide open for the doctor.  
He's allowed to visit not once, but twice,  
while I'm supposed to stay away?  
Deceitful medicine, I doubt you.  
What could he want from sweet ladies  
and ripe moments, she being a sweet fruit,  
and this being the moment to pluck her?  
She twice gave him her hands today,  
and I could see in doing so, he aroused her.

No doctor can heal jealousy,  
for the pain it brings is incurable.  
Doctor Barbosa, share your visits with me,  
or starting today, call me your enemy.

*He exits.*

## ACT 2, SCENE 3

*A street near the home of Doctor Barbosa in Coimbra, Portugal.*

*Enter Jerónima, dressed as a woman, and Quiteria, both in their cloaks.*

### JERÓNIMA

Quiteria, I must share my woes with you.  
My love, nearly my enemy,  
is burning for another lady.  
He loves Estefanía, and she loves me.  
My distress is old, but my pains are new.  
Gaspar loves the woman he can't have,  
and the lady imitates him in this.  
I love with the same kind of suffering,  
and in the end we three just cheat ourselves.  
How can I escape from this labyrinth?

### QUITERIA

If you can't find a solution in plays,  
you can't expect to find one in real life.  
Your blind love's brought us on a great journey;  
you entered the light of a convent as a woman, and  
escaped it in the darkness of night disguised as a man,  
but the chase for freedom must end right now.  
I don't know why you love studying this much  
when it forces you into such madness.  
You're charging money on false pretenses,  
you're pretending to heal fatal ailments,  
killing twenty when, by chance, you heal four.  
You're ruining good doctors' reputations;  
not one of them speaks well of your methods.  
You've dug yourself into a hole, for now  
you must pretend you have a sister here.  
And Estefanía wants to meet her!  
Even if you manage to satisfy everyone,  
you're bound to make a mistake playing  
all these roles.

JERÓNIMA

Just wait, Quiteria. We'll be fine.

QUITERIA

Then I pray we do not get caught. Where are  
we going in yet another disguise?

JERÓNIMA

To see Estefanía. My misfortune.

QUITERIA

What are you planning get us tangled up in now?

JERÓNIMA

We'll see.

QUITERIA

Gaspar and his page are coming!

JERÓNIMA

Cover yourself.

*They pull up their hoods.*

*Don Gaspar and Tello enter.*

TELLO

I suspect that the doctor lives right here where  
these two covered Portuguese ladies have emerged.

GASPAR

Women are cloaked in Portugal, as well?

TELLO

They must have learned the fashion in Spain.

QUITERIA

*(Aside)* And so we set our stage with new tricks.

GASPAR

Ladies, God be with you.

JERÓNIMA

*Fidalgo, os anjos vos vencan.*

[English: Knight, be blessed by angels.]

TELLO

The angels shall revenge us?

GASPAR

She said *vencan*, you idiot, not revenge.

Their mother tongue is Portuguese,  
and nothing like the Spanish we speak.

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

**160**



But don't worry, I'll be your translator.

She says "the angels will bless us."

TELLO

Ah, bless us. That's good.

*Jerónima extends her ungloved hand.*

GASPAR

What a lovely hand!

TELLO

It looks worn out to me, like it's worked hard.

Spanish women care for their tender hands.

I wonder what slippery business the women in Coimbra  
are up to that would make their hands as greasy as this.

JERÓNIMA

*Deixaimos passar diante,* [English: Let us walk ahead.  
*Que temos presa.* we are in a hurry.]

GASPAR

First let me see if your face matches your hand;

I've not seen such a lovely one in days.

JERÓNIMA

*Inda millor.*

[English: (The face) is prettier.]

GASPAR

Really? It's better than your hand?

JERÓNIMA

*Nao me engeita combarias;*

[English: I am not offended;

*ficad fidalgo con Deos*

stay with God, gentlemen,

*que naon falo castellanos.*

for I do not speak Spanish.]

GASPAR

I only seek hands that give me pleasure.

If your beauty matches your hands, let hands

do me this favor.

TELLO

Eat her hands out, Gaspar,

for you're a lover of this loose, greasy kind.<sup>39</sup>

GASPAR

Shut up, you fool. (*To Jerónima*) I beg you, let me see

just two fingers of your face for my delight.

JERÓNIMA

---

<sup>39</sup> The Spanish often called the Portuguese "greasy" because they used animal grease to soften their hands and gloves.

*Vindes doudo?*

[English: Are you insane?]

GASPAR

I come willing to risk it all, by God.

Aren't you going to satisfy me?

I love someone else, but it's too much trouble.

JERÓNIMA

*Assentai come la o iogo*

[English: Establish with her new rules

*desde oge ansi, e naom cureis.*

starting today, and stop worrying.]

GASPAR

You must be skilled in love to give such advice.

Would you like to confirm by unveiling?

JERÓNIMA

*O, que enfadonio e sobejo!*

[English: Oh, you are nosy and intrusive!]

TELLO

*(To Quiteria)* Let's remove your veil, too, and show your face!

Uncover yourself, my delicious tart!

QUITERIA

*Tiraihos!*

[English: Leave us alone!]

TELLO

Try both? Gladly! Show more skin!

JERÓNIMA

*Deixáimos ir.*

[English: Let us go.]

GASPAR

I'm looking for a doctor,  
but after seeing you I don't need him.  
Of all the women I have seen while traveling,  
none have cared to love me as I deserve.  
I did speak to one lady in Seville—  
she was also covered—and I must say  
she looked quite similar to you.  
I'm becoming impatient, my lady,  
looking at you with your hidden face.  
Oh, if you're as pretty as I presume!  
If only you could make me forget the  
unfortunate affairs of my visit,  
if my heart could be soothed in Portugal,  
if you were the first lady to love me,  
if you were loving and obedient!  
My stars begin to align themselves,  
my love begins to improve itself.  
My lady, let the sun shine on your face.

JERÓNIMA

*(To Quiteria) Ai mana mina.*

[English: Oh sister.]

GASPAR

Forgive my bad manners.

You did not cause my torment, but I know that  
you could cure me of the pain I'm feeling right now.

Why so aloof? Your indifference surprises me  
as you abandon courtesy for scorn. You're  
beautiful, but you're cold and very dry.

JERÓNIMA

*He seca? Pois burrifaya.*

[English: She's dry? Well, water her then.]

GASPAR

If I am called upon to douse you, I'd be  
as prostrated as a knight before his queen.

JERÓNIMA

*Bom dicho.*

[English: Well said.]

GASPAR

If you come from a noble family,  
I'll turn my love for you into a life  
And treat you like the Queen of Castile.

JERÓNIMA

*De manera esconiurando* [English: You are begging  
*falais, que por derradeiro* in such a way, that I am  
*a fazer lo que naom queiro* finally torced to do what  
*forcais; vindivos chegando.* I have avoided: to come close to you.]

*They move aside.*

TELLO

*(Aside)* When he sets his eyes on something, he wants it instantly.

*(To Quiteria)* Perhaps I can seduce you a little, too?

QUITERIA

*Gaze en mis ojos.* [English: Look me in the eyes.]

TELLO

*(To Gaspar)* Graze on her what? Are they melons?

GASPAR

Gaze, not graze. They're so  
beautifully bright, and so large, too!  
The brilliance of the sun does not compare.

JERÓNIMA

*Pois catai estoutro.*

[English: Look at the other one.]

GASPAR

Between your eyes,  
and hands, I fear I lose myself in love.

JERÓNIMA

*Pois ollai...*

[English: Look...

*mais naon, que he meu birmaon aquele.* but no, that is my brother.

*Martiña,<sup>40</sup> entremos em casa.*

Martiña, let's go inside.]

GASPAR

Your brother?

JERÓNIMA

*Ollai, la pasa.*

[English: Look, there he goes.]

GASPAR

The doctor?

JERÓNIMA

*Oui. Sí. Meu birmaom he ele.*

[English: He is my brother.]

---

<sup>40</sup> Martiña: the “iña” ending makes this a stereotypically Portuguese-sounding name. It is ridiculous, as “Marta” and “Martiña” are essentially the same name (“Chris,” “Chrissie.”)

*She uncovers her face and exits.*

TELLO

*(To Quiteria)* You're leaving, Martiña?

QUITERIA

Run *en casa*.

*She exits.*

TELLO

Rouen Castle? That's in France!

GASPAR

Tello, this woman slays me! From the time

I saw her veiled, I gave her my soul.

And now that she's unveiled herself for me,

I owe her one soul every day we meet.

TELLO

What will you do about Estefanía?

GASPAR

Kick her out.



TELLO

And what about Micaela?

GASPAR

Disinherit her on grounds of tyranny.

TELLO

And what about the lady from Seville?

GASPAR

I never saw her.

TELLO

And this new lady?

GASPAR

She's not a lady, but a golden seraph.

TELLO

Let's go. We'll look for the doctor later.

GASPAR

I came here seeking to revenge myself on this man,

but now I must thank him for his sister

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

who's erased Estefanía from my mind.

Did you see her hand and face? What beauty!

All others in Coimbra are just puffs of air.

TELLO

Your brain is a puff of air. You're switching  
between women faster than women shift moods.

You think it's good to try on three ladies  
in just one year? Are they like shirts to you?

GASPAR

I have done nothing. They've provoked me.

TELLO

Will you marry this one?

GASPAR

How could I know?

If she's as chaste as she is beautiful...

TELLO

You're engorged. Why don't you sleep on it?  
Remember, blind Cupid, she's a doctor's sister.

GASPAR

You should call her an angel, Tello.

*Enter Jerónima as Doctor Barbosa, with Don  
Gonzalo.*

JERÓNIMA

Love is a sickness just like any other,  
but it afflicts our spirit and soul.  
It seizes our bodies just like the flu,  
but it directs its pain straight to the heart.  
One usually finds the cure for this only with time,  
for our souls, which are bound by our bodies,  
are always fighting to be released from their chains.  
It is not unusual for bodies bound by blood—  
say, the bodies of a brother and sister, perhaps—  
to suffer the same ailments simultaneously.  
Lovesickness, in particular, is a condition  
that runs in families. It's an inherited disease.

*Jerónima takes Gonzalo pulse.*

JERÓNIMA

You have a lover's pulse.  
By drinking cold liquids and medicines,  
the fire in your heart should cool quickly.

GONZALO

Be discreet when you speak of this passion  
that burns me.

JERÓNIMA

So near my house, Gaspar?  
Do you need something?

GASPAR

*(To Tello)* They look so much alike.

TELLO

*(To Gaspar)* The Doctor and Marta?

GASPAR

*(To Tello)* They are kin.

TELLO

*(To Gaspar)* As well as kind and gentle.

GASPAR

Doctor Barbosa, my hopes, my life, and my love  
depend on you.

JERÓNIMA

You mean Estefanía.

If you speak a single word to her this month,  
you'll kill her. Your time will come later.

GASPAR

I must speak to you now.

JERÓNIMA

I'm listening.

GASPAR

But I can't. We're enemies.

Are you healing don Gonzalo, as well?

GONZALO

I'm not feeling so well here today.

GASPAR

The plague worries us all, don Gonzalo.

GONZALO

*(Aside)* What is love but the worst plague?

GASPAR

Doctor, are you going home?

JERÓNIMA

I am.

GASPAR

Can I come, too?

JERÓNIMA

Estefanía makes you so hasty.

GASPAR

No, doctor. My sickness and my cure both  
live in your house.

JERÓNIMA

I see.

GASPAR

That is the truth.

JERÓNIMA

I heal all illnesses with prescriptions,  
but you must take my word, for my name is  
renowned in these parts.

GASPAR

Do you think I won't?

JERÓNIMA

Follow me.

GASPAR

How lucky I am!

TELLO

Doctor, you must know that in my most  
long and lively part I am killed by nine abscesses.

JERÓNIMA

Abscesses, you say. Is there any liquid  
that gets ejected from these wounds?

TELLO

There is.

It comes when the wounds become swollen.

JERÓNIMA

If you'd like, I'll relieve you of these pains.

TELLO

I've found the pain subsides by applying  
pressure to my injured parts; perhaps  
you can relieve me with your gentle hands?

JERÓNIMA

May I examine you?

TELLO

Please do.

*As Jerónima is about to examine Tello:*

JERÓNIMA

A very sensible decision, for I fear  
these abscesses might be tumors.  
Though I can usually handle such small  
maladies on my own, I fear I must draw  
twenty ounces of blood from the  
stunted site to properly diagnose you.

TELLO

Twenty ounces?!

JERÓNIMA



If you've got that much.

TELLO

Am I to be castrated like a bull?

GASPAR

Tello, do as he says if you don't wish to wither away.

TELLO

Body of Christ! Twenty ounces!

You won't drain my swelled wound, doctor.

Though my words hold little power,  
bearing my sword's shaft I can fend off  
your tiny needle's prick!

*Gaspar and Jerónima exit together into her home, as Tello follows behind.*

### ACT 3

#### ACT 3, SCENE 1

*The University of Coimbra, Portugal.*

*Enter all characters except for Jerónima and Estefanía. After the Queen, enter Jerónima (as Doctor Barbosa) wearing pants, a cloak, tights, an academic cap,*

*and a muceta.*<sup>41</sup> *Music and applause accompany their entrance.*

JERÓNIMA

Your majesty joins gravity and kindness,  
producing love and respect in  
both the scholarly and the simple,  
and in me eternal obligation,  
for now you honor me with great renown.

QUEEN

Doctor, your abundant knowledge,  
for such a youth, deserves my honor and respect.  
The distinguished position you've obtained,  
and in it your astute solutions  
and innovative arguments,  
justify your entry into my chamber.  
Starting today, we entrust the  
pulse of Portugal's King to you,  
and thus the health of our country.  
You're now "Doctor of the King's Chamber."

TELLO

---

<sup>41</sup> A short cape that covers the shoulders worn by doctors, lawyers, and other professionals and academics in the period.

(*Aside*) His *bedchamber*? The old man's nurse!

JERÓNIMA

Your Majesty, may Spain admire you  
in the many happy centuries to come.  
Your lofty praise is more precious than  
that which Marcus Aurelius gave to the  
esteemed Roman doctor, Galen.<sup>42</sup>  
Not even the golden statues  
Athens erected for Hippocrates<sup>43</sup>

parallel the grace, my Lady, that  
Your royal highness has granted me.

QUEEN

(*Aside to Jerónima*) And she who praises  
the Queen raises her own status.  
(*To all*) Go now to visit with the King,  
doctor. He is becoming sad and  
his bosom is troubled with hazards  
which weigh heavily upon his heart.  
I have faith in your sensitive and  
gentle remedies to heal him.

---

<sup>42</sup> Galen was physician to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. Among other achievements, he helped to diagnose and treat the plague that affected the empire under Aurelius.

<sup>43</sup> Hippocrates: ancient Greek physician, and “father” of modern medicine.

JERÓNIMA

I thank you for your trust, my lady.

QUEEN

I thank you for your duties, noble sir. Your  
service in the court will not go unnoticed,  
for it is a most rare and extraordinary one.  
I'll discover you next in the royal residence, Doctor.

*The Queen exits.*

IGNACIO

Enjoy your position, doctor,  
for many happy years.

JERÓNIMA

I did not expect any less in serving  
you. Your grace promised me  
such favors.

IGNACIO

I hope the palace  
won't let you forget my daughter,  
who still depends on you, doctor.

JERÓNIMA

Good sir! Must you remind me of this  
when you know I long to serve her?  
I will leave to see her at once.

IGNACIO

She will not see other doctors;  
reward her for the faith she's placed in you.

