

# The Mercurian



*A Theatrical Translation Review*  
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Editor: Adam Versényi  
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*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.

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*Volume 3, Number 2*

## Table of Contents

Editor's Note	3
Three Sisters	5
By Anton Chekhov	
New Version by Libby Appel	
From a literal translation by Allison Horsley	
Updating the Cervantes <i>Interludes</i> for Contemporary Los Angeles	163
Oliver Mayer	
Dirty Fraud, The Widowed Pimp	170
The Divorce Court Judge	
By Miguel de Cervantes	
Translated by Oliver Mayer	
Our Way of Living	208
Daniel Brunet	
Electronic City	210
By Falk Richter	
Translated by Daniel Brunet	

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### **Editor's Note:**

This issue of *The Mercurian* begins with Libby Appel and Allison Horsley's new translation of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, originally commissioned for performance at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. *Three Sisters* continues 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).

In "Updating the Cervantes *Interludes* for Contemporary Los Angeles" Oliver Mayer discusses his translations of two Cervantes *entremeses*, *The Divorce Court Judge* and *Dirty Fraud*, *The Widowed Pimp*, and the task of finding contemporary comedic equivalents for Cervantes sixteenth century material. The translations of the two *entremeses* follow for readers to make up their own minds as to the success or failure of Mayer's enterprise.

Finally, the issue concludes with Daniel Brunet's introduction to his translation that follows of contemporary German playwright Falk Richter's *Electronic City*. Brunet's "Our Way of Living" presents Richter's meditation on the increasing digitization and globalization of our lives and raises questions about the nature of the "post-dramatic" in contemporary German dramaturgy.

In the last issue of *The Mercurian* we announced the formation of a new Advisory Board for the journal. Playwright and translator Caridad Svich was inadvertently left off that Board, a mistake we now rectify with abject apologies. The Advisory Board has already proved to be invaluable to my work as Editor and is, I hope, reflected in the material in this issue.

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 3, No. 3 will be May 1, 2011.

--Adam Versényi

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THREE SISTERS  
A Drama 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:

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## Characters

Andrey Sergeyevich Prozorov

Natalya Ivanovna, his fiancée, later wife.

His sisters:     Olga Sergeyevna

                  Maria (Masha) Sergeyevna

                  Irina Sergeyevna

Fyodor Ilyich Kulygin, high school teacher, husband of Masha

Aleksandr Ignatyevich Vershinin, lieutenant-colonel, battery commander

Nikolai Lvovich Tuzenbakh, baron, lieutenant

Vasilii Vasilyevich Solyony, staff-captain

Ivan Romanovich Chebutykin, military doctor

Aleksey Petrovich Fedotik, second lieutenant

Vladimir Karlovich Roday, second lieutenant

Ferapont Spiridonych, a messenger from the zemstvo council

Anfisa, a nurse, an old woman of 80 years, frequently referred to as “nyanya”

*The action takes place in the principal town of a province.*

## ACT 1

*The home of the PROZOROV'S. The drawing-room with columns, behind which a large dining area can be seen. Midday; outside it is sunny, cheerful. In the dining area a table is laid for lunch.*

*OLGA in the dark blue uniform dress of a girls' high school teacher continually corrects student exercise books, stands and paces; MASHA in a black dress, with a hat sitting on her lap, reads a little book.*

*IRINA in a white dress stands pensive.*

OLGA

Father died a year ago. *(Discovers.)* Today. May fifth, on your birthday, Irina. I remember it was very cold, snowing. I didn't think I'd live through it; you lay there like a dead person. But it's a year already, and we can talk about it again. You can wear a white dress now, and you have a smile on your face. *(A clock strikes twelve.)* Yes, I remember the clock too.

*Pause.*

I remember at the cemetery there was music and a gun salute. He was an important general, with his own brigade. But there were so few people at the funeral. It was raining, raining and snowing.

IRINA

Forget about that!

*Behind the columns, in the hall near the table appear baron TUZENBAKH, CHEBUTYKIN and SOLYONY.*

OLGA

It's warm today — enough to keep the window open. But the birches are still bare. Father was assigned his new brigade and we moved from Moscow eleven years ago. —Yes, I remember so perfectly that in Moscow, by the beginning of May all the trees are in bloom, it's warm, and everything is flooded with sun. Yes, it's been eleven years, but I remember everything there — as if we just left yesterday. My god! This morning when I woke up, it was so sunny – spring was finally here, and I was filled with joy. And I just wanted to go home again.

CHEBUTYKIN

To hell with the both of you!

TUZENBAKH

So sorry, it's ridiculous of course.

*MASHA, meditating upon her little book, quietly whistles a song.*

OLGA

Don't whistle, Masha. Please!

*Pause.*

My head aches so much when I'm teaching all day long and I feel like I've gotten so old. Honestly, after four years at the high school, I feel as if I'm losing my strength day by day ... and the only

thing I hold on to is our dream —

IRINA

To go to Moscow. To sell this house, to put an end to everything here and – go back to Moscow...

OLGA

Yes! As soon as we can —

*CHEBUTYKIN and TUZENBAKH laugh.*

IRINA

Andrey will become a professor probably, and then he'll move away from here. The only problem is poor Masha.

OLGA

Masha will come to Moscow for the whole summer, every year.

*MASHA quietly whistles a song.*

IRINA

Let's hope so... (*Looking out the window.*) The weather is really beautiful today. My soul feels very light – I don't know why. I got out of bed and remembered today is my birthday and I suddenly felt so much joy. I remembered when Mama was still alive and I was just a little girl... Oh, such marvelous memories, wonderful!

OLGA

You are particularly beautiful today – just beaming. Even Masha is beautiful. Andrey would be handsome, only he's really gained weight lately and it doesn't suit him. And I've gotten old — and so thin... I'm sure that's why I'm always so irritated with my students. But today I'm free, I'm home, and my headache is gone, I actually feel younger than yesterday. I mean, I'm only twenty-eight... Everything is good, everything is from God, but I still think, if I were married and stayed at home, my life would be better.

*Pause.*

I wish I had a husband.

TUZENBAKH

(*To SOLYONY.*) Ridiculous! I'm tired of listening to you. (*Entering the drawing room.*) Oh, I forgot to tell you — Today you'll have a visit from our new battery commander, Vershinin. (*He sits at the piano.*)

OLGA

Well that'll be nice.

IRINA

Is he old?

TUZENBAKH

No, so-so. At most forty, forty-five. (*He quietly plays.*) He seems to be a decent guy — Intelligent — probably. Only he talks a lot.

IRINA

Interesting?

TUZENBAKH

Yes, not too bad — only he has a wife, a mother-in-law and two little girls. And this is his second marriage. When he walks into anyone's house he always says he has a wife and two little girls. And he'll say it here, you'll see. His wife is a little crazy, dresses like a schoolgirl and talks philosophy all day long. I hear she's always attempting suicide — probably to punish him. I wouldn't be able to live with such a person but apparently he just suffers — and then complains to everybody.

SOLYONY

(*Entering from the hall to the drawing room/parlor with CHEBUTYKIN.*) With one arm I can lift only about forty pounds, but with two, a hundred and fifty, even two hundred pounds. From this I conclude, two men aren't twice as strong as one, but three times — maybe more...

CHEBUTYKIN

*(He reads the paper pacing).* When your hair falls out ... 15 ounces of naphthaline in half a bottle of alcohol... shake up and drink daily... *(He writes note in a little book.)* Yes, we'll just make a note of that! *(To SOLYONY.)* As I was saying, stick a stopper into a little bottle and put a glass tube through it... Then take the tiniest bit of ordinary alum...

IRINA

Ivan Romanych, sweet Ivan Romanych!

CHEBUTYKIN

What, my little girl, my darling?

IRINA

Tell me, why am I so happy today? It's as if I have wings and I'm flying away with big white birds in the sky. Why is that? Why?

CHEBUTYKIN

*(Kissing her on both hands, tenderly.)* You're my little white bird...

IRINA

When I woke up today, I just started smiling, and everything seemed to be covered with a bright, shining light and I suddenly understood how I must live. Sweet Ivan Romanych, I understand everything! A person must work, work by the sweat of his brow, whoever he is, whatever he does!

This is the only way to know true happiness in life. It must be so wonderful to be a worker, someone who rises at daybreak and builds roads, herds sheep, or teaches children, or works on a railroad... My God, something's wrong with being human, better to be an ox, better to be a simple workhorse, than a young woman, who wakes up at noon, drinks coffee in bed, takes two hours to get dressed... oh, that is so terrible! I'm as desperate to begin work as a thirsty man craves water. And if I don't get up early and go to work, then don't ever talk to me again, Ivan Romanych.

CHEBUTYKIN

*(Tenderly)* I won't. I won't ever talk to you ever again, I promise.

OLGA

Father trained us to get up at seven o'clock. Now Irina gets up at seven and lies back down, daydreaming until at least nine. Oh, what a face! *(She laughs.)*

IRINA

You always see me as a little girl, you never let me be serious. I am twenty years old!