JERÓNIMA

I hope to bring you relief by  
  
restoring your daughter to health.

*Don Ignacio exits.*

GASPAR

Although you're not indebted to me,  
I depend upon you for my progress, as well.

JERÓNIMA

If circumstances allow I promise  
your time apart from the lady  
will be brief. Do not be sad  
because of this present restraint.

GASPAR

You've read my pulse incorrectly,  
for it beats for another person.

JERÓNIMA

Although wise doctors can make diagnoses,  
there are some things they just can't guess.  
You're speaking so mysteriously.

GASPAR

My will is a mystery;  
  
but I'll reveal its secret  
if we can converse privately.

JERÓNIMA

Today I'm busy with academic affairs.  
Tomorrow you can tell me what you will  
and rid yourself of this ailment.

*Exit Gaspar.*

TELLO

A male doctor wearing women's shoes.  
I hear these small doctors don't come from  
schools of medicine but from schools of gossip.

And where there's one, they'll multiply  
until they've consumed us all. You're a  
busy doctor, but I wish you could find  
the time to heal my wound. If you take  
my blood, I'll throb with such agony.  
Instead you might find inspiration from the  
waxing moon and heal me tonight by  
circulating my orbs one hundred times.

JERÓNIMA

This injured place must be massaged  
  
with medicinal balms to stop the pain.

*Jerónima produces a vial of medicine and kneels before Tello.*

TELLO

Which kind are they? And how much?

JERÓNIMA

Six ounces...of hot peppers.

TELLO

Shit!

JERÓNIMA

You must chop them into small pieces  
so they cauterize your skin quickly,  
then add a pinch of alum, white lead,  
and six micrograms of saltpeter.<sup>44</sup>

TELLO

By God, doctor, if you have a  
sound conscience, don't prescribe  
remedies that will ruin me.

JERÓNIMA

If I don't, you'll die.

TELLO.

But chili peppers?  
Who has ever peppered his pecker?

JERÓNIMA

You must do as I say and heed my diagnosis.

TELLO.

Saltpeter! Hot peppers!  
Oh, the gall in dainty doctors!

---

<sup>44</sup> Saltpeter: potassium nitrate, a key ingredient of gunpowder.



*He exits.*

GONZALO

Among the many praises you've  
received, I offer mine to you.  
I hope they're not considered less worthy  
because I give them to you last;  
I assure you they're more sincere  
than all you've received before,  
for you're like a brother to me.  
You know there is no one like  
me to celebrate your genius.  
And now I hope your skill will heal  
the passion I described to you  
that burns me up without warning,  
for it was in jealousy that  
I came, I saw, and I loved.

JERÓNIMA

You speak as Caesar did in Rome.

GONZALO

I know I can't be lovesick,  
for I've only just met this lady.  
Love takes time to grow;  
it's a thing which follows years

of favors and sympathies.

It's precisely why I wouldn't let my  
sister see a man staying in our home;  
I knew she'd think she loved him  
when they first locked eyes.

JERÓNIMA

And where is your sister now?

GONZALO

A convent in Spain, where both her body and soul  
are safe from the sickness this world produces.

JERÓNIMA

Her body and soul are perhaps safe,  
but what of her heart?

GONZALO

Better that her heart is  
in the hands of God than the hands of a human.  
You must see how Estefanía has destroyed my own.  
Though she only looked at me with her eyes,  
she instantly set my heart ablaze.  
I know this can't be love,  
for love comes from the soul,  
not the body. What I'm feeling is

merely a fleeting passion of the heart.

JERÓNIMA

You speak so philosophically.

Love at first sight is exciting  
especially when, as it often is,  
requited by the other one.

This love first begins in the body,  
then later reaches the soul,  
and last asks the mind to understand.

From there, it becomes spiritual.

Therefore if you loved this lady  
immediately after seeing her,  
it simply means the stars have aligned.<sup>45</sup>

But I must warn you now that she  
caused this same sensation in the man  
who now walks sadly through Coimbra.  
Though you're no healthier than he,  
Gaspar seems quite incurable.

GONZALO

As do you, Doctor. What is the matter?

JERÓNIMA

---

<sup>45</sup> In the above section, Jerónima cites well-known Baroque theories about love.

The matter?

GONZALO

With your heart, sir.

You hold it as if it hurts you to breathe.

JERÓNIMA

It does.

GONZALO

Do you know the cause of the pain?

JERÓNIMA

I do, but I fear I can't seem to heal it.

GONZALO

Then you should let someone examine you,  
if you don't mind another skilled doctor laying  
his hands on your swollen breast.

JERÓNIMA

No!

My heart is strong, and I'll be cured in time.

Don't worry; I'll make sure both my heart

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

and yours heal. Though I can't predict  
what's to come, it wasn't by accident I  
forbid Gaspar from seeing Estefanía.  
I expect you'll prepare to honor me when  
you rise to the title of husband.  
God bless you. I go to treat the sick.

*She exits.*

GONZALO

What luck. God bless his sweet methods!  
From everything I've seen since I've come here,  
Estefanía despises Gaspar and sends him away.  
This all seems too good to be true,  
for it is clear that she's made  
Gaspar lovesick and miserable.  
But is she not a woman?

*He exits.*

ACT 3, SCENE 2

*A street near the home of Doctor Barbosa in Coimbra,  
Portugal.*

*Don Gaspar and Tello enter.*

GASPAR

I come on the pretext of the doctor.

TELLO

And so the theme of your madness persists.

GASPAR

Love puts me off course.

TELLO

I can see it now:

as soon as she falls in love with you,  
her love will extinguish your passion's flame  
until you find another woman to  
start the fire and replace the first.  
You know how I can tell this will happen?  
You've fallen in love four times already.

GASPAR

What do you expect? Among all women,  
only Marta is worthy of being worshipped.

TELLO

Marta, but not the Virgin Mary?

GASPAR

Aren't you sick of insulting me?

TELLO

We are in a foreign land, Gaspar.

Portuguese women must be more modest  
than those in Spain.

GASPAR

That's probably true  
only in the most remote villages.  
At court, ladies are not this shy.  
Right now, Marta's brother is busy  
with the duties of his university seat  
and leaves me space to visit with her.

TELLO

Just go. When you fall for a new lady,  
I'll be the one laughing down here.

*Enter Jerónima as Doctor Barbosa.*

JERÓNIMA

And so we meet again before my house?

If in Spain doors are opened by love,  
in Portugal they are closed by honor,  
for love here always leads to jealousy.  
What have you come in search of, Gaspar?

GASPAR

You shouldn't be upset; I've come for you.

JERÓNIMA

You try to escape when you see me coming.  
You know I have a sister, and your eyes  
are fixed on every window in my house,  
yet you claim that you're here to speak with me?  
If you continue with such loose behavior  
your noble reputation will pay the price.  
Though it may be acceptable in Spain,  
such dishonorable behavior in Portugal  
is denounced. As long as you're in Coimbra,  
live as we do, and you will find favor.  
But know that among books and prescriptions,  
my study also holds rifles.

TELLO

*(Aside)* For such a gentle one,  
this doctor's got some balls!



GASPAR

Leave this anger and listen as a friend.

JERÓNIMA

What could you possibly have to tell me?

GASPAR

Although I've not studied whether  
love is subject to scientific laws,  
I know when Estefanía sees you she's  
relieved of the illness that plagues her,  
and that in secrecy you've been a cure  
for both her illness and her lovesickness.  
From this relationship come romantic impulses,  
not ones of melancholy, as she says.  
She spends hours just giving you her pulse,  
and through this she also offers you her soul.  
By constantly giving you her hands, she's asking  
that you extinguish the fevers you've ignited.  
Since your profession demands that you  
touch others, I see how she's confused such  
touching with embracing.

JERÓNIMA

Stop, Gaspar.

Your suggestions are not noble;

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

they're base and common like a villager's.

I am a man of great reputation.

Until now, nobody has attacked  
the prestige of the medical profession.

GASPAR

It's no mistake to do so if we see its dangers.

But I did not mean to offend you, sir.

I hope to make you my new friend and serve  
you since we're no longer competitors.

JERÓNIMA

I do not understand.

GASPAR

The beauty of

Your face I now see in your sister;

she is the object of my devotion.

JERÓNIMA

So you have seen her?

GASPAR

I did, yesterday,

gracing a window with her presence.

JERÓNIMA

And are you pleased with what you saw?

GASPAR

Not just that, I am pleased with what I had.

JERÓNIMA

Is that so?

GASPAR

Your sister can work miracles, Doctor.  
Her heavenly touch seems to improve my health.  
In fact, she's so good to me that I want for us to  
share our fortune. I'll grant you rights to Estefanía,  
and you, permit me to seal a deal of love with  
your sister. If you'd like, I can also endow your  
marriage with two thousand gold chequeens.<sup>46</sup>  
I'll give up my inheritance to marry Marta,  
and when you become my brother-in-law  
you shall have more power to help us both.

JERÓNIMA

A long story with a foundation of sand, I see.  
Though I am by no means a poor man,

---

<sup>46</sup> Chequeens: currency of Turkish origin, in use around the Mediterranean.

I'm not the first-born son and am not  
heir to my family's estate;  
I must rely on my hard work and  
reputation for my financial security.  
I am a doctor, and have earned a good name  
which is bound to protect all my interests.  
I studied medicine for love, not money.  
It seems that you don't value honest love,  
Gaspar, for I hear you've recently dishonored  
women in both Portugal and Spain.  
Knowing this, how can I trust that  
you will treat my sister with respect?  
Marta's worth is not measured in numbers;  
your devotion to her cannot be counted in  
money, but only in the healing service of love.  
Have you repaid my sister in love, Gaspar?  
Or only with the dishonorable actions  
you're now known for? These words  
spoken against you taint your name.

*She exits.*

GASPAR

What's going on?

TELLO

What do I know?

If you fold your hand too soon,  
you must suffer the consequences.

*Enter Quiteria. She gives Gaspar a letter from Marta and  
exits.*

GASPAR

Marta has written to me!

TELLO

Won't you read it already?

GASPAR

The heavens must rescue  
my brain.

TELLO

If they can find it.

*Gaspar opens the letter and reads it to himself.*

GASPAR

Such a warm and tender letter, Tello!

TELLO

Just let it melt you later.

GASPAR

(Reads) “*Tudo canto vos falou* [English: “Everything you have said,  
*meu birmaon vos ei ouvido.*” I’ve heard from my brother ...”

TELLO

What does that mean?

GASPAR

She has heard  
everything while hiding.  
(Reads) “*Por o furaco escondido.*” [English: “...through a hidden hole.”]

TELLO

A hidden hole?! Obscene!

GASPAR

What’s obscene?

TELLO

She’s speaking of a vile hole. Perhaps  
you two can make sense of this together,  
but I’m not going near anyone’s hole.

GASPAR

Just listen, and I'll read the love letter:

“While listening from the front door's keyhole,

I have heard what my brother said; I am yours.

It does not matter if he's scolded you.

My brother does not understand this life.

You're my love, and if what you want is me,

you shall have me for the rest of eternity.”

TELLO

I still don't approve of this, Gaspar.

Holes can be very dangerous, especially

around young lovers such as yourself.

*Enter Jerónima, covered.*

GASPAR

This one—is she the one I wish to see?

She is Marta, no?

TELLO

Yes and no.

No, because she is a sealed letter.

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

**199**

But yes because her signature seems  
to reveal her identity.

GASPAR

My love sees  
through everything. Marta?

JERÓNIMA

Hold, sir.

Be courteous.

TELLO

She speaks your native tongue!

GASPAR

Are you not Marta?

*Gaspar and Jerónima speak, apart*

JERÓNIMA

I'm not the woman you think I am,  
though I do also come from her house.  
I was born in Seville where, if you  
remember, I hosted you for a month.  
In Spain, you were careless with me.  
In Portugal, you were rude to another woman.



I beg you, keep your promises to those who are innocent.

If you do not, you mock the Spanish way

and thereby dishonor the Portuguese.

Be loyal before news travels back to

those who will force you to get married,

for better or worse.

*Exit Jerónima.*

GASPAR

Jesus! What is this mess?

TELLO

Foreshadowing.

Let's go before a third one enters. Like the plague,

they follow us everywhere.

*Gaspar and Tello exit.*

ACT 3, SCENE 3

*In Estefanía's house.*

*The Queen enters, in male attire, and speaks to her people,  
the audience.*

QUEEN

I'm not the woman you think I am, for today  
I conceal myself in the cloak of cunning.  
It seems that the heart of this honest Portugal  
has been infected by one furtive fraudster.  
Therefore, in the name of medicine, permit me  
to deceive as I take leave of my title and seek  
out honesty in the secret harbor of this residence.  
Supplied with the threads of a servant boy,  
I now formally in person bear like a true male,  
and hence shall see what these seemers be.

*The Queen disappears from sight.*

*Jerónima (in female garb with a cloak), Quiteria and  
Estefanía enter.*

ESTEFANÍA

Remove your cloak.

JERÓNIMA

*Naom posso,*

[English: I cannot,

*ocu pacaons muitas teno.*

I have many other errands to run.]

ESTEFANÍA

I'd rather see you when you're relaxed.

JERÓNIMA

*Virei vagante outro dia.*

[English: I will come unoccupied another day.]

ESTEFANÍA

My God, you look just like your brother!

There is no difference between your faces.

Doctor Barbosa is very handsome.

JERÓNIMA

*Quem? Ele? He muito mimoso.*

[English: Whom? Him? He is very affectionate.]

ESTEFANÍA

Whoever isn't healed by the doctor

becomes more sick. But, is he a lover?

And does he have a lady in this court?

Tell me: who makes his heart catch fire?

JERÓNIMA

*Eu volo direi por certo;*

[English: I will tell you precisely;

*seus mimos tem aqui perto.*

his loves are close by.]

ESTEFANÍA

She's close by?

JERÓNIMA

*En vosa casa.*

[English: In your house.]

ESTEFANÍA

Marta,

if she is in my house, who could it be?

We are both women. You can tell me this.

Do I know this woman?

JERÓNIMA

*Pois nao?*

[English: Well, no?]

ESTEFANÍA

And she's in my house? Is it my cousin Leonor?

JERÓNIMA

*Por ela morre meu hirmaom.*

[English: My brother dies for her.]

ESTEFANÍA

He dies for Leonor? (*Aside*) What a mess!

Well, does she at least love the doctor back?

JERÓNIMA

*He cavaleiro o doutor*

[English: The doctor is a gentleman

*dos Barbosas e Barcelos;*

of Barbosa and Barcelos;

*bem pode.*

he can love her if he wants.]

ESTEFANÍA

I'll undo all of her plans.

JERÓNIMA

*Tende cuidado,*

[English: Be careful;

*porque si ja se ham casado*

if they are already married,

*Deos vos guarde de feito be.*

God will guard them fiercely.]

QUITERIA

*Senora, necesito vamoose now.* [English: Lady, you must leave now.]

ESTEFANÍA

In my house?

JERÓNIMA

*Por vos server*

[English: To serve you,

*falaremos outro dia*

I will talk with you another day

*devagar, porque o doutor*

carefully, because the doctor

*ou tem de ser de Lianor*

will belong to Leonor,

*ou de vosa sinoria.*

or he will belong to you.]

*Jerónima and Quiteria exit.*

ESTEFANÍA

Will he belong to Leonor or me?  
Love and honor, have pity on me.  
Is it easier to die than keep my love?  
Leonor kills me. Is it too much to ask  
that she who gives her wrist to the doctor  
will, in return, receive his hand in marriage?  
If Gaspar is a gentleman and is sensitive to my best  
interests, what could I lose? Would I not, in fact, win?  
My illness persists, yet I want to be healed.  
My father will forgive me, for he's the one  
who brought the fiery plague into this house.  
Love, like fire, burns everything it touches.