TUZENBAKH

I long for work too. Oh my God, how well I understand you! I never worked a day in my life. I was born in cold, empty Petersburg, into a family who never knew real labor, who never had a care in the world. I remember, when I came home from military school, a footman would pull off my boots. I was so awful to the servants, and my mother would just smile at me with pride and joy – but everyone else saw what a spoiled brat I was. My parents thought they were protecting me from hard work. Only it was hardly protection! The times have changed, there are huge clouds over our heads, a big storm is moving in—it's already close and soon it will blow away laziness, indifference,

prejudice against the workers and corruption. I will work, and in some twenty-five to thirty years every man will work. Every one of us!

CHEBUTYKIN

I won't be working!

TUZENBAKH

You don't count.

SOLYONY

In twenty-five years you won't be around, thank God. In two or three years you'll die of *kondrashok* [apoplexy], or, believe me, I'll get so angry, I'll put a bullet through your brain, my angel. *(He takes a flask of perfume from his pocket and sprinkles himself on the chest and hands.)*

CHEBUTYKIN

*(He laughs).* And honestly, I've never done anything. Since I left the university I haven't lifted a finger, haven't read one book. I only read newspapers... *(He takes from his pocket another newspaper.)* Here... I just learned from this newspaper that there's an important writer named Dobrolyubov, but I haven't read a word he wrote... God only knows...

*Knocking can be heard on the floor from the lower floor.*

Uh oh... They're calling for me downstairs, someone has come for me. I'm coming, I'm coming...

wait a minute, one minute... *(He hastily exits, combing his beard.)*

IRINA

Uh oh indeed, there's a surprise coming.

TUZENBAKH

Yes. He left with such a sneaky smile. I'll bet he's bringing you a present.

IRINA

Oh, too much fuss!

OLGA

Yes, yes, he's terrible. He's always doing something silly.

MASHA

"At the sea, a green oak stands, with a golden chain wound round." *(She stands and quietly sings.)*

OLGA

You're unhappy today, Masha.

*MASHA, singing, puts on her hat.*

Where're you going?

MASHA

Home.

IRINA

Terrible...

TUZENBAKH

You can't leave a birthday party!

MASHA

It's fine... I'll come back tonight. Farewell, my dear... (*She kisses IRINA.*) Once again I wish you health and happiness. In the old days, when father was alive, every time we had a party thirty or forty officers would come. It was so noisy, but today just a few people and it's quiet — like a monastery... I'm leaving... Today I am in *merlekhlyundii* [melancholy] — unhappiness has been visited upon me! You're not listening to me! (*On the verge of tears.*) We'll talk later, but for now farewell, my dear, I'm leaving...

IRINA

(*Displeased.*) What's wrong with you?

OLGA

(*With tears.*) I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY

If a man talks a lot, you might get philosophy or even sophistry; if one or two women talk, you get blah, blah, blah.

MASHA

What do you mean by that, you weird man!

SOLYONY

Nothing. Before he knew what hit him, the bear bit him.

*Pause.*

MASHA

*(To OLG A, angrily).* Stop howling!

*Enter ANFISA and FERAPONT with a cake.*

ANFISA

In here, my friend. Come in, your shoes are clean. *(To IRINA.)* From the *zemstvo* [town] council,

from Protopopov, Mikhail Ivanych... a birthday cake.

IRINA

Thank you. I thank you.

FERAPONT

Huh?

IRINA

*(louder)* I thank you!

OLGA

Nyanechka, give him a piece of cake. Ferapont, go, they will give you some cake.

FERAPONT

Huh?

ANFISA

Let's go, my friend. Come, Ferapont Spiridonych. Let's go... *(She exits with FERAPONT.)*

MASHA

I don't like Protopopov, that Mikhail Potapych, or Ivanych. Don't invite him here.

IRINA

I didn't invite him.

MASHA

Great.

*Enter CHEBUTYKIN, behind him a soldier with a silver samovar; rumble of amazement and displeasure.*

OLGA

*(She covers her face with her hands.) A samovar! You are so terrible! (She walks to the table in the hall.)*

*Together*{ IRINA

My dear Ivan Romanych, what're you doing?

TUZENBAKH

*(He laughs.)* I told you.

MASHA

Ivan Romanych, you simply have no shame!

CHEBUTYKIN

My sweet, my darling, you're my only... you're the most dear to me, you're the only one who

matters... I'll soon be sixty, I'm an old man, lonely, a worthless old man... I have nothing good in me, except my love for you, and if it weren't for you, I wouldn't even be alive... *(To IRINA.)* Sweet child, I've known you since you were a baby... I carried you in my arms... I loved your mama...

IRINA

But why such expensive gifts!

CHEBUTYKIN

*(On the verge of tears, angrily.)* Expensive gifts... Well aren't you something! *(To the orderly.)* Take it away!... *(He teases.)* Expensive gifts...

*The ORDERLY takes the samovar to the hall.*

ANFISA

*(Walking across the drawing room.)* Dearest, a stranger – a colonel! He's taken off his coat already, dear ones, he's coming in here. Irinushka, please be polite... *(Exiting.)* It's high time we had lunch...  
good  
heavens...

TUZENBAKH

It must be Vershinin.

*VERSHININ enters.*

Colonel Vershinin!

VERSHININ

*(To MASHA and IRINA.)* Allow me to introduce myself, Vershinin. I am so happy — to finally see you again. My goodness, how you've grown! *Ai! ai!*

IRINA

Please, have a seat. It's our pleasure.

VERSHININ

*(Happily.)* I feel so happy, so happy! But aren't there three sisters? I remember — three little girls. I don't remember your faces, but I do remember your father, Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls. I remember meeting all three... How time flies! Oh yes, how time flies!

TUZENBAKH

Aleksandr Ignatyevich is from Moscow.

IRINA

From Moscow? You're from Moscow?

VERSHININ

Yes, I'm from Moscow. Your late father was the battery commander there, and I was an officer in his brigade. *(To MASHA.)* Yes, I seem to remember your face a little.

MASHA

And I yours – no!

IRINA

Olya! Olya! (*She shouts into the hall.*) Olya, come here!

*OLGA enters from the dining area to the drawing room.*

Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow.

VERSHININ

You must be Olga Sergeyevna, the oldest... And you are Maria... And you are Irina – the youngest...

OLGA

You're from Moscow?

VERSHININ

Yes. I studied in Moscow and then began my military service there. I served there a long time, but I finally received my own command here – I just moved here, as you see. I don't remember you individually. I just remember three sisters. I remember your father so well, I can close my eyes and see him now. I came to visit you in Moscow...

OLGA

I thought I remembered everything... but...

VERSHININ

My name is Aleksandr Ignatyevich...

IRINA

Aleksandr Ignatyevich, you're from Moscow... What a surprise!

OLGA

Yes, we'll be moving back to Moscow soon.

IRINA

We plan to be there by autumn. Our home town – we were born there... On Old Basmanny street...

*They both laugh from joy.*

MASHA

I can't believe you're from Moscow! (*Vividly.*) Now I remember! Yes, you remember, Olya – they used to call you – “Major Romeo.” You were a lieutenant then and you were always in love with someone, and everyone teased you about it for some reason...

VERSHININ

(*He laughs.*) That's right, that's right... “Major Romeo”, yes...

MASHA

I remember you had a mustache then... Oh how old you've gotten! (*On the verge of tears.*) So old!

VERSHININ

Yes, when they called me "Major Romeo", I was still very young, I was in love. That's not true anymore.

OLGA

But you don't have a single grey hair. You've aged, but you're not really old.

VERSHININ

Yes... I'm forty--three. Have you been away from Moscow a long time?

IRINA

Eleven years. What's wrong with you, Masha, why are you crying, silly!... (*On the verge of tears.*) And now I'm starting to cry...

MASHA

Nothing's wrong with me. Where did you live? On what street?

VERSHININ

On Old Basmany.

OLGA

Oh, we lived there too...

VERSHININ

At one point I lived on Nemetsky street. From Nemetsky street I could literally walk to the barracks. On the way you had to cross a gloomy grey bridge, with the water murmuring below it. A solitary

man can feel very sad and lonely on that bridge.

*Pause.*

But here, such a wide, beautiful river! A glorious river!

OLGA

Yes, but it's cold. It's cold here and there are mosquitoes...

VERSHININ

No, no! It's so healthy here, a good Russian climate. Forests, rivers... and plenty of birches. Graceful, modest birches, I love them more than any other tree. It's good to live here. Only it's a little strange – the railroad station is eighteen miles away... why is that?

SOLYONY

I know why.

*Everyone looks at him.*

Because if the station were close, then it wouldn't be far, but if it is far, then it can't be close.

*Awkward silence.*

TUZENBAKH

Very funny, Vasilii Vasilyevich.

OLGA

Now I remember you. I remember...

VERSHININ

I knew your lovely mother.

CHEBUTYKIN

She was so wonderful. God rest her soul.

IRINA

Mama is buried in Moscow.

OLGA

In *Novo-Devichy*...

MASHA

I can't believe I'm already beginning to forget her face. And we'll be forgotten too. Yes, we'll be forgotten.

VERSHININ

Yes, we'll be forgotten. That's our fate, there's nothing you can do about it. Everything that seems important to us, so meaningful – before long – that will be forgotten too.

*Pause.*

And it's interesting, it's not possible to really know what will be important and meaningful to people and what will seem trivial and foolish. At first didn't they laugh at Copernicus and even Columbus – their discoveries were considered unimportant and ridiculous – and at the same time really shallow, nonsensical beliefs were considered the truth? It's possible that what we believe today will someday seem strange, stupid, awkward, and maybe even sinful...

TUZENBAKH

Who knows? It's also possible that what we believe will be considered sublime, truthful, and people will remember us with respect – maybe even reverence. Today there's no torture, no capital punishment, no war. But of course the truth is there is so much suffering!

SOLYONY

*(With a thin voice.) Tsyb, tsyp, tsyp...* Don't feed the baron any birdseed – just let him philosophize.

TUZENBAKH

Vasilii Vasilych, I beg you please leave me alone... *(He sits in a different chair.)* You are getting on my nerves.

SOLYONY

*(With a thin voice.) Tsyb, tsyp, tsyp...*

TUZENBAKH

*(To VERSHININ.)* There's so much suffering today, yes, but that's because society has gotten so far...

VERSHININ

Yes, yes, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN

You just said, baron, they will call our life sublime; but in fact all people are base... (*He rises.*) Look, how base I am! But I appreciate the comfort you give me – to say that my life is sublime and intelligent.

*Offstage a violin plays.*

MASHA

That's our brother Andrey playing.

IRINA

He's the scholar in the family. He'll probably be a professor. Papa was a military man, but his son chose a scholarly career.

MASHA

Just as Papa wanted.

OLGA

We were teasing him mercilessly today. He seems to be a bit in love.

IRINA

With a local girl. She'll probably come here today.

MASHA

Akh, the way she dresses! It's not that she's unattractive, but she has no sense of style – it's really a shame. She'll wear a strange, colorful, yellowish skirt with a vulgar fringe and a red blouse. And her cheeks are scrubbed raw – horrible! Andrey cannot be in love with her – I will not permit it! Surely he has some taste – I'm sure he's just teasing us. Just yesterday I heard she's going to marry Protopopov, chairman of the local *zemstvo* council. Excellent... *(To the side door.)* Andrey, come here! Darling, come in here.

*Enter ANDREY.*

OLGA

This is my brother, Andrey Sergeyich.

VERSHININ

Vershinin.

ANDREY

Prozorov. *(He wipes sweat from his face.)* You're the new battery commander?

OLGA

Aleksandr Ignatyich is from Moscow.

ANDREY

Really? Well, congratulations, now my sisters will never leave you in peace.

VERSHININ

I've already succeeded in boring your sisters.

IRINA

Look, what a lovely frame Andrey gave me today! *(She shows the frame.)* He made it himself.

VERSHININ

*(Looking at the frame and not knowing what to say.)* Yes... that's something...

IRINA

And that frame on the piano, he made that too.

*ANDREY waves his hand and walks away.*

OLGA

He's the scholar among us and he plays the violin, and he creates all kinds of wonderful things with his hands – in other words, he can do anything. Andrey, don't leave! You're always walking away.

Come here!

*MASHA and IRINA take him by the arms and with laughter lead him back.*

MASHA

Come, come!

ANDREY

Leave me alone, please.

MASHA

You're so funny! Aleksandr Ignatyevich used to be called "Major Romeo", and he wasn't angry in the least.

VERSHININ

In the least!

MASHA

And I will have to call you: Professor Romeo!

IRINA

Or *Maestro* Romeo, the violinist!

OLGA

He's in love! Andryusha is in love!

IRINA

*(Applauding.)* Bravo, bravo! Bis! Andryusha is in love!

CHEBUTYKIN

*(Approaches ANDREY from behind and puts his arms around his waist.)* We've been put on this earth for love alone! *(He chuckles; he has a newspaper the entire time.)*

ANDREY

Enough, enough... *(He wipes his face.)* I didn't sleep all night and I'm really not myself today. I was reading until four, then I closed my eyes, but nothing happened. I couldn't turn off my mind and suddenly it was dawn and the sun was pouring into my room. This summer, if I'm still here, I'd like to translate a book from English.

VERSHININ

Ah, you read English?

ANDREY

Yes. Father, God rest his soul, wore us down with education. It's funny – even a little crazy – but the fact is, after he died I started to put on weight. I have put on so much weight that I feel my body is pushing out all that education. Thanks to our father my sisters and I know French, German and English, and Irina even knows Italian. —For all the good it does!

MASHA

What's the point of knowing three languages around here? In truth, in this town, it's a burden, like an extra finger.

VERSHININ

Ah, I see! *(He laughs.)* You know too much! If you ask me, no place on earth can exist without intelligent, educated people. For example, let's take this town — let's say that among the hundred thousand inhabitants — probably all backward and crude — there are only three like you. Obviously, you can't conquer the stupidity around you all by yourselves, and it's true that little by little you may lose some of your brilliance and become lost in the crowd — you may even feel as if you're drowning — but you won't disappear entirely, you'll still have influence among these people. Then there will be six of you, maybe twenty, and so on, until finally, you will be the majority. In two hundred, three hundred years life on earth will be unimaginably beautiful, astounding. Of course, everyone wants such a life now and you must have faith that it will come. You must wait for it, dream about it, prepare for it. Undoubtedly you know more than your parents and your grandfather. *(He laughs.)* And you complain that you know too much!

MASHA

*(She takes off her hat.)* I'm staying for lunch.

IRINA

*(With a sigh.)* Really, we should have written all that down...

*ANDREY has slipped out quietly.*

TUZENBAKH

In many years you say life on earth will be beautiful, astounding. That's true. But, in order to prepare for that life – though it may be in the far distant future – we need to do something now, we need to work...

VERSHININ

*(He stands.)* Yes. You have so many flowers here! *(Looking around.)* And your home is marvelous. I envy you! All my life I've been living in tiny apartments with two chairs, one sofa, and with stoves that are always smoking. Obviously what I've needed all my life are these lovely flowers!... *(He rubs his hands.)* Ekh! Well, that's it!

TUZENBAKH

Yes, it's necessary to work. No doubt, you're probably thinking: the German is being romantic. But on my honor, I am Russian – I don't even speak German. My father was Russian Orthodox...

*Pause.*

VERSHININ

*(He walks about.)* I often think if only we could start all over again and much more consciously this time. The life we've already lived can be a rough draft for what we would do the next time. Then there's always the chance we wouldn't repeat our mistakes – we could at least find a better place to live – a place filled with flowers, filled with light... I have a wife and two daughters. My poor wife is ill, yes, yes... Yes, if only we could start all over again – I surely wouldn't get married...

*Enter KULYGIN in a uniform.*

KULYGIN

*(He approaches IRINA.)* Dear sister, permit me to congratulate you on your birthday. I sincerely wish from my soul good health and everything a young lady of your age wishes for herself. Permit me to present you with this book. *(He gives her a book.)* The history of our high school over the past fifty years, written by yours truly. A trifling little book, written when I had nothing better to do, but I hope you will read it nonetheless. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen! *(To VERSHININ.)* Kulygin, a teacher at the local high school. Civil servant, 7<sup>th</sup> class! *(To IRINA.)* In this book you will find a list of all those who graduated from our high school in the past fifty years. *Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.* [“I did what I could; let he who can, do better.”] *(He kisses MASHA.)*

IRINA

You already gave me this book for Easter.

KULYGIN

*(He laughs.)* Impossible! In that case, give it back, or better yet give it to the colonel. Please accept it, colonel. Read it sometime when you have nothing better to do.

VERSHININ

I thank you. *(He prepares to leave.)* I'm so very happy to see you again...

OLGA

You're leaving? No, no!

IRINA

You'll stay and have lunch with us. Please.

OLGA

I beg you!

VERSHININ

*(He bows.)* It seems I have walked in on a birthday party. Forgive me, I didn't know, I haven't yet congratulated you... *(He exits with OLGA to the dining room.)*

KULYGIN

Today, ladies and gentlemen, it's Sunday, a day of rest, we will rest, we will enjoy ourselves each in keeping with our own age and position. These carpets must be taken up and stored for summer, don't take them out until winter... Insect-powder or naphthalene... The Romans were healthy, because they labored, and then they rested, *mens sana in corpore sano* ["A healthy soul in a healthy body"]. Their life had order to it. Our headmaster says, the most important thing in life is order... Without order, there is no life—and it's the same for all of us. *(He takes MASHA by the waist, laughs.)* Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And the window curtains must go — along with the carpets... Today I'm happy, I'm in excellent spirits. Masha, at four o'clock today we are due at the headmaster's house. He's arranging a special walk for the staff and their families.

MASHA

I'm not going.

KULYGIN

*(Distressed.)* Dear Masha, why?

MASHA

We'll talk about it later... *(Angrily.)* Fine, I'll go, only leave me alone, please... *(She moves away.)*

KULYGIN

And then we'll spend the evening with the headmaster. In spite of his own poor health, that man always endeavors to be friendly. An outstanding, brilliant man. A splendid man. Yesterday after a conference he said to me: "I'm tired, Fyodor Ilych! Tired!" *(He looks at the wall clock, then at his own.)* Your clock is seven minutes fast. Yes, he said, tired!

*Offstage a violin plays.*

OLGA

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome! Luncheon is served. Pie!

KULYGIN

Akh, kind Olga, my kind friend! Yesterday I worked from morning until eleven at night, I'm tired and yet today I feel so happy. *(He exits to the table.)* My kind...