*Enter Gonzalo.*

GONZALO

I come to you with news, Estefanía,  
but I don't know if it's good or bad.

ESTEFANÍA

What makes you interested in my business?

GONZALO

I've found myself at the center of your joy and pain.

You've looked at me with love since I arrived;  
you've shown disgust when speaking to Gaspar.  
Since love can't be concealed, I'll share this news:  
the doctor says you've fallen for me.

ESTEFANÍA

Who says this to you?

GONZALO

Doctor Barbosa.

ESTEFANÍA

He said that I love you?

GONZALO

He swears it.

ESTEFANÍA

If this is his diagnosis, he's no doctor,  
and I no longer trust his prescriptions.  
Never praise he who switches positions;  
going between doctor and matchmaker,  
this man makes mistakes when he  
tries to minister to the ill.

GONZALO

Perhaps he didn't understand your eyes,  
but don't you know that pulses cannot lie?  
You can pretend you have no feelings now,  
but the doctor will come and clear this up.

*He exits.*

ESTEFANÍA

This doctor falls in love with my cousin,  
then swears that I love someone else?  
Who's ever seen a man more mad than he?

*Enter Jerónima as Doctor Barbosa*

JERÓNIMA

My duties in the court prevented me  
from visiting with you earlier, my lady,  
but they don't prevent the joy of serving you.  
My new position sanctioned by the Queen,  
which gives me work in the royal bedchamber,  
keeps me so long that I must constantly  
beg my friends to pardon my tardiness,  
unless Marta in my likeness was able to  
substitute my presence. How are you feeling,  
Estefanía? Has your melancholy subsided?  
You look relieved of something now.

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**



Let me feel your pulse.

ESTEFANÍA

I no longer trust  
licensed—or should I say licentious—doctors.  
Their skills corrupt, and where they're admitted,  
they seduce women.

JERÓNIMA

What are you saying?

ESTEFANÍA

What a performance! To cure my illness and steal  
my soul in one move!

JERÓNIMA

Who, me?

ESTEFANÍA

You? You're a saint.  
Do such doctors as you always prescribe  
remedies of marriage?

JERÓNIMA

Has someone said  
I'm a marriage-hustler?

ESTEFANÍA

Gonzalo tells me you prescribe husbands

for all your female patients in Coimbra.

Leonor, I hear, will be healthy, for

now she has a doctor and husband in one.

JERÓNIMA

That malicious low-life has lied to you!

ESTEFANÍA

That's enough, doctor.

JERÓNIMA

Motherless bastard.

ESTEFANÍA

That could be true...but stop, or you'll

embarrass yourself.

JERÓNIMA

You're jealous of

my duties at court. I lecture novices in the ways

of medicine, I care for the pulses of royalty,

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

but you're threatening to destroy their health.

ESTEFANÍA

With Leonor you'll be much healthier.

But you're no longer allowed in my house,

or even to treat my neighbors' illnesses.

My father will find out everything.

Let's see if he lets you continue

healing women with these false words.

JERÓNIMA

Look, just listen...

ESTEFANÍA

Leave me alone, Doctor.

Women must stand by one another.

I can only trust your sister now.

JERÓNIMA

Please wait.

ESTEFANÍA

Why won't you leave? Must I scream? Why do you stall?

JERÓNIMA

Because you will not listen to me.

After all my sister said, you really trust her?

ESTEFANÍA

Why shouldn't I? Women don't lie like men.

Now get out.

JERÓNIMA

Relax, relax.

ESTEFANÍA

Why relax?

*(Yelling)* Gaspar! Father! Everyone! Help!

JERÓNIMA

Relax, I say, because I am Marta.

ESTEFANÍA

Who?

JERÓNIMA

And a doctor.

ESTEFANÍA

Oh, great. This is lovely.

You lie to me as if I cannot see?

JERÓNIMA

Look at me and tell me if I lie.

ESTEFANÍA

How did you learn to speak several languages?

JERÓNIMA

My brother taught me.

ESTEFANÍA

Who can confirm this?

JERÓNIMA

I performed as my brother to make you

jealous. I lied to you about Leonor;

my brother has never seen this woman.

I wish I could warn him of this mess now,

but I need to get home immediately.

ESTEFANÍA

This is good news. But tell me: how were you

able to become a man so quickly?

JERÓNIMA

With a friend and an outfit from my brother.

ESTEFANÍA

I need more proof.

JERÓNIMA

Did I not say *o doutor*  
*tina aqui perto seus mimos?*

[English: ...the doctor  
keeps his lovers close by?]

ESTEFANÍA

That is true...

JERÓNIMA

And *por derradeiro sino*  
*nao vos dise que a meu hirmao*  
*tina de chamar marido*  
*Estefanía o Lianor?*

[English: ...did I not finally tell you  
that my brother would call either  
you or Leonor his wife?]

ESTEFANÍA

Then it's true. So he doesn't love my cousin?

JERÓNIMA

It was all a trick. He only loves you  
and is jealous of your lover, don Gaspar.

ESTEFANÍA

Assure him that I do not love Gaspar;  
my love is only for your brother.

JERÓNIMA

I kiss your hands for my brother.

*Jerónima kisses Estefanía's hands.*

ESTEFANÍA

But why did your brother tell Gonzalo  
I loved him?

JERÓNIMA

I don't know.

ESTEFANÍA

Gonzalo

came here trying to convince me that I love him.

JERÓNIMA

It could be because my brother is furious about  
your upcoming marriage to Gaspar. I hear many  
in Coimbra are jealous of your union with him.

ESTEFANÍA

Your brother heard about the dispensation?

JERÓNIMA

If he knew how lucky he was,  
he would be full of joy.

ESTEFANÍA

Then remind him that he will be mine.  
I am constant in my love for him.

JERÓNIMA

Words are not enough; how can you prove this?

ESTEFANÍA

What do you mean?

JERÓNIMA

Will you risk danger  
and offer him your hands in marriage?

ESTEFANÍA

First I need to know if he is noble.

JERÓNIMA

I can attest to that.



ESTEFANÍA

Of course you would;  
the outcome of this matters much to you.

JERÓNIMA

That's fine. Go search for your witness then,  
but know that Leonor will steal your place.

ESTEFANÍA

How?

JERÓNIMA

Yesterday she spoke of marriage,  
and now, if I guess correctly, they are  
talking to make sure they won't be stopped.

ESTEFANÍA

You cunning witch, not telling me he  
loves Leonor, that he sees her daily?

JERÓNIMA

I only meant to calm your worrying.

ESTEFANÍA

Is such a deception even possible?

A woman with so many concoctions?

A man with so many betrayals?

In love with Leonor? Oh, my jealousy!

You really must leave now, or I will go  
persecute them both!

JERÓNIMA

I stay, my lady.

ESTEFANÍA

You won't go?

*(Loudly)* Then I'll have you removed!

JERÓNIMA

I stay

because I am the doctor. Stop yelling!

ESTEFANÍA

Who are you?

JERÓNIMA

Doctor Barbosa.

ESTEFANÍA

What a mess.

JERÓNIMA

I've given you a great scare.

ESTEFANÍA

A man

absorbed into a woman's body now?

Tell me which you are.

JERÓNIMA

I am your doctor,

the one who visited you twice today;

the first time under my sister's name,

and then a second time under my own.

I first came dressed as a woman, and then

a second time in man's clothing.

You must not judge me by my clothes.

ESTEFANÍA

So Marta was not with me earlier?

JERÓNIMA

She was not. Her threads stood in place of mine.

It was my young age and my scanty beard,  
the fire of my love in which I melt,  
the dispensation and jealous feelings,  
that transformed me into a woman.  
(*Taking her hand*) Give me your hand, and let us be married.

ESTEFANÍA

It is yours.

JERÓNIMA

Then we are to be married?

ESTEFANÍA

Yes. No. I don't know.

JERÓNIMA

I insist on hearing this from you.

Do you take me to be your husband?

ESTEFANÍA

I do.

JERÓNIMA

Yes?

*She kisses Estefanía.*

*Enter Gaspar and Gonzalo.*

GASPAR

Peace. We will not fight over this.

The doctor has spoken the truth to me:

he is Estefanía's lover now.

JERÓNIMA

Well, Gaspar, Gonzalo. What is this?

GONZALO

A competition.

GASPAR

I will not fight you.

Estefanía will not be my wife.

Though I have served her, she does not love me.

ESTEFANÍA

It is true.

GASPAR

I am to marry Marta.

JERÓNIMA

I accept you as her husband, Gaspar,  
but the wedding must take place today.

GASPAR

Nothing would please me more. Call for her now.

JERÓNIMA

Listen. (*Takes him aside.*) Will you marry me?

GASPAR

Are you insane?!

JERÓNIMA

Don't judge me by my clothes. I am Marta.

GASPAR

What?

JERÓNIMA

I'm only disguised to help my brother.  
My brother, the doctor.

GASPAR

How did you do this?

JERÓNIMA

It required me to devise many plots.

I'll tell you later. You know from my letter  
what I want from you.

GASPAR

Are you mocking me?

JERÓNIMA

You cannot see beyond my clothing?

Or just because I don't speak Portuguese?

<i>Pois catai os ollos minos,</i>	[English: Well, look at my eyes,
<i>que onte vistes hum a hum,</i>	the same ones you started into yesterday,
<i>a boca, os dentes e o riso.</i>	and my mouth, teeth, and smile.]

I alternate disguises as skillfully as  
my polyglot tongue alternates languages:  
Spanish, Portuguese, Latin, English, French.

GASPAR

Give me your hand.

*Jerónima gives Gaspar her hand.*

JERÓNIMA

*Esta foi a que perdido*

[English: This is the hand that lost itself

*vos teve a bolta primeira.*

when it first met you.]

GASPAR

It's true.

JERÓNIMA

Don Gonzalo, bear witness to

Gaspar as he becomes Marta's husband.

GONZALO

I will.

ESTEFANÍA

If I may bear witness to your marriage,

I will consider myself prosperous.

JERÓNIMA

Then all is set. Now Gonzalo, I beg you

give your hand to this lady.

ESTEFANÍA

To me?



JERÓNIMA

*(To Estefanía)* Play along.

ESTEFANÍA

You're no longer my husband?

JERÓNIMA

Your marriage is secure; I promise  
you will take my family name.

*Estefanía and Gonzalo hold hands.*

*Enter Quiteria, Ignacio, and Tello.*

JERÓNIMA

Martíña!

QUITERIA

Martíña and Marta are over.

I come bearing news I must deliver:

your father has died of the plague.

His friends and your family wait in Seville.

JERÓNIMA

Lovers, please excuse me at this time.

I've loved Gaspar since he was our house guest  
in Seville. It was he that turned me into a doctor,  
and I can finally call him my husband.

GONZALO

Jerónima! What false medicine you've  
performed on so many hearts in Portugal. Come,  
we're going home to Spain. You're returning to  
the Convent of Santa Clara, and you will  
renounce all your books and medical instruments.

IGNACIO

Wait, you're a woman?

JERÓNIMA

I am, and have been  
a woman while practicing medicine.

IGNACIO

What deception! Someone call for the constable.

JERÓNIMA

I beg you, Señor, take pity on me. I came  
to Portugal for love, but found true happiness  
in healing your daughter of her sickness.

Look into Estefanía's face; do you not find there

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

the image of perfect health?

IGNACIO

Healed or not, your doubling is too severe to be pardoned.

Apprehend this woman for her deception.

*The Queen of Portugal appears again in male attire.*

QUEEN

Hold, gentles. This doctor is not to be  
imprisoned, for he has opened the doors  
of love and ministered to the ailing heart  
of Manuel, the King of Portugal.

IGNACIO

But he's a woman, Your Highness.

QUEEN

It is through women that the most valuable  
knowledge has come to mankind.

Doña Jerónima, for your most excellent  
medical service in the King's Chamber,  
and in the spirit of *La Latina*,  
I pardon these perilous practices you've  
performed while serving in Portugal.

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

Your medical license and endowed chair at the University,  
however, you must now bequeath to a man  
and henceforth study only in the solitude  
of your home in Spain. (*Aside to Jerónima*) But you should know,  
my child, of all the knowledge I've attained  
in studying, I am most certain of the authority  
a woman may have in her place of birth.<sup>47</sup>

JERÓNIMA

Your Highness, I am eternally thankful for your  
pardon. I will happily continue to practice this  
passion, if even in the privacy of my  
home in Spain, with my brother's blessing.

GONZALO

God's blessing on all your passions, Jerónima.

QUEEN

Your words are passion. But, pray you,  
stir up no more embers up, or the hand of Portugal  
must cool them in the name of honor.

*The Queen exits.*

---

<sup>47</sup> After her older sister died, Maria of Aragon, at the age of 18, was taken from her home in Spain and married off to her sister's former husband King Manuel I of Portugal to reaffirm dynastical links with the future Spain.

ESTEFANÍA

So you don't have a sister?

JERÓNIMA

Love transformed

both Marta and the Doctor into one.

ESTEFANÍA

Is there a worse betrayal than this?

JERÓNIMA

Don Gaspar is my husband, for through my  
skillful acts I've surely earned his love.

GASPAR

I consider myself lucky in this.

GONZALO

Then let us put Gonzalo in your place.

IGNACIO

You will be my heir with my daughter's word.

ESTEFANÍA

I follow your wishes.

TELLO

And Martiña?

QUITERIA

Quiteria.

TELLO

Quiteria, so that

we're not burdened with marriages today,

I will take you as my wife on Sunday.

IGNACIO

God help me, I'm amazed by all this!

JERÓNIMA

It was love that turned me into a doctor,

and the doctor that cured the lovesick here,

for to be healed of this ailment that plagues the heart,

one must learn to *love the doctor*.

*Alternate (shorter) version of Gaspar's speech on page 8.*

GASPAR

I served in royal Toledo  
the most beautiful angel: Micaela.  
For six months time my luck was good.  
But in love, as in stormy waters,  
change can become the pilot;  
just when I thought I'd disembark  
upon the sheltered shore of marriage,  
a jealous eastern wind blew  
and returned me to the open sea  
where my misfortunes drowned me.  
Micaela's mother and brother,  
without even consulting her,  
promised her to a wealthy man, don Jaime,  
though he called off their engagement  
when some rogues wrote don Jaime an  
anonymous letter declaring I had  
already deflowered his lady in bed.  
I found these villains and challenged them  
to sign with steel what they hadn't signed with ink.  
Then, taking out my sword, I quickly  
killed one man and wounded the others.  
Forced out of Toledo by Ferdinand,

I now seek shelter in you, my friend.

Don Jaime has also recently ordered  
a group of men to arrest me,

so I must flee to the East Indies,  
though my first stop is the old

university town of Coimbra in Portugal,  
where the royal court will grant me  
favours and dispatch me to India.

Traveling by ship, endless folds of hungry sea

will drown my memories of love's

tragedies and restore my fame in battle.