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(He puts the newspaper in his pocket, combs his beard.)* Pie? Magnificent!

MASHA

*(Severely to CHEBUTYKHIN.)* Listen to me — nothing to drink today. Do you hear me? Drinking is killing you.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Nonsense! That's all over. It's been two years since I was drunk. *(Impatiently.)* And in any case, *babushka* [grandma], what difference does it make!

MASHA

And in any case, don't drink. You hear me, don't drink! *(Angrily, but so that her husband cannot hear.)*  
Damn it, another boring evening with the headmaster!

TUZENBAKH

Don't go... just don't go.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Don't go, my darling.

MASHA

Oh sure, don't go... this goddamn life! *(She walks to the hall.)*

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(He goes to her.)* Oh, well...

SOLYONY

*Tysp, tysp, tysp...*

TUZENBAKH

Enough, Vasilii Vasilyich. Stop it!

SOLYONY

*Tysp, tysp, tysp...*

KULYGIN

*(Happily.)* To your health, colonel. I'm an educator, but in this house I'm just one of the family, Masha's husband... She is good, very good...

VERSHININ

I'll have that dark vodka... *(He drinks.)* To your health! *(To OLGA.)* I feel so at home here...

*In the drawing room only IRINA and TUZENBAKH remain.*

IRINA

Masha is so depressed today. She was only eighteen when she got married — he seemed to her the most intelligent man in the world. Not anymore — he's the kindest, but not the most intelligent.

OLGA

*(Impatiently.)* Andrey, come on!

ANDREY

*(Offstage.)* Coming. *(He enters and goes to the table.)*

TUZENBAKH

What are you thinking about?

IRINA

Hmmm. I hate that Solyony of yours — I'm afraid of him. He says such stupid things...

TUZENBAKH

He's a strange man. I feel sorry for him, and I'm also annoyed with him, but I think it's more like pity. He's so shy... When we're together, just the two of us, he can be very intelligent and gentle, but in company he's rude, a bully. Don't go, they can wait. Let me be close to you. What are you thinking about?

*Pause.*

You're twenty years old, I'm still not thirty. There are so many years ahead of us — a future of long days, all filled with my love for you...

IRINA

Please, Nikolai Lvovich, don't talk to me about love.

TUZENBAKH

*(Not hearing.)* I'm craving life, struggle, labor, and this craving in my soul perfectly blends with my love for you, Irina. You're so beautiful, and it makes me feel that life is beautiful! What are you thinking about?

IRINA

You say life is beautiful. Yes, but what if it only seems to be! For us three sisters, believe me, life hasn't been beautiful – it's choking us, like weeds in a garden... I'm crying. How stupid! *(She quickly wipes her face, she smiles.)* We must work, work. We're unhappy and we're depressed because we don't work. We were born into families who never had to work for a living...

*NATALIYA IVANOVNA enters; she is in a pink dress, with a green belt.*

NATASHA

Oh dear, they've sat down already... I'm late... *(She glances in passing in the mirror, fixes herself.)* My hair looks good... *(Seeing IRINA.)* Sweet Irina Sergeyevna, congratulations! *(She gives IRINA a long, firm kiss.)* You have so many guests, I'm embarrassed... Hello, baron!

OLGA

*(Entering the drawing room)* Well, Nataliya Ivanovna. Hello, my dear!

*They kiss.*

NATASHA

Happy birthday. You have so much company, I'm so embarrassed...

OLGA

No, no – everyone is welcome here. *(Under her breath, aghast.)* You have a green belt on! Dear girl, that's not right!

NATASHA

Did I do something wrong?

OLGA

No, it simply doesn't go... it looks funny...

NATASHA

*(With a weepy voice.)* Really? But it's not really green – it's darker than green. *(She follows OLGA to the dining room.)*

*In the dining room they settle in to eat lunch; no one is left in the drawing room.*

KULYGIN

Irina Serveyevna, I wish for you a suitable suitor. It's high time you got married.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Nataliya Ivanovna, I wish for you a suitable suitor.

KULYGIN

Nataliya Ivanovna already has a suitable suitor.

MASHA

*(She raps on the plate with her fork.)* Let's have another glass of vodka! What the hell! We don't live forever!

KULYGIN

That's an F-minus for conduct!

VERSHININ

This vodka is delicious. What's it made from?

SOLYONY

Cockroaches.

IRINA

*(With a weepy voice.)* Ekh, that's disgusting!

OLGA

We're going to have roast turkey and sweet apple pie for dinner. Thank goodness, I'm at home all day today and tonight – at home... Everyone, please come back.

VERSHININ

May I return too?

IRINA

Please.

NATASHA

They don't stand on ceremony here.

CHEBUTYKHIN

We've been put on this earth for love alone... *(He laughs.)*

ANDREY

*(Angrily.)* Please! Stop teasing us! It's getting old...

*FEDOTIK and RODAY enter with a big basket of flowers.*

FEDOTIK

They're eating already.

RODAY

*(Loudly and with an accent.)* Lunch? Great...

FEDOTIK

Wait a minute! *(He takes a photograph.)* Hold still... Just a little minute... *(He takes another photograph.)*  
Alright, everybody breathe.

*They take the basket and go into the dining area, where everyone greets them.*

RODAY

*(Loudly.)* Congratulations, I wish you everything wonderful! Isn't it a gorgeous day! I spent the whole morning today hiking with my young hooligans. I teach gymnastics at the high school...

FEDOTIK

Yes, you can move now, Irina Sergeyevna. *(Taking a photograph.)* Today you are the star attraction.  
*(He takes a top from his pocket.)* Here's a top for you... it makes an astonishing sound...

IRINA

How lovely!

MASHA

“At the sea, a green oak stands, with a golden chain wound round...” (*Pathetic.*) What the hell am I saying? I can’t get that poem out of my head today...

KULYGIN

Thirteen at table!

RODAY

(*Loudly.*) And what is that supposed to mean?

*Laughter.*

KULYGIN

If there are thirteen at table, then, it means there’re lovers here. Surely you’re not one of them, Ivan Romanovich...

*Laughter.*

CHEBUTYKHIN

Me! I’m an old sinner – but why is Nataliya Ivanovna so red – why? why?

*Loud laughter; NATASHA runs from the dinner table to the drawing room, ANDREY follows.*

ANDREY

Stop it! That's enough! *(To NATASHA.)* Don't pay any attention...

NATASHA

I'm so embarrassed... I don't know what's wrong with me — why are they all making fun of me? I know it wasn't right to leave the table, but I can't... I can't ... *(She covers her face with her hands.)*

ANDREY

My dear, I beg you, I implore you, don't be upset. They're just joking, they're all good-hearted. My dear, my sweet girl, they're all good, sincere people and they love me and they love you. Come over to the window, they can't see us there... *(He looks around.)*

NATASHA

I'm just not used to this much company!...

ANDREY

Oh, you are so young, so beautiful! My dear, my sweet, don't be upset!.. Believe me, believe... I'm so full of love right now, so full of joy... Don't worry, they can't see us! When did I fall in love with you? How? Where? Oh, I don't understand anything. My dear, sweet, pure darling, be my wife! I love you, I love you... like no one ever...

*Kiss.*

*Two officers enter and, seeing the kissing pair, come to a stop in amazement.*

*CURTAIN.*

## ACT 2

*Same as first act. January, 21 months later.*

*Eight o'clock in the evening. Offstage, on the street, barely audible, someone plays an accordion. There is no fire in the stove.*

*Enter NATALIYA IVANOVNA in a house-coat, with a candle; she stops at the door to ANDREY's room.*

NATASHA

Andryusha, what're you doing? Are you reading? Never mind, it's nothing, I just... *(She walks, turns away toward another door and, looking in it, shuts it.)* Just wanted to check if there was a light...

ANDREY

*(He enters with a book in hand.)* What's wrong, Natasha?

NATASHA

I'm just checking if there was a light... It's carnival week, and the servants are acting up, I have to keep a careful eye on everything. Yesterday at midnight I walked into the dining room, and there was a candle burning. No one will admit who did it... *(She places the candle.)* What time is it?

ANDREY

*(Glancing at the clock.)* Quarter past eight.

NATASHA

And Olga and Irina are still out – not home yet. The poor dears — always working. Olga at the high school and Irina at the telegraph office... *(She sighs.)* This morning I told your sister, I said, “take better care of yourself, Irina, my dear”. But she doesn’t listen. Quarter past eight, you say? I’m worried our Bobik is sick. Why is he so cold? Yesterday he had a fever, and today he’s cold all over... I’m so worried!

ANDREY

It’s nothing, Natasha. The boy is healthy.

NATASHA

But I think I’d better put him on a special diet. I’m worried. And tonight at ten, the carnival people will arrive. It would be better if they didn’t come, Andryusha.

ANDREY

Alright... I don’t know. They were invited, you know.

NATASHA

Our little boy woke up this morning and looked at me, and suddenly smiled – he knew me! So I said, “Bobik, hello! Hello, little sweetheart!” And he laughed. Children understand, they know everything. So, so then, Andryusha, let’s cancel the carnival people.

ANDREY

*(Indecisively.)* Isn't it up to my sisters? It's their house too.