**Tirso de Molina** (1580?-1648) was one of the greatest playwrights of Spain's "Golden Age." Though biographical information is scarce, we do know that his real name was Gabriel Téllez, that his background was humble (his father was a servant in a noble household), and that by 1600, he had become a Mercedarian friar. It is presumed that Tirso chose a pen name in an attempt to separate his religious and theatrical lives. But the friar's love for the theater led him to choose a pen name with theatrical overtones: Tirso—or thyrsus—is the name for the staff of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, revelry, and theater. Between 1606 and 1615, Tirso lived in Toledo—the cultural center of Spain—and began writing, allying himself with Lope de Vega and the three-act *comedia nueva*, the new freewheeling form of popular theater that was sweeping the Spanish stage at the time. Through his writing, Tirso pointedly poked fun at the ruling classes and explored bawdy subject matter, which eventually got him on the wrong side of the second most powerful man in Spain, the Count-Duke Olivares. At the pinnacle of his writing career, Tirso was censured several times by the church for the obscenities in his plays. Most notably, on March 6th, 1625, he was forbidden by Felipe IV's watchdog group, the Council on Reform, from writing "plays that foster profane incitements and examples," and was sentenced to excommunication and exile to a remote monastery (though it seems Tirso had good enough connections to avoid both). Over the course of his career, Tirso somehow wrote more than 300 plays, all while having official administrative posts and duties for his religious order. Less than 90 survive today, and only a handful have been translated into English.

**Sarah Brew** is pursuing her M.F.A. in dramaturgy in the Department of Theater at the University of Massachusetts, where she has pursued an interest in the translation of Spanish Golden Age drama. She earned her B.A. in English at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 2008, though she spent most of her time cloistering herself away in the theater department. Though her first theatrical love is Shakespeare and other bawdy drama of the English Renaissance, Sarah has found the plays of



the Spanish Golden Age to be unparalleled in their wit and subversiveness. *Love the Doctor* is her first full-length translation/adaptation of a *comedia*. Sarah's other interests include new play dramaturgy and digiturgy. She has most recently assisted and worked on dramaturgical projects at Soho Rep and Hartford Stage.

**Josephine Hardman** was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina but got her B.A. in English from Florida Atlantic University in Palm Beach, FL. She relocated to Massachusetts to attend UMass Amherst, where she completed her Master's degree in English in 2011. Josephine studies interconnections between English Renaissance and Spanish Golden Age dramas, paying special attention to the historical, cultural, and political context of Anglo-Spanish relations in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. More recently, she has turned to the study of translation history – specifically, the role of translated Spanish texts in the English literary system both before and after the Civil War of 1642-49.

*A Man Walks into a World* by Martin Heckmanns, translation by Henning Bochert

Martin Heckmanns's play *A Man Walks into a World* (*Kommt ein Mann zur Welt*) plays on the playwright's core theme of identity. "Who am I?" is a question Heckmanns never finds himself able to answer, as it always tends to open an even deeper abyss instead of a congruent answer. In *A Man Walks into a World* (2007), he presents the audience with the curriculum vitae of an emblematic character, who struggles to make decisions and exercise his free-will against the constraints of heritage and genealogy. Heckmanns manages to make this broad philosophical theme theatrically worthy by creating a linguistically witty play with action-oriented scenes. The main character Bruno Stamm is endowed with the common conviction that he is more special than the rest of mankind. During the course of the play, we witness him stumble into all the standard pitfalls of life that disappoint these convictions. Heckmanns's choice of names reflects the thematic orientation, too. They are almost exclusively functional and non-individual (father, mother, young socialist, judge, police etc.). The few real names are extremely ordinary German first names (Suse, Ulf, Tina). The only (fictional) one being privileged with a last name is Bruno himself. And consequently, this last name represents the very function of any last name, linking the individual to a larger entity like a family, clan. Bruno's last name is "Stamm", which, in German, means both a) tribe and b) (tree) trunk. Heckmanns thus underlines his main character's meaning as a specimen rather than an individual. Around this word, a cluster of meanings unfolds (here shown with their respective translations as further "branches"), all underlining the theme.

*(tree) trunk*

|

Baumstamm

*tribe*

|

|

*origin* – Abstammung/Ursprung – STAMM – Volksstamm – Stammhalter – *son and heir*

|

Stammbaum

|

*family tree*

The second meaning of the word “Stamm” (“trunk”) is further varied by Heckmanns’s play on the German compound noun “Stammbaum” (“family tree”) and reversing it to Baumstamm (“tree trunk”). By naming his character Bruno Stamm, Heckmanns thus clearly refers to a genealogical meaning. Bruno Stamm is one in a (blood-) line of heritage (of a tribe). The first two characters to appear after his parents are his aunt and uncle. “Stamm” (as trunk) at the same time evokes the notion of something solid, that can be a trustworthy fundament for something else. Even the associative meaning of “Stammhalter” (son and heir) is played out in the recurring scene of “becoming a father” at Bruno’s own birth as well as at his son’s birth, both of which are interpreted by the protagonist as being forced into a responsibility that infringes on the individual’s freedom.

With Heckmanns, a linguistically very acute playwright, this term/concept is then converted into

theatrical action: first, a father rejecting the idea of being one; in another early scene, Bruno falls out of a tree as a child (out of lineage, a chain again more restraining than supporting Bruno's notion of free will); and in a later scene, he cuts down trees as a performance art piece, yet later claiming a philosophical identity issue when brought to court.

A few words about the challenges and pitfalls of Heckmanns's language: except for the very first monologue, the play's dialogue is seemingly banal. While this first part and its constructed and complex language reminds the reader of his early play/s (e. g. "Kränk"), the remaining scenes are mostly short, their language trivial. But: in steering the spectator/reader into these shallow waters, one might overlook sentences like "life doesn't live", which, upon closer look, turns out to be a quotation from the German philosopher T. W. Adorno. While almost all of his plays are based on fundamental philosophical problems from the area of ontology or cognitive science, the playwright doesn't fail to reveal (with dry irony) the commonplace wisdom, with which philosophers often present us. So the translator needs to be careful: Heckmanns is not always so explicit with quotations as he is with the Italian philosopher in this play, who appears as a character out of the blue. Together with the use of allegories like Time, which appears as a character, too, and the above-mentioned flat jokes (New York scene: "dark alleys-dark folks"), which he seems to have a weakness for, Heckmanns does not shy away from stylistic means unusual and even frowned-upon by his German playwriting colleagues.

These images evoke their thematic relevance through association. When translating this play, one encounters the special challenge of preserving all branches and layers carrying these associative

meanings. This is, of course, a standard issue in translating particularly literary texts, as they often employ multiple meanings in one term to bring their point across in an intelligent and poetically worthy manner. In this instance, one finds a perfect example for the translator's dilemma, as there doesn't seem to be a satisfying solution. Almost all of the compound meanings as conceived by Heckmanns' terminological concept would be sacrificed in translation. One rule in translating, of course, is to leave sur- and brandnames untranslated. In this case, where the theme of the play is inscribed into the main character's name with unusual consequence, one might be tempted to breach this rule. It is necessary, however, to carefully consider all the consequences of doing so. In translating the term, one creates new references in English. All literal translations (trunk, tree, tribe, or even origin) never really open into this web of associations, which unfolds in the German context, among them the almost clumsy groaner in the scene entitled Studies, in which Bruno applies at an arts university.

PROFESSOR

That's all well and good, Mr. Baum, what you're doing here, pretty wild as well, of course, nice, almost pornographic at times.

BRUNO

Stamm.

PROFESSOR

Beg your pardon?

BRUNO

Stamm is my name. Bruno Benjamin Rafael Stamm.

The German audience will immediately hear this as the compound nouns "Baumstamm" or

“Stammbaum”, which are the same image (a tree, as either a plant or a family tree). This equally dense and playful association will work with no translation in English (Bruno Trunk, Bruno Tree, Bruno Tribe ...). On the other hand, if we don’t translate the name, the very sense of the small portion of that scene is obliterated, and some if it would convey no meaning.

In general, it seemed a literarily safer solution to leave the main character’s last name untranslated and trust on other theatrical imagery in production to convey these layered and associative meanings rather than to translate it with one of those terms, thus excluding all other interpretative options.

-- Henning Bochert

## **A Man Walks into a World**

by Martin Heckmanns

Translated from German by Henning Bochert

### **Copyright note**

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved. Application for performance etc. must be made before rehearsals begin to:

Antje Oegel International  
1963 W. Foster Ave. #2  
Chicago, IL 60640  
USA  
+1 (773) 910 5691  
[aoegel@aoegelinternational.com](mailto:aoegel@aoegelinternational.com)

No performance may be given unless a license has been obtained.

This translation was sponsored by the Goethe Institute.



## **Voices**

A lot of it had already been around for a long time.

Most of it, actually.

Before he was born, there had been cars.

Video had been invented.

There was TV, fire, recreational sports, English, and the alphabet.

The globe had been circled, the animals named.

For the time being, nothing new was expected.

*Silence. Nothing new.*

He arrived on a Tuesday

Quite painfully

According to his mother.

He heard her cry out in welcome.

That concerned him. There was no way back.

He imitated her

And cried and screamed and in a blur, he saw:

The world.

And was silent with fear.

*Heartbeats.*



For every human being, the birth experience is the primal pain.

The rest of life is usually an ineffective attempt to deal with it.

*Heartbeats.*

They named him Bruno

After his mother's father

Benjamin

So small was the child

Rafael

A pseudonym

Stamm

That they couldn't change.

Bruno Benjamin Rafael Stamm.

Good gracious!

Gonna be someone special, that one

You could tell right away.

He had expectations to fulfill

Considering he hadn't even been wanted in the beginning.

FATHER

You're what?

MOTHER

You heard me right.

FATHER

But how can that be?

MOTHER

It happens when two people love each other.

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

FATHER

But didn't we always, didn't you say...

MOTHER

Aren't you happy at all?

FATHER

I'm an artist.

MOTHER

Now you'll be a father.

FATHER

I can't be, I still need to, I'm still not, not there yet, where I wanted to be. I still have to mix a few things up, interrogate, despair. Excess and solitude. That's part of my job. How am I supposed to raise a child?

MOTHER

He'll do everything better.

FATHER

He? How do you know how he is going to do things?

MOTHER

We messed things up. Look around you.

FATHER

Is there any progress in history?

BRUNO

*I pronounces itself*

*into the open space*

*Expresses itself*

*full of expectation and almost for no reason*

*I repeats itself*

To be more certain  
That it is really there  
In its own exclamation  
*I* remembering  
To be said a billion times  
By people who became murderers  
Who kept an *I* to their own credit  
One spelled no differently than this one:  
*I* recreating/redesigning itself  
With a firm voice  
Projected into empty space  
A sound like a sigh  
A fleeting sound  
Hoping for approval  
So that it might be filled out  
In the next *I*  
finally might be more certain  
Whether it is the right thing  
*I* puts itself on the line  
With an assertion,  
And so *I* reminds itself  
To be the same  
Obliging itself to the sound  
And forbidding itself  
To call itself anything but  
*I* tries once more to

Resurrect itself

Talking itself into

Calling itself *I*

Making an effort to assert itself

Against time

And against disappearing

Positioning itself

As the moments pass

*I* wants to invent itself

Wants to know grow sprawl

Wants to embrace the world

To go down in history as

*I* that always believed in itself.

*Breather.*

*I* had been invented a long time ago

When I articulated myself first.

FATHER

A remarkable child.

BRUNO

As soon as you say I, you double yourself?

FATHER

Slightly precocious maybe.

BRUNO

Personally, the first three years were the most important for me. That period defined me, especially my character. Everything that came later was merely embellishment. During the first three years, I was alone a lot in our wooden house at the lake. Ever since then, loneliness smells like brackish water. There was a swamp nearby. Another symbol, maybe. Often, I would just listen to the birds

for days. My love for song has its roots there. Perhaps my desire for flights of fancy, too. Those were important years. I would have become someone else without them. And how could I possibly imagine that?

I liked being out in nature. I used to climb trees a lot. *Climbs a tree.*

Later on, I preferred the city. And was afraid of trees. Something must have happened back then. But I can't remember. *Falls out of the tree, lies there unconscious.*

MOTHER

Bruno, Bruno, wake up. What is it, wake up, my boy. What are you climbing up there for? That's too high for you. Bruno!

FATHER

Why don't you watch out better? Where have you been anyway? How can you leave the kid alone?

MOTHER

Stop telling me how to raise my child. You didn't want him in the first place.

FATHER

Now he's here. Now we shouldn't let him fall out of trees. Now we shouldn't even let him climb trees. He's six years old.

BRUNO *awakening.*

Knowing the risk makes happiness sweet.

FATHER

This boy will be writing hits one day.

MOTHER

My boy, you're alive.

BRUNO

Yes, mom. Why are you telling me that?

MOTHER

You're alive. That doesn't go without saying.

BRUNO

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

But I don't know any different. I've been alive ever since I can think.

FATHER

As I said, he'll be writing hits.

MOTHER

He'll be allowed to do anything he wants. He can be whatever he wants.

BRUNO

I can do anything I want to. Anything I want.

FATHER

And what do you want?

BRUNO

I don't know yet. But I can do anything anything anything I want.

FATHER

But you have to make a decision.

BRUNO

Why do I have to make a decision?

FATHER

Not making a decision is a decision too.

BRUNO

Nonono, I haven't decided yet. It's all still open.

FATHER

Those who fail to make a decision remain undecided. They have no direction. And lose their strength.

BRUNO

I won't say another word now. Right, I'm going to stop talking now?

MOTHER

See, that's what you get. Now he won't speak.

## Times of Questions

UNCLE

Dear Bruno! For your twelfth birthday, your Aunt Catherine and your Uncle Edgar have brought you something very special. A karaoke machine.

You can sing other people's songs. With your own voice.

*Bruno keeps silent.*

AUNT

You like singing so much.

UNCLE

Now go ahead.

*Bruno keeps silent.*

UNCLE

What's the matter with you?

AUNT

You're not a baby anymore.

UNCLE

Now don't be like that.

AUNT

Relax for once.

UNCLE

Girls like that.

AUNT

What do you want to be?

UNCLE

A silent monk?

AUNT

You need a haircut.

UNCLE

You leave him alone now.

AUNT

But what's the matter with the boy?

MOTHER

His father didn't want him. *All eyes on the father.*

FATHER

I was surprised. For a moment. Helpless. I couldn't imagine what it meant to have a child. I'm still not sure. But that surely can't be the reason for all the things that have gone wrong with the boy. He just doesn't like singing other people's songs. He likes singing his own lyrics. He likes being silent now and then. That's the way he is.

UNCLE

Listen, Bruno, if you ever have any questions, if you don't know what to do next, if Papa isn't there and Mama can't help, you just come to uncle Edgar, okay? Promise? You'll ask me, when you have a question? Man to man? Promise?

BRUNO

Is it normal that white slime comes oozing out down there when I shake my penis a little?

UNCLE

Uhm. Yes, Bruno, that is normal for a man. You'll get used to it. You'll hardly notice later. That's normal. Enjoy it. Enjoy the newness of it. You'll want it back later. When you're older and wiser, you'll wish you could repeat the first time later. But the first time is ...

BRUNO

... over. I will never be going to have enjoyed my first ejaculation. I'll never be going to have spent my childhood abroad. I will never have grown up during my first years without contact to



civilization and be admired for my powers of assimilation and be interviewed by every young lady about the impressions those strange years in the jungle made on me. That is ... over. But there is something special about me. Different somehow.

*Rips his pants, dyes his hair, pierces his face with metal.*

AUNT

I think it's funny how the boy gets all worked up.

UNCLE

But we've seen it all before.

AUNT

I'm sure it all feels very urgent from inside.

MOTHER

Even though others may have had those problems before.

FATHER

It won't help Bruno be comfortable in his skin.

BRUNO

This whole growing thing, this growingness, this ongoingness all over me. Is it still an illness or is it already me?

UNCLE

It was the time of questions. Not even Uncle Edgar could answer them all.