NATASHA

Yes, it's theirs too – I'll tell them. They are so kind... *(She walks.)* For dinner, I ordered you some yoghurt. The doctor says you need to eat only yoghurt, otherwise you won't lose any weight. *(She stops.)* Bobik is cold. I'm worried, he's too cold in his room. Maybe we should move him to another room until the weather warms up. Irina's room, for example, is perfect for a child: it's dry and sunny all day. We need to tell her – for the time being she and Olga can share a room... It won't make any difference to her, she's away all day, she only sleeps here...

*Pause.*

*Andryushanchik,* why are you so quiet?

ANDREY

Nothing, I was thinking... nothing...

NATASHA

Wait... what was I going to say?... Oh, yes. Ferapont from the council is here. He's asking for you.

ANDREY

*(He yawns.)* Send him in.

*NATASHA exits; ANDREY, sits by the candle she left, reads a book. FERAPONT enters; he wears an old tattered overcoat, with the collar raised, ears covered.*

Hello, old friend. What's up?

FERAPONT

The chairman sent a book and some papers. Here... *(He gives the book and parcel.)*

ANDREY

Thanks. Good. Why did you come so late? It's after eight, you know.

FERAPONT

What?

ANDREY

*(Louder.)* I said, you've come late, it's already after eight.

FERAPONT

Uh huh. I came here when it was still light outside but they wouldn't let me in. They said, the master is busy. Well, okay. Busy is busy, I'm not in a hurry – I have nowhere else to go. *(Thinking that ANDREY is asking him about something.)* Huh?

ANDREY

Nothing. (*Examining the book.*) Tomorrow is Friday, we have the day off – well anyway, I'll go in... I'll keep myself busy. It's boring at home...

*Pause.*

Sweet *dyedushka* [granddaddy], how crazy life is – it keeps changing, it lies to us! Today, with nothing better to do, I starting reading this book again – some old university lecture notes of mine, and suddenly I started laughing out loud... My God, I'm the secretary of the *zemstvo* council, the council where Protopopov is chairman, I'm secretary, and the best I can hope for – is to be a member of the *zemstvo* council! Me, a member of the local *zemstvo* council, me, who dreams every night that I'm a professor at Moscow University, a famous scholar, a national hero.

FERAPONT

Sorry, I don't... I can't hear you...

ANDREY

If you could hear me, I wouldn't be talking to you. I need somebody to talk to– my wife doesn't understand, I'm afraid of my sisters for some reason – afraid – maybe they'll laugh at me, make me feel ashamed... I don't drink, I don't like taverns, but oh, what pleasure it would be to be in Moscow, to be sitting at Testov's or at the Grand Moscow, what joy....

FERAPONT

At the council, I heard a story about some merchants eating *blini*, and one guy ate forty *blini*, and I guess he died. Forty or fifty. I don't remember.

ANDREY

In Moscow, you can sit in a big restaurant – you don't know anybody and nobody knows you – yet you don't feel like an outsider. Here you know everybody and everybody knows you, but you feel like a stranger, a stranger... uncomfortable and alone.

FERAPONT

Huh?

*Pause.*

And the same guy was saying – maybe he was lying – it seems they're going to stretch a rope across all of Moscow.

ANDREY

Why?

FERAPONT

I don't know. The guy said...

ANDREY

Nonsense. *(He reads the book.)* Were you ever in Moscow?

FERAPONT

*(After a pause.)* Never. It wasn't God's will, I guess.

*Pause.*

Can I go?

ANDREY

Yes. Be well.

*FERAPONT exits.*

Be well. *(Reading.)* Come tomorrow morning, take these papers...

*Pause.*

He's gone.

*Bell.*

Yes, business... *(He stretches and unhurriedly exits to his room.)*

*From offstage the nurse sings, rocking the baby to sleep. MASHA and VERSHININ enter. While they talk, a maid lights the lamps and candles.*

MASHA

I don't know.

*Pause.*

I don't know. Of course, there's always habit... After father's death, for example, for a long time we couldn't get used to the fact that we no longer had orderlies around. But anyway, it seems to me, and I think I'm being fair – maybe in other places it's not true – but in our town the most respectable, the most noble, the most courteous people – are in the military.

VERSHININ

I'm dying of thirst. I would love some tea.

MASHA

*(Looking at the clock.)* They'll bring it in a minute. I got married when I was eighteen, and I looked up to my husband because he was a teacher, and I had just graduated high school. He seemed so terribly distinguished, so intelligent and important. But now... sadly...

VERSHININ

Ah... yes.

MASHA

I never talk about my husband, I'm used to having him around. But when it comes to civilians in general, people are crude, disrespectful, ill-bred. The rudeness bothers me, it offends me, I suffer when someone is coarse and impolite. I can't stand it when I'm in the company of my husband's colleagues – I really suffer.

VERSHININ

I see... But I think military men are just as crude and boring as civilians – at least around here. Exactly the same! Listening to “intellectuals” – whether civilian or military – all I hear is how worn out they are by their wives, by their houses, by their estates, by their horses... Russians are probably capable of higher thinking – so tell me, why are they always complaining? Why?

MASHA

Why?

VERSHININ

Because they're worn out by their children, by their wives? And because their wives and children are worn out by them?

MASHA

You seem so sad today.

VERSHININ

Maybe. I didn't have any lunch, I haven't eaten since morning. My daughter was a little sick, and

when my daughters are sick, I get worried – I start feeling guilty that they have such a mother. Oh, you should have seen her today! What a fool I am! We started to fight at seven o'clock a.m., and at nine I slammed the door and left.

*Pause.*

I never talk about this. Why is it that I only complain to you? *(He kisses her hand.)* Don't be angry with me. Except for you, I have no one, no one...

*Pause.*

MASHA

The stove is noisy. Just before father's death there was a hum in that stove. Just like this.

VERSHININ

Are you superstitious?

MASHA

Yes.

VERSHININ

That's strange. *(He kisses her hand.)* You're a splendid, marvelous woman. Splendid, marvelous! It's

dark in here, but I can still see the brilliance of your eyes.

MASHA

*(She takes a different chair.)* There's more light over here...

VERSHININ

I love, love, love... Love your eyes, your every movement – I see you in my dreams. Splendid, marvelous woman!

MASHA

*(Quietly laughing)* When you speak to me like this, I don't know why, but I laugh – although in truth it terrifies me. Don't say it again, I beg you... *(In a half-voice)* Oh, please speak... it doesn't matter... *(She covers her face with her hands.)* It doesn't matter... Someone's coming, talk about something else...

*IRINA and TUZENBAKH walk across the hall.*

TUZENBAKH

I have three family names. My name is Baron Tuzenbakh-Krone-Altschauer, but I'm Russian, Russian Orthodox, like you. There's practically no German left in me, except perhaps the patience and stubbornness I bother you with every evening when I walk you home.

IRINA

I'm so tired!

TUZENBAKH

And I will continue to come to the telegraph office and walk you home every evening – I will for ten-twenty years, until you throw me out... (*Seeing MASHA and VERSHININ, joyfully.*) Oh, is that you? Hello.

IRINA

Hooray, I'm home at last. (*To MASHA.*) Just before I left work, a woman comes in and wants to telegraph her brother in Saratov – her son died today, and she can't remember the address. So she sent it without an address, just to Saratov. She was crying. And I was rude to her for no reason at all. "I don't have time," I tell her. I sounded so stupid. Aren't the carnival people coming tonight?

MASHA

Yes.

IRINA

(*She sits in the armchair.*) Ooh, I'm so tired.

TUZENBAKH

(*With a smile.*) When you come home from work, you seem so tiny, so vulnerable...

*Pause.*

IRINA

I'm tired. No, I don't like the telegraph office, I don't like it at all.

MASHA

You've lost too much weight... *(She whistles.)* And gotten younger, you look like a little boy.

TUZENBAKH

That's because of her haircut.

IRINA

I must find another job – this one's not for me. Everything I yearned for, dreamed about — there's none of it in the post office! What is work without poetry, without intellect...

*Tap on the floor.*

The doctor is tapping. *(To TUZENBAKH.)* Dear friend, knock for me. I can't... I'm too tired...

*TUZENBAKH taps on the floor.*

He's coming now. We've got to do something. Yesterday the doctor and Andrey were at the club and they lost again. I heard Andrey lost two hundred rubles.

MASHA

*(Indifferently.)* What are we supposed to do about it!

IRINA

Two weeks ago he lost, he lost in December. The sooner he loses everything, maybe, the sooner we can get out of this town. Good God, I dream about Moscow every night, I'm going completely insane. *(She laughs.)* We'll move away from here in June... February, March, April, May... *(She sighs deeply.)* ... almost half a year!

MASHA

We'd better not let Natasha hear anything about him losing.

IRINA

It doesn't matter to her.

*CHEBUTYKHIN, having just gotten up from bed — he took a nap after dinner — enters the hall and combs his beard, then takes a seat there at the table and takes a newspaper from his pocket.*

MASHA

Here he comes... Did he pay his rent?

IRINA

*(She laughs.)* No. Not a *kopek* in eight months. Apparently he has forgotten.

MASHA

*(She laughs.)* How imperious he is!

*Everyone laughs; pause.*

IRINA

Why are you so quiet, Aleksandr Ignatyich?