BRUNO

Where does this spot come from?

Where do the others go in the night?

Where am I when I'm asleep? Where am I when I'm thinking?

What's in my hands?

Who is the moon good for? Does suffering make any sense?

Is music more important than science? Is the future more important than complete intoxication? Is

a life in the arts worth it?

What does my enemy hate in me?

How strange is a stranger? How could I know all this? And how do I look anyway? How do I look?

BUDDY

Hey, great, Bruno, hey, you look great. And now, first you're gonna have a smoke. And then you're gonna have a drink. And now you're gonna come to the Underground with me. Cause that's where they are, the experts for all your questions. They know the answer to everything.

### **Other circles**

YOUNG DRUG CONSUMER

For real, Bruno, it's really true. After all of mankind has taken LSD, there won't be any more wars. It's true. They'll be over then. We need to fight for it. Are you with us? Are you on the side of the friends of peace?

BRUNO

Sure, absolutely. Could I maybe get back to you later, friend?

YOUNG SOCIALIST

I'm a socialist and still adhere to the socialist idea that the quality of any society should be measured by whether its weakest members are able to lead a successful life.

BRUNO

I agree with that. A successful life for everybody.

YOUNG SOCIOLOGIST

They want to frighten us, my dear Bruno. Retirement arrangements, climate change, health insurances. They only say those things so we won't feel free. So we are afraid to make a mistake. So we only care about our own insurance instead of attacking, bold and raw. They want to avoid that, my dear Bruno, that's how you have to look at it, they hold us down with fear.

BRUNO

Maybe, yes.

YOUNG SOCIOLOGIST

Life doesn't live. We can't trust anyone. Not even ourselves. Life doesn't live.

VOICES

Bruno was new to the world.

His parents' wisdom repelled him.

Slowly, he repeated sentences.

BRUNO

Life doesn't live?

YOUNG SOCIOLOGIST

Exactly, Bruno.

BRUNO *louder:*

Life doesn't live.

YOUNG SOCIOLOGIST

It's the truth.

BRUNO *louder:*

Life doesn't fucking live?

VOICES

And beautiful Tina was thrilled.

TINA

Is that really true, Bruno? Life doesn't live?

BRUNO

Yes, Tina, it's true. And we are remote controlled.

TINA

I always thought we might be. But if we are remote controlled, who lets you know that we are remote controlled?

BRUNO

I've got a sensor for that type of thing.

TINA

Where's your sensor?

BRUNO

If we don't defend ourselves, we are lost.

TINA

Wow, Bruno, my thoughts exactly. But Bruno, how should we defend ourselves?

BRUNO

Kiss me.

TINA

Well, Bruno, you're kinda sweet when you talk. I like it when you sound like we're in some big fight. But kissing, that wouldn't be logical. I think you're sweet when you talk. So I'd better kiss Ulf. He looks so sweet when he's silent. You're sweet when you talk. Why don't you go on talking some more.

BRUNO

Will you kiss me then?

TINA

That wouldn't be logical. I like you talking. Your voice is so nice and warm. I'm going to find Ulf now.

BRUNO *sings:*

I don't want to go on living

The light of day it pains to see

Because she gave a kiss to him

But not to me. But not to me. But not to me.

BUDDY

Great song, Bruno.

BRUNO

Just came to me. Cause I was so hurt. Cause Tina kissed Ulf.

BUDDY

You should let yourself get hurt more often, if it leads to songs like that. That'll help with that career of yours.

BRUNO

Maybe I should let myself get hurt more often, yes.

BUDDY

By the way, Tina kissed Andreas as well. Actually, she kissed pretty much everyone here. Tina seems to find you physically repulsive.

BRUNO

What can I do about that?

BUDDY

I heard that it's all because of the glands.

BRUNO

Huh.

BUDDY

Yeah. It's all the glands' fault.

BRUNO

A hundred bottles of beer on the wall, a hundred bottles of beer

You take one down, pass it around, ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall ... *Drinks.*

BUDDY

That wasn't such an original song now. *Drinks.*

BRUNO

To the glands. *Drinks.*

BUDDY

To women. *Drinks.*

BRUNO

To the future. *Drinks.*

### **Intoxication**

BUDDY

Oh man. I'm wasted.

BRUNO

Completely.

BUDDY

You said it.

BRUNO

Ain't that right.

BUDDY

Right on.

BRUNO

Who's responsible here?

BUDDY

Is that still me who's talking?

BRUNO

I can see us from above, though I'm still sitting here.

BUDDY

And what do you see?

BRUNO

Two drunken bums on a park bench in the shopping zone of a dead silent city.

BUDDY

Saturday night, twelve thirty a.m., and not a single person on the streets.

BRUNO

This town is hell.

BUDDY

A graveyard.

BRUNO

You can say that again.

BUDDY

Graveyard.

BRUNO

So how, I ask you, my friend, how should one live?

BUDDY

I watched a movie about Jimi Hendrix last night. He did the right thing.

BRUNO

He died at 27.

GIORGIO COLLI

Hello, my name is Giorgio Colli. I'm a professor of philosophy and have dealt with the human question all my life.

Man's domination over himself is the destruction of himself, in whose name it is happening. Because the dominated, oppressed substance, disintegrated through self-preservation, is nothing but the life force that was meant to be preserved in the first place.

BRUNO

Where did he come from?

BUDDY

Life of a thinker. That's what I want to have someday. But before then, I'll drink another schnapps.

BRUNO

And off he goes again, the thinker.

BUDDY

And we're still sitting here.

BRUNO

You miss so much, when you only live your own life.

BUDDY

In this graveyard town.

BRUNO

Not a soul in the streets.

BUDDY

Intoxication don't help much here.

BRUNO

In this shopping zone, empty of people.

BUDDY

We gotta get outta here.

BRUNO

Off to New York City.

### **New York**

BRUNO

Lookit, lookit, lookit: there's 138th street.

BUDDY

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**



Hey, and look over here, 139th street. Looks just like on TV.

BRUNO

Just like on TV.

BUDDY

Here's where they shot Hip Hop in the Hood.

BRUNO

Isn't this also where Black Panther IV is set?

BUDDY

Getting pretty dark already.

BRUNO

There's people coming.

BUDDY

Also pretty dark, those people coming this way.

BRUNO

I don't think we should keep going down this street.

BUDDY

I think we better turn back very fast.

BRUNO

We better go very very fast, ahhh!

BUDDY

Run, Bruno. Run.

## **Travels**

### VOICES

The USA was large.

London was expensive, Delhi chaotic.

Rio full of life.

Back home, Bruno realized:

Even people who did nothing but watch TV knew his stories.

His reports about the world impressed no one.

So he went traveling once again.

Climbed high mountains

Dived in deep waters

Crossed the Sahara

And returned and was able to talk about his experiences.

Proofs of experience, records of intensity, high-performance tourism.

Bruno missed his earlier naiveté, his curiosity, his belief in secrets undiscovered.

He now felt

That tired him out

Experienced.

## **Landing**

### FROM OFFSTAGE

Captain Rainer Deutermann and his crew would like to bid you farewell. We hope you had a

pleasant flight and that your remaining time in Düsseldorf is pleasant.

BRUNO

Remaining time? What does that mean, remaining time? Is anything wrong? Do I have to leave? We haven't landed yet, have we? Hello? Can anybody still hear me?

SUZY

Calm down. Everything is fine.

BRUNO

Are you sure? Is that true?

SUZY

Yes, it's true.

BRUNO

How? How can that be true?

SUZY

I'm telling you.

BRUNO

What? Who are you anyway?

SUZY

Hi. I'm Suzy.

BRUNO

Hello, Suzy.

SUZY

Hello. And who are you?

VOICES

Bruno wasn't quite himself.

He could have simply said his name.

But his name didn't seem appropriate to the significance of the situation.

He seemed bewitched.

His time was running out.

BRUNO

You mean me?

VOICES

Did his parents belong in the first sentence?

Or his confession?

What was the point of the question? Who he was?

BRUNO

You mean who am *I*?

SUZY

If you ask that one more time I'm afraid I'll have to go. So, what is your name?

VOICES

Say Bruno.

Bruno.

Bruno!

BRUNO

Bruno!

SUZY

What are you shouting like that for?

BRUNO

In case you don't understand me.

SUZY

It's fine. I did, thanks. As much as is possible.

VOICES

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

**260**

When meeting strangers, everybody has to assume that the other person has at least as many voices in their head as oneself. So in the case of Bruno, there are at least four voices in Suzy's head talking to at least four voices in Bruno's own head. So what looked like a harmless conversation between two young people was in truth a colloquium of at least eight strangers' voices.

BRUNO

Do you always have these foreigners in your head, too?

SUZY

What foreigners?

BRUNO

Well, these strange voices.

SUZY

No, not really.

VOICES

Bruno tried to explain himself to Suzy.

He told her about the voices he sometimes heard.

BRUNO

Sometimes I hear voices.

VOICES

That told him his life in the past tense, as if its course were predestined. As if he were a mere plaything.

BRUNO

Plaything.

VOICES

Example.

BRUNO

Example.

VOICES

For an ordinary life through and through.

As if he were repeating someone's instructions.

BRUNO

Someone's instructions. You know, I'm never sure whether it's me who's making a decision. How much of this sentence is my own.

VOICES

As if he were nothing special. His own supernumerary. He heard voices, which made him smaller and subject to their will. And they distanced him from his experiences. By claiming that everything could just as easily be different.

SUZY

But that's true. Everything could just as easily be different.

BRUNO

Right, but I mustn't think about it all the time. Then I'll never be all there. And nothing is certain. Those voices mess up every normal sentence.

VOICES

That sentence could have been more elegant.

BRUNO

I don't know what to say anymore. I wouldn't have needed to mention that either. What do I know that you don't know? What could I possibly communicate to you? I didn't mean that. I was going to tell you about something very special. Now I'm just talking ordinary stuff again.

SUZY

No, no, please go on. I like listening to your voice. Your voice is warm.

BRUNO

But I can't help that.

SUZY

And you're funny.

BRUNO

But not only that.

SUZY

Not only that, no. You're a little intense, too.

*Pause.*

BRUNO

If our conversation were not burdened by the current political situation

If I were sure how to behave towards you

If I didn't sometimes know that it would take a deeper disappointment to find a clear thought

If nature hadn't always offered consolation

I'd say to you: hey, look, the first cherry blossoms.

That's what I'd say.

SUZY

It might have moved me

Had you given me a glimpse at something starting to blossom outside of us

Even though every fresh new blossom

Might make my condition seem more inevitable by contrast

Than it perhaps actually is

BRUNO

At least, we are standing face to face

SUZY

At least, we are standing face to face

BRUNO

Most likely.

SUZY

I'm trying.

BRUNO

It's nice being with you.

SUZY

Yes.

BRUNO

What?

SUZY

It's nice being with me.

BRUNO

And funny.

SUZY

Yes.

BRUNO

In the beginning, when I saw you – it's been a while, now – when you appeared, I had hoped we might understand each other without any words.

SUZY

Over. That's over. The beginning is over now.

BRUNO

But I feel we handled it quite well together.

SUZY

Yes, I think so too.

BRUNO

Now we can look forward to what will happen next with us.

SUZY

I have a good feeling.

BRUNO

I am so happy I met you.

SUZY

Really?



BRUNO

Yes. I can hardly say how much. I'm going to sing you a song that will explain more precisely why I am so happy.

SUZY

Now?

BRUNO

I need to compose it first. When I miss you. Then I will sing it to you.

SUZY

Are you some sort of star?

BRUNO

Well, yes. Not exactly. But yes, kind of ...

SUZY

And what else do you do? I mean professionally?

### **Studies**

VOICES

Bruno wanted to study the arts

The free arts

Of course

The freest art possible.

But his portfolio was maybe

A little too free

Or naïve

Or old.

PROFESSOR

It's not bad at all, Mr. Stammer, not bad what you're doing here, pretty wild too, of course, nice, almost pornographic at times.

BRUNO

Stamm.

PROFESSOR

Beg your pardon?

BRUNO

Stamm is my name. Bruno Benjamin Rafael Stamm.

PROFESSOR

Yes, of course, Mr. Stamm. Really, it's all very nice. This wild energy. Very expressive and funny too. But I'm afraid I've seen it all before.

BRUNO

It's all my own work.

PROFESSOR

Sure, sure, of course, I believe you. But others have done it before you.

BRUNO

Who, for example?

PROFESSOR

Polke, Herold, Kippenberger. Böhmler, Ulrichs, Neo-Fluxus.

BRUNO

Never heard of them.

PROFESSOR

That's too bad.

BRUNO

But if it's good. If you like it.

PROFESSOR

It needs to be new, as well. New is what it should be. Otherwise, it's only private art.

BRUNO

New? But, professor, what could possibly be new? Absolutely positively new?

PROFESSOR

You tell me.

BRUNO

And what are you going to tell me? What will I learn from you?

PROFESSOR

What was there before. That I can tell you. So you don't do it again. Not again in exactly the same way. That's what you'll learn here.

BRUNO

I can do that without you.

PROFESSOR

Well, do it then.

### **Arrest**

VOICES

The police caught Bruno during a phase of identity crisis. He had read French philosophy. And spraypainted its mottos on walls.

BRUNO *spraypainting*:

All hail la différence! Down with the subject! Down with logocentrism, phallocentrism, and with politics of identity ...

POLICE

Now we got ya.

BRUNO

But that's not me.

POLICE

Keep it down, pal.

BRUNO

I'm not your pal.

POLICE

You're staying here for a while.

BRUNO

I is a different one.

POLICE

I see, a different one.

BRUNO

Different again. Yes. I can't remember. I reject that. Concepts of identity. You know, I'm an artist.

POLICE

We arrested an artist, folks, come and see. In my lifetime! May I see your ID?

POLICE

He feels just like we do.

POLICE

And what does an artist like you do around here, may I ask?

BRUNO

Singing and performance art.

POLICE

And cutting down this tree ...

BRUNO

It's part of the act: I'm not quite myself.

POLICE

Obviously.

BRUNO

That's the name of the project. I'm not quite myself. A critical review of the intentionalist concept of behavior. That's the subtitle.

POLICE

Please don't get abstract with me now. To us, you're first and foremost a delinquent, and no bullshit is going to help you here.

BRUNO

Brain research has long proven that we don't make our decisions so much as they are made for us on a neural level.

POLICE

And that's why you cut down the tree?

BRUNO

A demonstration of arbitration. Overcoming the self. To commit an act against one's own nature.

POLICE

Come with us now. Mr. Stamm. Stammer.

BRUNO

Stamm. But I'm not responsible. I'd like to emphasize that.

POLICE

Tell it to the judge.

## **In Court**

BRUNO

Bruno Benjamin Rafael Stamm.

JUDGE

Mr. Stamm, why did you have a gun on you in the first place?

BRUNO

To shoot, in case of an emergency.

JUDGE

What do you mean by emergency?

BRUNO

If I couldn't go on.

JUDGE

When would that have been the case?

BRUNO

That would have been decided according to the situation.

JUDGE

And then the emergency occurred?

BRUNO

Yes.

JUDGE

Could you describe this emergency?

BRUNO

Shooting was required.

JUDGE

But why?

BRUNO

The emergency had occurred.

JUDGE

We're going round in circles.

BRUNO

Yes.

JUDGE

Did you plan to shoot at anybody in particular?

BRUNO

No. There just had to be shooting. So things would change.

JUDGE

Because of the emergency.

BRUNO

Exactly.

JUDGE

But at no one in particular?

BRUNO

No. The shot was what counted.

JUDGE

So you could just as well have shot into the air?

BRUNO

If it would have changed anything.

JUDGE

So why did you end up shooting at yourself then?

BRUNO

I was closest to myself, I think. I wanted to change.

JUDGE

You don't know the reason for certain?

BRUNO

No. I don't feel very close to the person that committed the act back then.

JUDGE

How can that be?

BRUNO

I believe that this person has changed fundamentally precisely through this act.

JUDGE

But you remember this person.

BRUNO

Yes, but like I remember a story that I've been told.

JUDGE

That is sufficient for the court.

BRUNO

But I am the result of my former history. I had to become like that. I am not responsible.

JUDGE

I make you responsible. In the name of the people. Our laws want to believe in responsibility.

BRUNO

But this former history is a history with a different person than the later stories with the person of the same name. I'm someone else now.



JUDGE

The court cannot see it that way. You have committed this act.

BRUNO

Of course you have to claim this coherence, in order to judge me.

JUDGE

Exactly, Mr. Stamm, we claim the existence of this coherence. This is the seventh tree with you, and now on top on that, illegal possession of firearms. I have a soft spot for the arts, you know that, but you don't seem to want it any other way.

BRUNO

The current Mr. Stamm would like it another way.

JUDGE

The former Mr. Stamm seemed to have wanted it this way. You will come to your senses now and be placed under arrest.

### **Visiting Hours**

SUZY

Bruno, look at you, what in the world have you been up to?

BRUNO

I did it for you. All that art. To show you who I am and what I could be.

SUZY

You didn't need to do that. I like you just the way you are.

BRUNO

But I'm nothing special.

SUZY

We had that intense moment. In the beginning.

BRUNO

But that's over.

SUZY

I like to reminisce.

BRUNO

But what do we do now? We can't just keep on remembering.

SUZY

Quit the arts. It would be better to start writing songs again.

BRUNO *puts his hand against the pane*: I see you, but I can't touch you. There's this plastic between us.

SUZY

That's a nice line.

BRUNO

I have so much to sing to you, things I can't say.

SUZY

That's another good line. It's good for you if we can't touch. Good for your songs.

BRUNO

But not for me. I need you. I think. I miss you.

SUZY

Sing about it. About this distance. We'll meet again soon.

BRUNO

I'll still be needing you.

SUZY *getting up*:

Anything else you need?

BRUNO

Yes. Senseless excursions. My own mess. The confusion on the streets. I miss all of that.

SUZY

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

**274**

Write songs about it. With this desire.

And send the songs to Ulf. He's a producer now. *Exit.*

BRUNO

Don't go. Please, don't go.

*Bruno sings.*

Your voice fades away in the open

I'm calling after you my dear

Where body was, is now a draft

Space is open, empty, and clear.

*Refrain.*

This is my song, like us

Passing by and past its beginning

Hoping that its ending may

Be negated in singing

Be negated in singing

Be negated in singing.

PRISON DIRECTOR

Mr. Stamm. The first few days with you were not easy. But ever since your girlfriend came to visit, you have displayed excellent conduct. Even though not everybody here liked your singing. It gave you a purpose. I can release you today on good behaviour and give you the same recommendation I give everybody else leaving us, to help them find their way on the outside: go shopping first.

**Hit**

BRUNO *in the health food store:*

That's it. I can't believe it. That's Bruno's song. Bruno's song, that's what it is. They're playing it here at the health food store. That's incredible.

*Bruno at the electronics store:*

And here as well. At the electronics store, they're playing it too. My song.

*Bruno at the fun park:*

At the fun park. Bruno's song. As loud as thunder. I don't believe it.

*Sings along.* Bruno's song is about me. That's got to be said. It's me, it's me, hooray. It's still me.

*Bruno at the dentist:*

At the dentist. My song. The classic version. With strings. Crazy, pure kitsch. That's awesome. Ouch.

DENTIST

Sorry, the drill slipped. It's this song. Bruno's song. You know it? I just don't seem to be able to concentrate. Tremendous song.

BRUNO *with his mouth open:*

'a' if my fong.

DENTIST

That's your song?

BRUNO

My fong, yef.

DENTIST

You're right, now I recognize you. It's you, Bruno. And here I am, drilling away. With your song on the radio. It's Bruno. Here in my chair. Well. I'll give you a crown here, the fans will be thrilled. You can sing the high C and the last row will see it shine.

BRUNO

Great boss, a nice crown is always welcome. 'Cause I'll go to see Tina right after this. I always wanted to shine with her. She laughed at me back then. And then she kissed Ulf. And then Andreas, too. But not me. Because of the glands. I'll show her a crown job now.

DENTIST

A crown, Bruno, a first-rate crown.

*Enter Tina.*

TINA

Bruno, my sweetheart. Finally you're back.

I kept thinking about you. And I've prepared a little striptease with musical accompaniment from...

BRUNO

Bruno's Song.

TINA

Bruno's song. Exactemente, señor. How did you know that?

BRUNO

I had a hunch. It was in the air, Tina. I have sensors for refinement. I told you that. Vamos, chica!

TINA

Didn't you have that weird girl friend? Suzy somethingorother?

BRUNO

Never mind. Let it rip, baby.

*Striptease. Striptease. Bruno preparing his cigar. The reporter inching closer.*

REPORTER FOR GOSSIP AND SPORTS

Now you've really made it.

BRUNO

That's right. Yesss! I made it!

REPORTER

After all these years of failure, you've finally achieved the success so many have been wishing to see you achieve for so long. That you earned long ago, that I personally have always predicted for you. Great, Bruno. How does it feel?

BRUNO

Heavy. It feels very heavy in my pockets. All the bills are just about pulling down my pants.

REPORTER

Now it's probably: don't let it go to your head, keep your feet on the ground, be one of us, right?

BRUNO

Not at all. Now it's raise the roof, paint the town red, that's what it is now. Now it's do things in a big way. Today, we're letting it rip!

REPORTER

Now a very practical question: how did you manage it, Bruno? What was the initial spark?

BRUNO

I just have a feel for emotions. That's my thing. I can hear it. I often walk the city streets in the early morning and ask people out there, how do you feel? And the people tell me, because I'm one of them, and that's what I sing about. That's why this song is called Bruno's Song. Because it is by me.

REPORTER

And personally? What were the prerequisites for this kind of success?

BRUNO

I think I believed in myself. That's fundamental. Where there's a will, there's progress. It's important that things keep moving. Stagnation is stagnation. A standstill is a standstill. Although you do have to come back to yourself every so often. Your center. So you know where you're coming from. But not too deep. You can't get sucked in. Never take your eye off the target. That'll be fatal, that's for certain. Without targets, there's only stew. Speaking of nutrition. You should always make sure to eat enough fiber.

REPORTER

Thank you, Bruno. Well that was another episode of 'The Morals of Champions'. Please tune in to the next episode. For those who follow in the footsteps of winners, will not be trampled underfoot.

*Reporter off. Tina has danced herself naked.*

BRUNO

Wow, Tina, look at you. You'll catch your death like that. Standing around all naked. Put some clothes on. Catch your death you will. Please, I don't need this at all now.

TINA

But that's what you dreamed of. Ever since we were young. That I'd strip for you one day. That's

what you always wanted.

BRUNO

Yes, I wanted that. And now I've had it. I've seen it now. And I saw some flaws there. And there is someone, I'm almost sure, who doesn't have those flaws.

TINA

She's got other flaws.

BRUNO

Yes, and I'd like to discover those other flaws now. So I can start looking for other ones.

TINA

You're on the run.

BRUNO

Keeps me moving. Keeps me fresh. Get me the paper, will you?

BRUNO *reading:*

'Out of the gutter. Now a star. Parents neglected. That only made his will stronger. Soaring high. Wunderkind. Superstar. But why did this sensitive singer abandon his young love? And what part did drugs play in his life? Did he fall out of a tree as a child?'

It can't be true. I don't believe it. He was such a nice guy, that slimy fuck, and didn't he keep telling me what a great fucking guy ...

*The phone rings.*

BRUNO

What? Yes. Just read it. No. Finished. Campaign, absolutely. The figures. Rock bottom. Completely new image. No, no, no. I don't know how it happened either. I never said any of this.

*Bruno hangs up. Tina puts on Bruno's song.*

BRUNO

Turn that off. Turn that off now.

TINA

But it's your song. Your creation.

BRUNO

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

I hate my creation. Now I understand how God must feel.

TINA

Just write something new.

BRUNO

Something new, yes, something new, you think that's so easy. I'm always so much like myself. And then I'm so torn apart. And as a kid, I fell out of a tree. And nobody was with me but my mother. And now my mother is dead. What is that stink of brackish water all of a sudden?

### **Crisis Talk**

ROB

Hello, my name is Rob, head of the life coaching company Provitaloven. How are you?

BRUNO

Well. Thanks. How about you?

ROB

Once again I'm asking you, and more sharply now: how are you?

BRUNO

Pretty good. Really. Not bad.

ROB

A third and last time, I ask with insistence and genuine interest, how is that Bruno deep down inside?

BRUNO

Okay, yes, things could be better. It's all a bit much at the moment. Always plans, projects, productions. That's a strain. Sometimes, it's really too much for me.

ROB

It doesn't have to be that way. First, you have to identify what it is you want. What do you want?



BRUNO

That someone would hold me in their arms again.

ROB

It's success you want. You want success.

BRUNO

Probably, yes.

ROB

Then someone will hold you. Many will want to hold you in their arms then, very many.

BRUNO

Exactly. I want success. Professionally, sexually and in my emotional life. I want more success.

ROB

To have success, you need a clear-cut plan. Set priorities, goals. Identify where you want to be in one year's time and where you want to be in five years.

BRUNO

Got it. Just about. Alright.

ROB

So? Where do you want to be?

BRUNO

Sometimes, I just want to be dead.

ROB

Is that success? No.

BRUNO

Depends.

ROB

What do you like doing?

BRUNO

Singing.

ROB

And what else?

BRUNO

Cuddling.

ROB

So you'll be a cuddly rock singer. Within one year, you'll bring out a new album. Because it's ...

BRUNO

Fun.

ROB

Fun, exactly. That's what you're here for. Any questions so far?

BRUNO

What about fantasy?

ROB

Very important: to let go. If you don't limit yourself too early, ideas will come to you all on their own. Think about your childhood and don't be afraid. And first and foremost: stay true to yourself. Don't let yourself be fooled.

BRUNO

What does that mean?

ROB

Don't let yourself be talked into anything by consultants who think they understand you. Who try to tell you what your life should be like.

BRUNO

No. Yes. No. Gotta watch out there. Definitely.

ROB

If you feel weak and small, you're vulnerable to shady therapists with half-baked advice. Successful people are self-determined.

BRUNO

That's true, I know. I need to find my own way.

ROB

Unsuccessful people say: I have to. Successful people say: I want to.

BRUNO

Right. I forgot about that. I want to find my own way.

ROB

That's what I wanted to tell you. Find your own way. Listen to your voice.

BRUNO

But there are many.

ROB

So listen to the many voices.

VOICES *all at once*:

Tax declaration. Cancer screening. Garbage collection. Problems with European intelligence. The grandparents are waiting. Is there still acid rain? How to proceed in the Middle East? What about the question of technology in late Simmel? Aspects of syntax. Myths of antiquity. Who was Arnolt Bronnen? One pound of mincemeat. A pinch of horseradish. Referee. Telephone. Account balance.

Burnt out. Made love today?

BRUNO

Okay, okay, I'll try again.

### **Comeback**

VOICES

Bruno takes a Modasomil to keep himself awake.

And pops some Fluctin to stop the sadness.

And refreshes himself with a few Seroxat so he's not afraid of people again.

BRUNO

Hey, hey, hey.

VOICES

Who could be opposed to popping pills if it produces better people?

BRUNO

I'm back. So much for crashed. So much for burnt out. I improved just a little bit. For you. And now I've got a new song. For you. Basically, a refined version of the first one. My lyrics are now a lot more varied and my melodies are technically a lot more demanding than before. Hey, mass audience?

MASSES

Hello, Bruno.

BRUNO

Hey, mass audience. Do you want to hear a brand new, very original and complicated track?

MASSES

Wull noooh, we dooohn't waant that so vuurry moch.

BRUNO

But why don't you want that so very much? My success could go on a little bit longer, couldn't it? Is there no demand for technically highly refined music? None at all?

MASSES

There are other people now. And other songs.

BRUNO

But I have gotten used to hearing my song all over the place. What will I do now?

MASSES

Well, look. Just look. Do exactly what you want.

BRUNO

I'll show you. I'll whip up songs that will make your ears fall off.

MASSES

Everybody's got their one hit. At best. But that's enough. If we were to hear a two-minute hit by every citizen on Earth, we'd be busy for the next 4000 years. We're not patient enough for that.

BRUNO

I can't go on.

MASSES

You'll have forgotten that sentence by tomorrow. One year from now, you will have forgotten this evening. In the next millennium, you will be forgotten. Earth and mankind are phenomena limited in time within a universe that will one day die of cold.

### **Time**

BRUNO

Why are you walking around here like that all the time?

TIME

I am time.

BRUNO

And you need to walk around like that all the time?

TIME

Yes. All the time.

BRUNO

Can't you stand still for a moment?

TIME

No.

BRUNO

Not possible?

TIME

Unfortunately not.

BRUNO

Awful.

TIME

It can be refreshing, too. Invigorating. Encouraging. That things move on.

BRUNO

Makes me nervous.

TIME

To be able to talk is a question of time. Music has to do with time. The body breathes. Worries and hopes are based on time.

BRUNO

Will you stand still already.

TIME

That's impossible.

BRUNO

You're making me completely nervous.

TIME

That's your problem.

BRUNO

But what's that about?

TIME

That's how it goes.

BRUNO

What does it mean?

TIME

It doesn't mean anything.

BRUNO

Where are you going?

TIME

I march on. And you?

BRUNO

I'm going with you. Not so fast, hey!

*Time runs out. Enter a child.*

CHILD

What are you doing here?

BRUNO

I'm walking around a little.

CHILD

And who was that you were talking to just now?

BRUNO

An acquaintance.

CHILD

Do you see ghosts?

BRUNO

Don't you?

CHILD

I don't believe in those things.

BRUNO

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

That'll come back. They just made you stop believing.

CHILD

And who were you running after just now?

BRUNO

Time.

CHILD

It exists?

BRUNO

You're too young for that now.

CHILD

And where did it go?

BRUNO

I don't know. I really don't know! I can't find the way anymore. This story has no idea where it's going.

VOICES

It's your story.

BRUNO

But I'm not the one telling it.

VOICES

Yes, you are one of its narrators. You help create it.

BRUNO

But characters are constantly appearing that I haven't invited.

FREE MARKET ECONOMY

Hello. I'm the free market economy, and I've been around longer than you and I urgently advise you to take control of your life.

BRUNO



Like this one for example. Who ordered this one?

VOICES

You'd better listen to what she's got to say to you.

FREE MARKET ECONOMY

Pull yourself together. Take control of your life, for God's sake.

BRUNO

Wouldn't that feel repulsive?

FREE MARKET ECONOMY

Otherwise you won't have any turnover.

BRUNO

I'm not gonna listen to this old hag. I don't want to listen to anyone at all...

IMPOSSIBILITY

Yes, exactly, right. I am Impossibility, and you must not listen to anyone. Not even to yourself. On the contrary, you must work against yourself aggressively. Against your background, your language, your habits. You must resist yourself, contradict your inclination. You must exorcise your unique qualities for the sake of impossibility. That's me, that's what I'm here for. To remind you. That I don't exist. Impossibility.