VERSHININ

I don't know. I want tea. My kingdom for a cup of tea! I haven't eaten since this morning...

CHEBUTYKHIN

Irina Sergeyevna!

IRINA

What do you want?

CHEBUTYKHIN

Please come here. *Venez ici.*

*IRINA goes and takes a seat at the table.*

I can't live without you.

*IRINA plays Solitaire [card game].*

VERSHININ

What's happening? If they're not bringing the tea, then let's talk.

TUZENBAKH

Let's. About what?

VERSHININ

About what? Let's imagine... the life to come after us, in two hundred-three hundred years.

TUZENBAKH

What? After us... we'll be flying in air balloons, wearing different fashions, and maybe they'll discover a sixth sense and learn how to use it — but life itself will remain the same, life will always be difficult, full of mystery with glimpses of happiness. And in a thousand years man will still say: "akh, life is so hard!" — and just like today, he'll be afraid to die.

VERSHININ

*(Having thought of something.)* How can I explain this? It seems to me, everything on this earth must evolve slowly — in fact it's already evolving before our eyes. In two hundred-three hundred years,

maybe a thousand years – the exact time isn't important – we'll know a new, happy life. Well, of course we won't know it in our lifetime, but for now we'll live, we'll work, we'll suffer, and yes, make it happen – that's what we're striving for, why we exist – to create future happiness.

*MASHA laughs quietly.*

TUZENBAKH

What's the matter with you?

MASHA

I don't know. I haven't stopped laughing all day.

VERSHININ

I've had as much education as you – though it's true, I didn't go to the military academy. I read a great deal – any book I can get my hands on – though they're probably not what I should be reading – but the longer I live, the more I want to learn. My hair is getting gray, I'm practically an old man, and I feel like I don't know anything — akh! But what I do know – and this is the really important thing – we will never know happiness in our lifetime – happiness is not for us... But we must keep on working, working — happiness is for future generations.

*Pause.*

It's not for us...

*FEDOTIK and RODAY appear in the hall; they sit and sing quietly, playing the guitar.*

TUZENBAKH

So according to you we're not even allowed to dream of happiness! But what if I'm happy already!

VERSHININ

No.

TUZENBAKH

*(Clasping his hands and laughing.)* Evidently, we don't agree. Well, how can I convince you?

*MASHA laughs quietly.*

*(Pointing at her.)* Go ahead, laugh! *(To VERSHININ.)* Life won't change in two or three hundred years, in fact it will be the same in a million years. The laws of nature have their own course, which will follow regardless of what you and I think or do. Migratory birds, cranes for example, fly and fly, and whatever thoughts they have, lofty or trivial, they will keep on flying and never know why or where they're going. Whatever the philosophers say, they will keep on flying. So talk all you want, they will still be flying...

MASHA

But what does it all mean?

TUZENBAKH

Mean... It's snowing. What does that mean?

MASHA

It seems to me, we have to believe in something or else life is empty... empty... To live and not know why cranes fly, why children are born, why there are stars in the sky... not to know – why then it's all meaningless...

*Pause.*

VERSHININ

Still, it's a shame youth goes by so fast...

MASHA

You know what Gogol says, it's a long, sad life, my friends.

TUZENBAKH

I must say, it's hard to argue with you, ladies and gentlemen. You are so...

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(Reading the paper.)* Balzac got married in Berdichev.

*IRINA sings quietly.*

I must make a note of that in my little book. *(He makes a note.)* Balzac got married in Berdichev. *(He reads the paper.)*

IRINA

*(Plays Solitaire.)* What was Balzac doing in Russia?

*Pause.*

TUZENBAKH

The die is cast, my friends. Maria Sergeyevna, I am tendering my resignation.

MASHA

I heard. And I can't see anything good will come of it. I hate civilians.

TUZENBAKH

It doesn't matter... *(He rises.)* I'm not a handsome man, so what kind of soldier does that make? Well, yes, it doesn't matter... however... I'm going to work. If I could work just one day in my life, come home in the evening and collapse into bed and fall asleep immediately. *(Walking to the ball.)* I'm sure workers sleep very soundly!

FEDOTIK

*(To IRINA.)* I bought you some colored pencils at Pyzhikov's on Moscow Street. And this little knife...

IRINA

You still treat me like a little girl — Don't you see, I'm all grown up! *(She takes the pencils and knife, joyfully.)* Oh, how lovely!

FEDOTIK

I bought myself a knife... look at this... a blade, another blade, and a third, this one is for picking my ears, these are scissors, this is to clean my toe nails...

RODAY

*(Loudly.)* Doctor, how old are you?

CHEBUTYKHIN

Me? Thirty-two.

*Laughter.*

FEDOTIK

Let me teach you another kind of Solitaire... *(He plays with the cards.)*

*They bring the samovar; ANFISA sits next to the samovar; after a little time passes NATASHA enters and also fusses at the table; SOLYONY enters and, greeting them, takes a seat at the table.*

VERSHININ

It's so windy outside!

MASHA

Yes. I hate winter. I can't even remember what summer was like.

IRINA

Look, I'm going to win! That means we'll be in Moscow soon.

FEDOTIK

No — sorry... You see, the eight has fallen on the two of spades. *(He laughs.)* That means you'll never get to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(Reading the paper.)* Hmmm, Tsitsikar. Smallpox is raging there.

ANFISA

*(Approaching MASHA.)* Masha, have some tea, *matushka* [mama]. *(To VERSHININ.)* Please, your excellency... forgive me, my dear, I forgot your name...

MASHA

Bring it here, *nyanya*. I won't go in there.

IRINA

*Nyanya!*

ANFISA

I'm coming, I'm coming...

NATASHA

*(To SOLYONY)*. Little babies understand everything. I say to Bobik, "Hi, sweetness!" And the way he focuses right on me! I know you think it's because I'm his mother, but believe me, he's an extraordinary baby.

SOLYONY

If that child were mine, I would sauté him in a frying pan and eat him for supper. *(He goes with a glass to the parlor and sits in the corner.)*

NATASHA

*(Covering her face with her hands.)* Disgusting man!

MASHA

Happy is he who doesn't even notice the winter. I'm sure if I were in Moscow, I would be

completely indifferent to the weather...

VERSHININ

The other day I was reading the diary of a French minister who is in prison. He had been convicted in Panama. He writes about the birds he sees from his prison window with such rapture – and he's sure he never noticed them before, when he was a minister. Now, of course, the minute he's released, he'll never notice them again. In the same way, when you live in Moscow, you'll never really see it. There is no such thing as happiness, there is only the desire for it.

TUZENBAKH

*(He takes a small box from the table.)* Where's the candy?

IRINA

Solyony ate it.

TUZENBAKH

All of it?

ANFISA

*(Pouring tea.)* There's a letter for you, dear sir.

VERSHININ

For me? *(He takes the letter.)* It's from my daughters. *(He reads.)* Yes, of course... Forgive me, Maria

Sergeyevna, I must sneak out of here. I won't have any tea. *(He rises agitatedly.)* These endless scenes...

MASHA

What is it? Is it a secret?

VERSHININ

*(Quietly.)* My wife poisoned herself again. I must go. I'll leave quietly. God, it's so horrible. *(He kisses MASHA's hand.)* My dear, sweet, lovely woman... I'll just leave quietly... *(He exits.)*

ANFISA

Where's he going? I just poured him tea... What's going on...

MASHA

*(Becoming angry.)* Stop it! Leave me alone! You never shut up... *(She goes with her teacup to the table.)* I'm sick of you, old woman!

ANFISA

What's the matter? Dear heart!

ANDREY'S VOICE

Anfisa!

ANFISA

*(She teases.)* Anfisa! And he just sits there... *(She exits.)*

MASHA

*(At the table in the hall, angrily.)* I want to sit here! *(She messes up the cards on the table.)* You're taking up the whole table with your cards! Just drink your tea!

IRINA

Mashka, you're being very nasty.

MASHA

If I'm very nasty, don't talk to me. Don't touch me!

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(Laughing.)* Don't touch her, don't touch...

MASHA

You're sixty years old, but you act like a little boy — always making some goddam trouble.

NATASHA

*(Sighing.)* Dear Masha, don't speak that way in public. You are so beautiful and the truth is, you would be very popular in fashionable society, if it weren't for that mouth of yours. *Je vous prie, pardonnez moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.* ("I beg you pardon me, Marie, but you

sometimes have course manners.”)

TUZENBAKH

*(Holding back laughter.)* Give me... give me... There – I see some... cognac...

NATASHA

*Il parait, que mon Bobik déjà ne dort pas,* he woke up. My sweet little boy is feeling unwell today. I must go to him, *pardonnez moi...* *(She exits.)*

IRINA

Where did Aleksandr Ignatievich go?

MASHA

Home. Problems with his wife again.

TUZENBAKH

*(He goes to SOLYONY, with a decanter of cognac.)* You’re always sitting alone, always thinking – but about what? Well, let’s make up. Let’s drink some cognac.

*They drink.*

I’ve had such an urge to play the piano all day – I want to play all sorts of silly things... Well, be that as it may...

SOLYONY

Why make up? I wasn't fighting with you.

TUZENBAKH

You always make me feel as though something's gone wrong between us. You must agree you have a very strange personality.

SOLYONY

*(Declaiming.)* Yes, I'm strange, but who isn't strange! "Don't be angry, Aleko!"

TUZENBAKH

Who's Aleko...

*Pause.*

SOLYONY

When I'm alone with someone, then I'm all right. I'm like everybody else — but in company I get depressed, shy and... I say all kinds of crazy things. Well, in any case, I'm more honest and noble than many, many other people. And I can prove it.

TUZENBAKH

I get so angry with you, you're always picking on me when we're with other people, but I still like

you somehow. Well, be that as it may... Let's get drunk. Let's drink!

SOLYONY

Yes, let's drink.

*They drink.*

I have nothing against you, baron. But I'm a lot like Lermontov, don't you think? (*Quietly.*) I even look a little like Lermontov... so they say... (*He takes a flask from his pocket with perfume and pours it on his hands.*)

TUZENBAKH

I'm resigning from the army. *Basta!* I've been thinking about it for five years and now I have finally decided to do it. I will go to work.

SOLYONY

(*Declaiming.*) "Don't be angry, Aleko"... Oh, cut it out with your ridiculous fantasies...

*While they talk, ANDREY enters with a book quietly and sits by a candle.*

TUZENBAKH

I will work.

CHEBUTYKHIN

(*Walking to the parlor with IRINA.*) And the food was genuinely from the Caucasus: soup with onions, and for the entrée – *chekhartma* meat.

SOLYONY

*Cheremsha* is not meat at all, but a vegetable like onions.

CHEBUTYKHIN

No, my angel. *Chekhartma* is not an onion, but an entrée from mutton.

SOLYONY

No, I'm telling you, *cheremsha* – is onion.

CHEBUTYKHIN

And I'm telling you, *chekartma* – is mutton.

SOLYONY

And I insist, *cheremsha* – is onion.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Why am I arguing with you! You've never been to the Caucasus and you haven't eaten *chekhartma*.

SOLYONY

I didn't eat it, because I can't stand it. *Cheremsha* smells like garlic.

ANDREY

*(Imploring.)* Enough, gentlemen! I beg you!

TUZENBAKH

When are the carnival people coming?

IRINA

They promised by nine; that's right now.

TUZENBAKH

*(He embraces ANDREY and sings.)* *Akh, vy seni, moi seni, seni novye moi...* [ah you hall of welcome, my new welcoming hall...]

ANDREY

*(He dances and sings.)* *Seni novye, klenovye...* [welcoming hall, wonderful hall...]

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(He dances.) Re shetchay – e!* [lacy trellised...]

*Laughter.*

TUZENBAKH

*(He kisses ANDREY.)* Goddam it, let's have a drink. Andryusha, let's drink to you. And I'm going to go with you, Andryusha — to Moscow — to the university.

SOLYONY

To which university? Moscow has two universities.

ANDREY

There's only one university in Moscow.

SOLYONY

I'm telling you – two.

ANDREY

Alright, let there be three. That's better yet.

SOLYONY

In Moscow there are two universities!

*Grumbling and catcalls.*

In Moscow there are two universities: the old one and the new one. And if you don't like to listen to me, if what I say irritates you so much, then I won't talk. I can even go to another room... *(He walks to one of the doors.)*

TUZENBAKH

Bravo, bravo! *(He laughs.)* Ladies and gentlemen, let's begin, I'm going to play the piano now. That Solyony is so strange... *(He sits at the piano and plays a waltz.)*

MASHA

*(She dances the waltz alone.)* The baron is drunk, the baron is drunk, the baron is drunk!

*NATASHA enters.*

NATASHA

*(To CHEBUTYKHIN.)* Ivan Romanych! *(She says something to CHEBUTYKHIN, then quietly exits.)*

*CHEBUTYKHIN touches TUZENBAKH on the shoulder and whispers something to him.*

IRINA

What is it?

CHEBUTYKHIN

It's time we left. Be well.

TUZENBAKH

Good night. It's time to go.

IRINA

I'm sorry but... what about the carnival people?...

ANDREY

*(Embarrassed.)* They won't be coming. You see, my sweet sister, Natasha says Bobik isn't feeling well, and so... to tell you the truth, I don't know, it makes no difference to me.

IRINA

*(Shrugging her shoulders.)* Well, if Bobik isn't feeling well —

MASHA

We've had it! They're running us out of here, we've got to leave. *(To IRINA.)* If Bobik isn't sick,

then believe me, she is... Here! *(She taps her finger on her forehead.)* Small town bitch!

*ANDREY exits through the right door to his own room, CHEBUTYKHIN follows him; they bid farewell in the hall.*

FEDOTIK

What a shame! I intended to spend the whole evening here, but if the little boy is sick, then, of course... But where can I go with a guitar...

RODAY

*(Loudly.)* I took a long nap today on purpose, so I could dance all night. It's only nine o'clock, you know!

MASHA

Let's go outside, we can talk there. We'll decide what to do next.

*"Farewell! Have fun!" is heard. TUZENBAKH's happy laughter is heard. Everyone exits. ANFISA and the maid clear the table, put out the lights. The nurse can be heard singing. ANDREY in an overcoat and hat and CHEBUTYKHIN quietly enter.*

CHEBUTYKHIN

I never had time to get married — whoosh, life just flew by — and the truth is I was always madly in love with your *matushka* [mama], who was of course already married...

ANDREY

There's no reason to get married — it's boring.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Yes, probably – but then there's loneliness... Whatever you want to say, loneliness is a terrible thing, my dear friend... However... what's the difference... it's all the same!

ANDREY

Let's hurry.

CHEBUTYKHIN

What's the rush? We have time.

ANDREY

I'm afraid my wife will see me.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Ah!

ANDREY

I won't play tonight. I'll just sit and watch. I'm feeling a little unwell... Ivan Romanych, what should

I do for shortness of breath?

CHEBUTYKHIN

Why ask me! I don't remember, my dear friend. I don't know.

ANDREY

Let's go through the kitchen.

*They exit.*

*The doorbell, then another ring; voices are heard, laughter.*

IRINA

*(She enters.)* Who's there?

ANFISA

*(In a whisper.)* The carnival folks.

*Doorbell.*

IRINA

Tell them no one's home, *nyanechka* [nana]. Tell them to forgive us.

*ANFISA exits. IRINA walks about the room thinking; she is agitated. SOLYONY enters.*

SOLYONY

*(Perplexed.)* No one here... Where is everyone?

IRINA

They went home.

SOLYONY

Strange. You're alone here?

IRINA

Yes, alone.

*Pause.*

Good night.

SOLYONY

Tonight I've been very tactless. But you aren't like the others, you're sublime and pure, you see the

truth... You alone — only you alone — can understand me. I love you, deeply, love you endlessly...

IRINA

Good night! Please leave.

SOLYONY

I can't live without you. (*Going to her.*) Oh, my bliss! (*On the verge of tears.*) Oh, happiness! Splendid, magical, amazing eyes, I have never seen such eyes in a woman...

IRINA

(*Coldly.*) Stop it, Vasili Vasilych!

SOLYONY

This is the first time I can speak of my love for you — I know I must be out of my mind — on another planet. (*He rubs his forehead.*) Well, it doesn't matter. You can't force someone to love you, of course... But I cannot have any rivals... can not... I swear to you by all that is holy, I will kill any rivals... Oh, you beautiful woman!

*NATASHA passes through with a candle.*

NATASHA

(*She looks in one door, in another and passes by the door leading to her husband's room.*) Andrey's in there. I'll let him read. *Pardonnez moi*, Vasili Vasilych, I didn't know you were here, I'm in my dressing gown.

SOLYONY

It makes no difference to me. Farewell! (*He exits.*)

NATASHA

Oh, you're so tired, my poor, darling little girl! (*She kisses IRINA.*) You ought to go to bed earlier.

IRINA

Is Bobik in bed?

NATASHA

Yes, in bed. But not sleeping well. By the way, darling, I wanted to tell you – since you're never home... Bobik's bedroom is cold and damp. But your room is so perfect for a child. Sweetie, please, move to Olya's room for a while!

IRINA

(*Not understanding.*) Where?

*A troika with little bells is heard pulling up to the house.*

NATASHA

You and Olya will be in one room, so that Bobik will have your room. He's such a sweet boy. Today I said to him: "Bobik, you are mine! Mine!" And he looked at me with his dear little eyes.

*Bell.*

It must be Olga. She's so late!

*The MAID goes to NATASHA and whispers something in her ear.*

Protopopov? What a crazy man! Protopopov's here, he wants to take me for a ride in his troika. *(She laughs.)* Men are so silly...

*Bell.*

Uh oh, someone else is here. Maybe I'll go for a little ride with him – maybe just fifteen minutes... *(To the MAID.)* Tell him I'm coming.

*Bell.*

More people?... Oh, that must be Olga. *(She exits.)*

*The MAID runs out; IRINA sits thinking; KULYGIN and OLGA enter, behind them, VERSHININ.*

KULYGIN

Well, for goodness sake. I thought you were having a party.

VERSHININ

This is funny. I left about a half hour ago – just a half hour ago – and they were waiting for the carnival people...

IRINA

Everyone left.