BRUNO

Here we go again. Characters keep entering and giving me impossible advice.

VOICES

And you? What do you want?

BRUNO

How should I know?

VOICES

Who but you should know what you want. Why you're here. You've had enough to think it over properly.

BRUNO

Yes.

VOICES

Yes. So?

*Short pause.*

BRUNO

I'd like to, I still could, I wish I could ...

VOICES

There was nothing he would have given himself up for.

No nation, no faith, no afterlife.

First and foremost:

BRUNO

I, well I, I ...

VOICES

He put himself first. Nothing else ever came to his mind. He never considered himself in terms of world history.

BRUNO

I ...

VOICES

What is it going to be?

BRUNO

I'm only here to confirm that everything is alright. I'm an example of that. To confirm. For mankind. That it's feasible like this.

VOICES

Oh. You don't want any more than that? That's all?

BRUNO

All. Exactly. I want it all.

VOICES

Out of the question.

BRUNO

Always something different. Something new. I know what's old. Proceed.

VOICES

And clarity, inwardness, concentration?

BRUNO

That too, yes, great. I want that too. Just not always.

VOICES

So make a decision already.

BRUNO

I'm looking for Suzy, the love of my life.

VOICES

Oh dear. If nothing else, there's always love.

BRUNO

Yes. Suzy's what I'm looking for.

VOICES

Is that your story? That's what you tell yourself now? The search for your long lost love?

BRUNO

It's the truth.

VOICES

Because you believe in it yourself. Then it's your truth.

BRUNO

I've been alive for so long and can't find anything to hold on to. Suzy! I'm sorry. Suzy! Come back to me.

VOICES

Moaning won't help anybody. You'll need to go looking.

### **The Liberty Department Store**

BRUNO

Have you seen a woman? Her name is Suzy and she could save my life.

SALESMAN 1

We sell raspberry drops, chocolate bars, mint drops, lollipops, sour fries, sour cherries, mixed pickles, chewing gum cigarettes, liquorice curls, aniseed bricks, edible wafer paper, candy shells for licking.

BRUNO

Thanks.

SALESMAN

Gobstopper?

BRUNO

No thanks, I'll keep talking. I'm looking for a woman. Her name is Suzy and she is very beautiful.

SALESMAN

Has she always been beautiful?

BRUNO

Yes, she has always been beautiful.

SALESMAN

Why did you let her go, only to look for her now?

BRUNO

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

I had forgotten. I must have been blind.

SALESMAN

Ladies' glasses, men's glasses, children's glasses, designer glasses, reading glasses, diving glasses, protective work glasses and contact lenses can be found one flight up.

*Bruno runs.*

BRUNO

Do you carry glasses?

SALESMAN 2

Yes, ladies' glasses, men's glasses, children's glasses, designer glasses, reading glasses, diving goggles, protective work glasses and contact ...

BRUNO

Yes?

SALESMAN

Uhm.

BRUNO

Contact lenses.

SALESMAN

Contact lenses. Precisely. You need any?

BRUNO

No. I'm looking for a woman.

SALESMAN

Please take a pair of glasses instead. Our top designer model Titanium Flex will no doubt charm you with its elegant shape. In addition, anti-reflective lenses and UV protection provide the quality that you deserve.

BRUNO

I'm looking for a woman. Her name is Suzy and she is very beautiful.

SALESMAN

Well, this would help you see her more clearly?

BRUNO

I don't need glasses! I'm looking for a woman.

SALESMAN

Yes, there was a woman here once. And your description fits.

BRUNO

What did she look like?

SALESMAN

Beautiful. She had radiant eyes and one slightly flickering lid.

BRUNO

And otherwise? Body? Clothes? Personality?

SALESMAN

I only have eyes for eyes. A radiant blue with long lashes. And one lid slightly flickering.

BRUNO

That must be her. Was she alone? Where did she go?

SALESMAN

Up, I believe, further up. Maybe mountain climbing shades?

*Bruno runs.*

SALESMAN 3

Welcome to the umbrella tree, where we sell umbrellas, charms, and melons. We also have a never-ending stream on sale.

BRUNO

What would I do with a never-ending stream?

SALESMAN

Better than a concrete foundation.

BRUNO

I don't want a concrete foundation.

SALESMAN

You better take a never-ending stream then. Your life will be streaming and roaring between banks and dams between willows and meadows under changing skies and you will perpetually be in motion in ever-changing wetness. Umbrella, parasol, collapsible?

BRUNO

Suzy! Where are you?

SALESMAN

Perhaps you should have a look in the erotic department on the open roof-top level.

*Bruno running.*

SUZY

Hey, Bruno, what a coincidence to see you here. At the Liberty Department Store in the erotic department on the open roof-top level.

BRUNO *breathless*

Yes, that's something. On the open roof-top level. It's the last place I would have expected you. What are you doing here?

SUZY

Well, I'm here with my boyfriend, we're looking for some rubber for golden shower games. Some whips to go with it, maybe. Do you know where they keep those?

BRUNO

No. I don't know.

SUZY

Anything wrong?

BRUNO

No, no.

SUZY

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

How about you?

BRUNO

Me? Well, yes, sure. I'm here by myself.

SUZY

And what are you doing here?

BRUNO

Looking for something.

SUZY

I thought you might be.

BRUNO

Something very special.

SUZY

Me? You're looking for me?

BRUNO

Yes.

SUZY

But you said you didn't expect to see me here.

BRUNO

I've been looking for you. Everywhere, really.

SUZY

But you might have taken a few of those big-big-boobie magazines instead?

BRUNO

Instead, yes. But I'm really only looking for you.

SUZY

Well, then come, come. Come on, my darling Bruno. Let's go.



**At home**

*Bruno in an armchair, Suzy bringing soup.*

BRUNO

Suzy. You bring me soup. You left your boyfriend Achim for me, just when you were going to buy rubber sex toys, you listen to me when I talk about my problems with myself and my desire for more and more. Why do you do that?

SUZY

Because I love you, Bruno. I love you.

BRUNO

I don't deserve this.

SUZY

You're a good person.

BRUNO

I was rarely tested. And when I was tested, I failed.

I walked away from you when success came. Now I need someone, and you come back to me.

SUZY

Well, you know, Achim was a concrete mixer, he was nice, but it wasn't meant to last. And also, he didn't look nearly as good as you, when you're singing with your warm voice.

BRUNO

Doesn't matter anyway why you're back. You are back here, and that makes me happy. This is happiness.

SUZY

Happiness is not a lasting thing.

BRUNO

Why do you say that?

SUZY

It's a saying.

BRUNO

But how can we keep this here between us, we can't let it be over again right away.

SUZY

I'm with you, am I not? Don't be afraid again.

BRUNO

But I am. It's starting to fade already. While I'm thinking about why you're here. That Achim was a concrete mixer. That you expect a career from me now and only love me because of my external features. Happiness grows all weak at the mere thought.

SUZY

Don't think about it.

BRUNO

How couldn't I? I always have these these these ...

VOICES

Varicose veins

Elders

Prompters.

BRUNO

... these things I always have in my head.

SUZY

You still do?

BRUNO

Yes, still. And they're always interfering. And they always know better. And find everything I do ridiculous. Because they've been around for so long. They've seen it all. They ridicule our love. And make every word I say small. I hate this irony. But I can't get rid of it.

VOICES

And Suzy thought of Achim the concrete mixer and how nice and silent she used to be with him.

BRUNO

Can't you help me?

SUZY

Maybe a little bit of hands-on work would be good for you.

BRUNO

You talk like my father.

SUZY

Maybe that will help you. Or us. 'Cause we're outta money. And we're not expecting a new hit any time soon, are we?

BRUNO

No. Probably not.

SUZY

Well then. At Achim's construction site, they're still looking for someone.

### **Construction site**

BOSS

Well, we're actually pretty full here. But I heard you're a friend of Achim's.

BRUNO

Not exactly a friend. More of an acquaintance.

BOSS

A good concrete mixer, Achim, reliable man.

BRUNO

I agree, definitely.

BOSS

What have you been doing up to now?

BRUNO

I'm a singer. I've been singing.

BOSS

So you haven't got much experience in the trade?

BRUNO

Bruno's song, that was my hit. It's me, it's me, hooray. You know it?

BOSS

Music is not my forte. You ever work in construction?

BRUNO

I did performance art for a while. Cutting down trees.

BOSS

Oh yeah. But not in construction?

BRUNO

How hard can it be. If Achim can do it.

BOSS

Then go ahead and start off with Karlo. At the gravel pit. He'll tell you what to do.

BRUNO *shoveling*

The voices. *Shoveling*. The voices are gone. *Shoveling*. I don't hear anything. *Shoveling*. The voices are gone. *Shoveling*. I'm free again. Shoveling, I don't feel anything anymore. *Shoveling*. I've forgotten all songs. *Shoveling*. That's not bad. *Shoveling*. At least I'm free. *Shoveling*. No comment. *Short break*.

KARLO

Stop jabbering, asshole. You're here for shoveling.

BRUNO

Sure thing, Karlo, but can you please call me Bruno.

KARLO

Can do, asshole. The pit over there is yours as well. I need that done by tonight. Understand, asshole?

BRUNO

Listen, Karlo, don't I know you from someplace? You look like my father. And a little like Ulf as well, who kissed Tina back then. That art professor from way back, who rejected me, wasn't that you too? Haven't you always been there when things went bad?

KARLO

Any more of that psycho crap you'll be digging another pit for me. Got it, asshole?

BRUNO *shoveling*

The voices are gone. That's good. But at least they didn't insult me all the time. They had a certain charm. I can't stand being insulted all the time. I did a good job shoveling here. That's got to be recognized too. I'm an artist, right? *Stops*. I'll have a break now. To think. The voices are gone. Now I'll think a little.

VOICES

So Bruno stopped and thought.

BRUNO

No!

VOICES

Thought about himself!

BRUNO *shoveling faster*

Silence! Stop! Enough! Shovel, shovel. Shoveling. Just shoveling. No voices. No will. Unnoticed. Might disappear. Not be anymore. Only breath. Not visible anymore. Pure breath. Completely in the moment. Freed from worries. Released from remembering. Speechless. Silent. Mute. *Short break*.

PROFESSOR

Mr. Stamm, ever since your application to our academy, I have been following your artistic career and I've got to say *pointing at the gravel*: this is your best work yet.

BRUNO

In a certain way, it isn't even my work.

PROFESSOR

Yes. That's the way novelty works. Always said it. You need to let go. Free yourself of your idols. Be with yourself completely. That is genius.

BRUNO

But I'll never manage that again. I won't be able to do it again. That was my moment. My moment of fulfillment. I can't sell that. That belongs to me. I'll never manage it again. It's over. That was my oeuvre. There won't be anything now. I sense that.

### **Child**

VOICES

Into this creative crises fell

Out of the blue sky

Out of a fertile womb

A child.

That is to say, the announcement of it.

SUZY

I'm pregnant.

VOICES

It took only one night.

Bruno vaguely remembered.

It had been late that night.

BRUNO

Is it mine?

SUZY

It's yours.

BRUNO

Are you sure?

SUZY

What do you take me for?

BRUNO

Come on, don't play innocent.

SUZY

If you don't want to pay, then we'll have it tested.

BRUNO

But I'm an artist.

SUZY

You are what?

BRUNO

An artist, I thought.

SUZY

Didn't we do this scene before?

BRUNO

Well, never mind.

VOICES

Bruno was allowed to watch the child's birth and

That's how ordinary he was

He had to cry.

And of course this moment was

Ta-ta

Perhaps the most beautiful moment of his life.

REPORTER

Was that the most beautiful moment in your life now?

BRUNO

When Tina did her striptease dance to Bruno's song back then and I had a hard-on, a cigar in my mouth, maybe that was even more beautiful. But this here is also pretty ... *child in arms* pretty slimy.

VOICES

Bruno had reproduced himself.

The Bruno gene wouldn't vanish.

The world was

Hip hip hooray

Strangely unimpressed.

*Silence.*

BRUNO

Googoogoo.

VOICES

Bruno now owned: one house, one child, one wife

And in his garden six trees. Practically grew them himself.

Tudor, his gardening help from Poland, said:

TUDOR

Bruno, you lucky. You real life.

VOICES

And Bruno thought:

BRUNO

Maybe.

VOICES

And paid Tudor 5 Euro per hour.

BRUNO

That's a lot for someone like him.

VOICES

And only wanted to go away.

Felt the end coming. Felt everything constrict.

And once more wanted:

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**



BRUNO

Restlessness. Confusion. Destruction. Insurgency, revolution, mistakes, mistakes, I want to make mistakes once more, that's what I'm here for. My mistakes are beautiful mistakes. Original mistakes. So that not everything goes smoothly. Doesn't just continue. I'm the one who produces beautiful mistakes. That others might then learn from. If I look stupid, that will educate others. My mistakes are for the common good. Not everything can be alright. That'd be death. If I don't fully function, I'm completely myself. I'm here for the mistakes. So that they're noticed. So that not everything runs smoothly. I raise my voice for that. I stand up for that. So that wrong may be visible. In me. And may be fought. That's what I'm here for.

SUZY

You're in a good mood.

BRUNO

Yes. Now I know what I'm here for. I make mistakes.

SUZY

You're right. That's something you're pretty good at.

### **Body**

VOICES

Sudden entrance:

The body

*Enter the body.*

Bruno wasn't prepared for this at all.

Knocked first

Slight pulsating pain

Which Bruno didn't hear

But then with a vengeance.

BRUNO

Ouch. What's that about?

VOICES

Slipped disc. Nothing dramatic. Except Bruno couldn't move the slightest bit anymore. And there were complications, of a medical nature.

Long and short of it: Bruno limped. That would stick.

So no more discos.

The little nightly affairs.

That made the limping twice as bad.

No more Disco Bruno.

He was all alone with his misery.

Completely by himself and his bones, his tendons, his muscles and all that stuff

That he had never had any interest in.

There was only himself and the pain.

His body had taken him over.

*Body growing, Bruno sinks to his knees in surprise.*

VOICES

The pain gave him a point of view.

Suddenly he was sure that he belonged to his wife.

Suzy, sweetie, one sweet soul of a person.

She cared

At first compassionately

Later reluctantly.

Bruno was able to relax and was very proud of himself.

BRUNO

How relaxed I am! Not everybody can do that. Relax like that. Germans have a hard time doing it.

VOICES

Bruno became almost wise.

He hardly managed to get up anymore anyway.

He grew faithful and fat.

And then Suzy asked to talk to him.

SUZY

It can't go on like this.

BRUNO

Maybe I need a wheelchair.

SUZY

Let's look at the situation rationally.

BRUNO

Why should we look at the situation rationally all of a sudden? We never used to do that.

SUZY

As a singer, you failed. You were unfaithful to me for years. Now you can hardly move and own almost nothing. But I still have options on the market of love. Why should I stick with you?

BRUNO

You're right. I can only appeal to your sympathy and your faithfulness.

SUZY

Did you say faithfulness? Did you use the word faithfulness? Faithfulness you shouldn't have said. That was one word too much. *Exit.*

VOICES

She was gone.

Suzy.

And his father was dying.

**At his father's deathbed**

BRUNO

Father.

FATHER

Bruno. My son.

BRUNO

Yes, it's me.

FATHER

It's been a long time since I've seen you.

BRUNO

I'm sorry. I was busy.

FATHER

At the beginning of your life, I told you that you needed to make up your mind. Did you make up your mind?

BRUNO

Yes.

FATHER

What did you choose?

BRUNO

I chose life.

FATHER

You are and will always be a crooner. What kind of a decision is that?

BRUNO

I have lived. I have tried a few things out.

FATHER

Tried a few things out. Everybody does that.

BRUNO

I went to New York. And I had a hit. I slept with women. And I have worked at a construction site ...

FATHER

It's because of you, I think, that I didn't become a great artist.

BRUNO

But I didn't do anything to you.

FATHER

You might have forgotten, but you soiled your diapers for three years, then you fell out of a tree and weren't able to sleep at night for years. You peed your bed when the wind blew too loudly. Then you took drugs and spat at us. Because we raised you as a consumer. Then you put your mother into her grave. And then you didn't call me for years.

BRUNO

I apologize.

FATHER

You were a horrible child.

BRUNO

But you wanted a child, didn't you? You did, didn't you? Father? Father? No! Father, don't leave me Alone with this unanswered question ...

PRODUCER

Hey, hello, I'm Victor Geffen, talent scout with BMGM, and in my opinion, these last few lines with your dying father had some definite hit potential. Definite damned potential. *Exit.*

BRUNO

Dear God, it's a little late now, I know. But you see for yourself what's going on here. I didn't want to bother you these past years. There were some nice moments too. But now I don't know, what is that about? Is all this decay everywhere meant to be taken seriously? It hurts. And now my father's dead, too. Say something. You've got the overview. Or punish me, so I know what this is. Are you

making jokes? About us all? Dear God, make me religious. Or insensitive. Please. Thanks. Amen.

*Bruno starts singing.*

God in heaven, make me deaf

So in your silence I believe.

Angel of God, throw me down

I am the greatest anyhow

God in heaven, you make me dumb

So I will go to heaven or to heaven come.

PRODUCER

Yes, goddamnit, yes, that definitely has some hit potential. Call me.

BRUNO

Really?

PRODUCER

Yes, goddamnit, if I say so. Here's my card. *Exit.*

### **Baden Baden**

SALESMAN

What are you doing here?

BRUNO

I came to Baden-Baden to record a song with the last words to my deceased father, but the investment manager of BMGM feels that the trend for death chorales is over. Instead, it's spring dances are back. I can't provide that anymore.

SALESMAN

What are you doing in front of my tobacco and gift shop, that's what I'd like to know.

BRUNO

Oh, I'm just looking.

SALESMAN

What are you interested in?

BRUNO

I'm an old man, what could I be interested in?

SALESMAN

But you're not an old man. You're a mature gentleman. Cigars, cigarillos, lighters?

BRUNO

Thanks, I'm just looking.

SALESMAN

Postcards, key chains, souvenirs?

BRUNO

Souvenirs, yes. Souvenirs help me remember the places I've been. I like thinking of them, sometimes at home, when I'm alone, and I'm alone often. I like remembering.

SALESMAN

Right you are. Which souvenir would you like?

BRUNO

Oh, but I don't have any money, because I never saved any when I was successful. Because I had no sense for the future. Because I only thought about myself and my appetites. I don't have anything. I'm just looking around a little.

SALESMAN

Listen, it doesn't exactly look good for my business when there's an unkempt old man loitering outside my shop.

BRUNO

It's nice to talk to someone. We don't do that often enough.

SALESMAN

Yes, it's good to talk sometimes. But it won't get us anywhere.

BRUNO

Warm voices. That's enough.

SALESMAN

If you could leave now, please.

BRUNO

But where should I go?

SALESMAN

Go see a doctor. I know one.

### **Waiting room**

NURSE

I'd like to close the clinic for today. Did I forget you?

BRUNO

I don't think so.

NURSE

Didn't I call you in?

BRUNO

No.

NURSE

Did you have an appointment?

BRUNO

No. I'm alright.



NURSE

Are you sure?

BRUNO

Your office was recommended to me.

NURSE

And so you're sitting here now?

BRUNO

I like watching sick people.

NURSE

I see.

BRUNO

Yes.

NURSE

That's not looking good, your neck. Maybe we should give that a quick check after all. I'll ask the doctor if he has time to see you.

BRUNO

But I'm alright. There's nothing wrong here. That's not necessary.

### **Cancer**

DOCTOR

Mr. Stamm, the lab results are back. And I'm very sorry, they are bad results. There isn't much we can do now. We've tried all treatment options.

BRUNO

And now? What happens now?

DOCTOR

We differentiate between five successive phases of dying. In the first phase, the patient refuses to believe it.

BRUNO

I don't believe it. It's not true. I'll have a little smoke now.

DOCTOR

During the second phase, anger prevails.

BRUNO

I'll sue you all. All of you. How dare you talk to me like this. I'm not gonna just sit here.

DOCTOR

Then the patient tries to negotiate.

BRUNO

Isn't there anything I can do? Perhaps if I stop smoking. And become a better person. One year maybe? Or two?

DOCTOR

In the fourth phase, depression follows.

BRUNO

There's nothing I can do. I am nothing. It's all over.

DOCTOR

And finally, there is acceptance.

BRUNO

OK. OK. It's OK. It's alright. I'm ready to go. I can do this. *Pause.*

No, no, no! I don't believe it. It can't be true.

DOCTOR

You, Mr. Stamm, are still in the first phase.

BRUNO

Thank you, Doctor, I think you are right. Yes, you are probably right.

*Pause.* No, no no! It can't be true. It just can't be true. That can't have been everything. I don't deserve this.

VOICES

Why are you whining, Bruno, there's no reason to.

BRUNO

I missed out on everything.

VOICES

You had it all. Once success and once love. Moments full of love. Moments of affection. Short, but true.

What more do you want?

BRUNO

I should have chosen Anna back then. Then Anna, Tina and I could have had a threesome. If Britta had come with us, we might have even had a foursome. We could have done it in the summertime on Britta's father's farm. With all the animals. We would have wallowed in the mud and made love. Damn it, damn. Why was I always so thoughtful and shy? That fucked everything up, goddamnit.

VOICES

That's all?

BRUNO

No. I want to start all over again. Now I know how it's done.

VOICES

Is that so, Bruno? And what do you know now?

BRUNO

That you shouldn't wait for too long. That you can't control everything. I know that now, too. The traps, the mistakes, I know them now.

VOICES

Aha.

BRUNO

I would have liked to  
Perhaps  
Become a gardener as well  
With plants  
And flowers and everything  
Or I'd like to have invented something  
Devices  
Technical devices  
That help people  
With their lives  
To better their lives.  
Or I might have wanted to become  
A dancer  
Maybe  
That might have inspired me  
I think.  
But you can't do that for long  
On a professional level.  
First a dancer, then a gardener, maybe.  
Or an inventor.  
That would have fit.  
Possibly.

VOICES

You accomplished a lot. Be thankful, too.

BRUNO

Alright, so I'd like some dry sparkling wine and a string quartet to play, while I pick my bum a little

and think about transience. I'd like that now.

VOICES

No.

BRUNO

What does that mean, no? I achieved something. I deserve a little luxury in my old age, don't I? Without me, the world would look quite different.

VOICES

Bruno?

BRUNO

Yes?

VOICES

You had one single hit. And a few reasonably loving moments.

BRUNO

Of course, it's impossible to value it quantitatively. But it was still a very special hit. And those were some very special moments.

VOICES

Yes, you may enjoy that now. From a distance. From afar. But the sparkling wine to go with it, you'll have to buy that yourself.

BRUNO

What am I supposed to remember?

VOICES

The beautiful moments. You just said it.

BRUNO

I don't remember.

VOICES

Why not? Bruno?

BRUNO

I don't remember.

VOICES

Bruno?

BRUNO

I don't remember.

### **Alzheimer's**

VOICES

On top of the cancer came Alzheimer's.

Which helped to forget the cancer.

But didn't make for interesting conversation.

DOCTOR

Hello, my name is Doctor Rush. I'm your neurologist. What's your name?

BRUNO

Bruno.

DOCTOR

Last name?

BRUNO

Bruno.

DOCTOR

What is the name of your wife?

BRUNO

I think Bruno.

DOCTOR

Your wife.

BRUNO

Oh, my wife.

DOCTOR

Are you married?

BRUNO

Yes, to Bruno.

DOCTOR

Mr. Stamm?

BRUNO

Yes, to Bruno Stamm.

VOICES

Memory is the only paradise that we cannot be driven out of. This, this, this guy said that once, I just can't think of his name now.

He knew nothing about neurofibrils.

The doctor went away and never said another word to Bruno ever again.

The nurse sang when she washed Bruno. But he only mumbled.

BRUNO

Bruno Bruno.

NURSE

Oh when the saints go marching in

When the saints go marching in

Oh lord I want to be in that number

When the saints go marching in

*Short silence.*

BRUNO

Whatever happens to my mind. What I am will never be lost.

NURSE

What did you say, Mr. Stamm?

BRUNO

What I am will never be lost.

NURSE

Say that again.

BRUNO

Bruno.

NURSE

Say that sentence once again, please.

BRUNO

Bruno Bruno.

NURSE.

Mr. Stamm!

BRUNO

Bruno. Bruno Stamm.

NURSE

What I am will never be lost. *Leaves the room crying.*

BRUNO *leaving chalk trails when walking:*

That was me. I was over there just now. I want to go back but the spot that was formerly dark is whitened now. I'm drawing circles. *Draws circles.* I've been there once before. What was I like there? I look around me and see where I was. I don't lose myself. I make a connection. *Takes a photograph.* It produces me. I proceed from myself. I can't help myself. I'm going out. Anybody coming with me,



now that I'm going? Who will come with me aside from my fear? Now even the fear is leaving me.  
What have I got left? Who will go with me?

VOICES

Nobody witnessed his last performance

Except for his voices

His voices

His voices.

BRUNO

The voices are still there. That's good. I'm not alone. You were always there. You narrated me.

VOICES

Yes.

BRUNO

I want to kiss you. Then you will be silent. I don't want that. It's good that someone's there. Only in death is one completely at one with oneself.

VOICES

Wonderful last sentence. But unfortunately, Bruno wouldn't shut up.

BRUNO

Maybe I should have ...

VOICES

That was the end.

In the middle of a wish

A half sentence at the end

No ending really.

No ending, no punch line, no fate.

More of a break

Breaking off

A compromising conclusion.

BRUNO

Conclusion my ass. I can't see anything. Nobody's here anymore.

It's so bright. I can't hear anything either.

SUZY

What should we write on his gravestone?

BRUNO

My son's not going to do any better, either.

SON

Did you hear that?

SUZY

No. What was it?

SON

Sounded like Papa's voice.

SUZY

Don't you get started now. Those voices seduce you.

SON

But I heard them clearly.

SUZY

Stop it, boy, I'm telling you. It won't end well. So, what are we going to write on the stone?

SON

He gave it his best.

SUZY

Accusations won't do anybody any good now.

SON

That's no epitaph, Mama.

**The Mercurian, Vol. 3, No. 4**

SUZY

I know that, smart aleck. Can you think of something better?

SON

It was a good life.

SUZY

Given his options.

SON

He tried.

SUZY

There is no progress in history.

SON

May he rest in peace.

SUZY

He was only human.

### **Martin Heckmanns**

Martin Heckmanns, born 1971 in Mönchengladbach, Germany, studied comparative literature, history and philosophy, lives as playwright in Berlin. He is one of the most prominent young writers for the theater. Apart from many other award, he won the audience award at the renowned Mülheim „Stücke“ festival – with „Schieß doch, Kaufhaus“ in 2003 and with „Kränk“ in 2004. In 2002, he was voted emerging playwright of the year by the „Theater heute“ critics' choice.

#### **Plays:**

»Finnisch oder Ich möchte dich vielleicht berühren«, premiere 10/22/1999 Stadttheater Herford, D: Zeno Stanek;

»Disco«, premiere 12/15/2001 Staatsschauspiel Dresden, D: K.D. Schmidt;

»Schieß doch, Kaufhaus!«, premiere 5/9/2002 TIF/Staatsschauspiel Dresden, in coproduction with

the Theaterhaus Jena, Sophiensæle Berlin and the Thalia Theater Hamburg, D: Simone Blattner;  
 »Kränk«, premiere 03/11/2004 schauspiel frankfurt, D; Simone Blattner;  
 »Anrufung des Herrn«, premiere 05/13/2004 TIF/Staatsschauspiel Dresden, D: Patrick Wengenroth;  
 »4 Millionen Türen« (together with co-author Thomas Melle), premiere 10/01/2004 Deutsches Theater Berlin, D: Eike Hannemann;  
 »Das wundervolle Zwischending«, premiere 02/10/2005 Staatstheater Hannover, D: Charlotte Roos;  
 »Die Liebe zur Leere«, premiere 01/26/2006 schauspiel frankfurt, D: Simone Blattner;  
 »Wörter und Körper«, premiere 02/10/2007 Staatstheater Stuttgart, D: Hasko Weber;  
 »Kommt ein Mann zur Welt«, premiere 03/24/2007 Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf, D: Rafael Sanchez;  
 »Ein Teil der Gans«, premiere 10/07/2007 Deutsches Theater Berlin, D: Philipp Preuss.

### Translations:

4 Millionen Türen - (4 millones de puertas) - Spanish  
 Schiess doch, Kaufhaus ! - (Skjut då, varuhus!) - Swedish  
 Wörter und Körper - (Palabras y Cuerpos) - Spanish  
 Die Liebe zur Leere - (El amor al vacío) - Spanish  
 Kommt ein Mann zur Welt - (Viene un hombre al mundo) - Spanish  
 Ein Teil der Gans - (Pedazo de Ganso) - Spanish

**Henning Bochert** works as playwright, dramaturg, and translator in Berlin. Since 1996, he accomplished numerous translations of theater plays for various agencies (incl. Christoph Hein (funded by the [Goethe Institute](#)), Ingrid Lausund ([henschel SCHAUSPIEL](#)), M. Heckmanns ([Suhrkamp Verlag](#), funded by the [Goethe Institute](#)) into English, and Adam Rapp, Neil Simon, Carlos Murillo ([S. Fischer Verlag](#)), and Jason Grote into German).

Since 2007, he is a member of [raum4 – netzwerk für künstlerische alltagsbewältigung](#), and since 2009, he is part of [Drama Panorama](#) – *Forum for Translation and Theater*, an international platform for dramatic literature translators.

In these frameworks, Bochert produced, realized, participated in various functions in productions like [SumSum2 – eine grenzenlose Liebes- und Sprachverwirrung](#) (Erlangen, St. Petersburg), [phoenix transatlantic](#), and [Werkschau Wuppertal](#) (both Berlin), was mentor of a dramatic literature translation contest (Bielefeld). He was invited to the *Werkstattstage für Autoren* (playwrights' workshop) at the [Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg](#) in 2002. In the same year, he taught acting at the [University of Arts Berlin](#). [Own writings](#) include: *Übersee* – short play 2005 in Leipzig (D: [Ulrich Hüni](#)), *Heimatsfilm* – narration 2003, *credits* – play 2006 [sophiensæle](#) Berlin (D: [Nora Somaini](#)), *Aschenputtel* – play ([verlag autorenagentur](#)) UA 2008 TdA Stendal (D.: [Eberhard Köhler](#)). Prose was published in various literature magazines including *macondo*, *freie zeit art*, *Muschelhaufen*.

1994 Bachelor of Arts (Acting) at University of Arts Berlin. Founded a translation agency [Bochert Translations](#) in 1997.

Links:

[www.henningbochert.de](http://www.henningbochert.de)  
[www.bochert.com](http://www.bochert.com)  
[www.drama-panorama.com](http://www.drama-panorama.com)  
[www.raum4.org](http://www.raum4.org)