KULYGIN

Masha too? Where did she go? And why is Protopopov waiting downstairs in a troika? Who's he waiting for?

IRINA

Don't ask me... I'm tired.

KULYGIN

Well, Miss *Kapriẏnitsa* [moody]...

OLGA

The meeting just ended. I'm worn out. Our headmistress is sick, and I'm stuck taking her place. My head, oh my head hurts, my head... (*She sits.*) Andrey lost two hundred rubles at cards yesterday...

The whole town is talking about it...

KULYGIN

Yes, and I too am tired from that meeting. (*He sits.*)

VERSHININ

My wife took it into her head to give me a fright — she nearly poisoned herself. Everything turned out alright, and I'm fine now. I can relax... But it looks like we need to get out of here — yes? Well, permit me to wish you all the best. Fyodor Ilych, let's go somewhere! I can't go home, I can't... Let's go!

KULYGIN

No, I'm tired. I'm not going. (*He rises.*) I'm tired. Did my wife go home?

IRINA

Probably.

KULYGIN

(*He kisses IRINA's hand.*) Good night. Tomorrow and the day after I'll be able to rest all day. All the best! (*He goes.*) I really wanted some tea. I counted on spending the evening in pleasant company and — *o, fallacem hominum spem!*.. (“Oh, illusory human hope!”) Accusative case for exclamations...

VERSHININ

So that means I'll have to go alone. *(He exits behind KULYGIN, whistling.)*

OLGA

My head hurts, oh my head... Andrey lost... everyone's talking... I'm going to lie down. *(She goes.)*  
Tomorrow I'm free... Oh, my god, what a lovely thought! Tomorrow I'm free, the day after that I'm  
free... My head hurts, my head... *(She exits.)*

IRINA

*(Alone.)* Gone. They've all left.

*On the street an accordion, the nurse sings a song.*

NATASHA

*(In a fur coat and hat she walks across the hall; her MAID trails behind her.)* I'll be home in a half-hour. I'm  
only going for a little ride. *(She exits.)*

IRINA

*(Alone, she is miserable.)* Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!

*Curtain.*

### ACT 3

*Two and one-half years later. OLGA and IRINA's room. To the left and to the right are beds, screened off from one another. It's after two a.m. Offstage fire alarm bells sound. They've been ringing for a while. No one has gone to bed in the house. MASHA lies on the couch, clothed, as usual, in black.*

*OLGA and ANFISA enter.*

ANFISA

Now, they're sitting under the stairs... I says to them – “you're welcome to come upstairs, don't worry about it, it's all right to come upstairs” – they're crying, “Where's our *papasha* [papa]? God forbid he was burned up”. Can you believe it! And in the courtyard there's someone walking around naked...

OLGA

*(She takes clothes from the closet.)* Here take this grey one... And this one... The blouse too... And take this skirt, *nyanechka*. My god, what's going on? Kirsanovsky Street is completely in flames – is it true? Take this... And this... *(She throws clothes into ANFISA's arms.)* The poor Vershinins had such a scare... Their house nearly burned. Let them stay the night with us... They mustn't go home... Everything of Fedotik's burned, all gone...

ANFISA

You should call Ferapont, Olyushka, I won't be able...

OLGA

*(Calls into the hallway.)* No one's answering... *(At the door.)* Come up here, anybody!

*Through the open door a window is visible, red from the fire's glow; the fire brigade passing near the house is heard.*

Oh, this is so horrible! And so irritating!

*FERAPONT enters.*

Here, bring these downstairs... Give them to the Kolotilin girls. And take this...

FERAPONT

At your service, ma'am. In 1812 Moscow burned too. My Lord God! The French were surprised.

OLGA

Go, be off...

FERAPONT

At your service, ma'am. *(He exits.)*

OLGA

Nyanechka, sweetheart, give everything away. We don't need anything, give it all away, nyanechka... I'm so tired, I can barely stand on my feet... The Vershinins can't go home... The girls can sleep in the parlor, Aleksandr Ignatievich can stay at the baron's... Fedotik can also stay with the baron, or let him stay with us – in the hallway... The doctor got drunk on purpose – so horribly drunk, so no one can stay with him. And put Vershinin's wife in the parlor.

ANFISA

*(Wearily.)* Dear Olyushka, don't send me away! Please don't send me away!

OLGA

What are you talking about, *nyanya*? No one is sending you away.

ANFISA

*(She lays her head on her chest.)* Mine own, my precious darling, I work so hard, so hard... Just when I'm getting weaker, people say – go! Where will I go? Where? I'm eighty years old – nearly eighty-two...

OLGA

Sit for a minute, *nyanechka*... You're tired, poor darling... *(She helps her to sit.)* Rest, my dear. How pale you are!

*NATASHA enters.*

NATASHA

Everyone's saying we need to establish a society for the fire victims as soon as possible. Why not? It's an excellent idea. Yes, let's face it, we need to help poor people, that's the responsibility of the rich. Bobik and Sophochka are fast asleep, as if nothing was happening. There are so many people everywhere, everywhere you go, the house is full. And there's influenza spreading in town. I'm afraid the children might catch it.

OLGA

*(Not listening to her.)* You can't even see the fire from here. It's so peaceful...

NATASHA

Yes... I must look a mess. *(In front of the mirror.)* They say I've put on weight... but it's not true! Not at all! Oops, Masha is sleeping. She was so tired, poor... *(Coldly to ANFISA.)* Don't you dare sit in my presence! Get up! Get out of here!

*ANFISA exits; pause.*

And why you still keep that old woman — I just don't get it!

OLGA

*(Struck dumb.)* Excuse me, I don't think I understand...

NATASHA

She doesn't do anything. She's a peasant, she should live in the village... You are spoiling her! I like order in a house! We must get rid of everything that's unnecessary. *(She strokes OLGA's cheek.)* You poor thing, you're so tired! Our headmistress is tired! And when my Sophochka grows up and enters high school, I'll be afraid of you.

OLGA

I will not be headmistress.

NATASHA

You will be, Olyechka. It's decided.

OLGA

I'll refuse. I cannot... I don't have the strength... *(She drinks water.)* You treated *nyanya* so rudely just now... Pardon me, I simply can't bear that... I feel like I'm going to faint...

NATASHA

*(Anxiously.)* Oh forgive me, Olya, forgive me... I don't want to distress you.

*MASHA rises, takes the pillow and exits, angry.*

OLGA

Please understand, my dear... perhaps you can't understand this, but we have been brought up to...  
I cannot bear such rudeness – I'm feeling faint... I'm simply falling apart!

NATASHA

Forgive me, forgive me... *(She kisses her.)*

OLGA

Even the slightest discourtesy – any indelicately uttered word – upsets me...

NATASHA

I often say the wrong thing, it's true, but you have to agree, my sweet, she should live in the village.

OLGA

She has been with us for thirty years.

NATASHA

But you must see she can't work anymore! Either you really don't get this, or you don't want to get it. She can't work. All she does is sleep or sit.

OLGA

Then let her sit.

NATASHA

*(Astonished.)* Let her sit? She's a servant! *(On the verge of tears.)* I don't understand you, Olya. I have a nanny and a wet-nurse, a maid, a cook... why do we still need that old woman? Why?

*Offstage alarms sound.*

OLGA

I've aged ten years tonight.

NATASHA

We need to reach an agreement, Olya. Once and for all... You're at the high school, I'm at home – you are a scholar, I take care of this house. And if I say something about the servants, then I know what I'm saying; I know, what I-am-say-ing... And I want that old woman out of here tomorrow... *(she stamps her feet)* that witch!.. Don't you dare make me angry! Don't you dare! *(Regaining control of herself.)* It's true, if you don't move downstairs, we'll always be fighting. It's just terrible.

*KULYGIN enters.*

KULYGIN

Where's Masha? It's time to go home. They say the fire is dying down. (*Stretching.*) Only one block burned, but it was so windy, you know, and at first we were afraid the whole town would burn. (*He sits.*) I'm tired. My dear Olyechka... I often think — if not for Masha, then I would've married you, Olyechka. You're so good... I'm exhausted. (*He listens.*)

OLGA

What?

KULYGIN

And to add to our troubles, the doctor's drunk again — completely pie-eyed! (*He rises.*) Uh oh, he's coming up here... Yes... Hear him? Yes... (*He laughs.*) What a character! I'll give him a scare. (*He goes to the wardrobe in the corner.*) What an idiot...

OLGA

For two years he was sober, and now suddenly he goes and gets drunk... (*She moves with NATASHA upstage.*)

*CHEBUTYKHIN enters.*

CHEBUTYKHIN

(*Morosely.*) The hell with them... all of them... They think just because I'm a doctor, I can treat any illness, but of course I know absolutely nothing, I've forgotten everything I knew, I remember

absolutely nothing.

*OLGA and NATASHA, unnoticed by him, exit.*

The hell with them. Last Wednesday I treated a woman in Zasya – she died, and I am responsible — Yes... maybe I knew something twenty-five years ago, but now I remember nothing. Nothing... My head is absolutely empty, my heart is cold as ice. Maybe I'm not even a person – I only look like a person – I have arms and legs... and a head. But maybe, I don't really exist – maybe it only seems like I exist because I walk around, eat, sleep. *(He cries.)* Oh, if only I didn't exist! *(He stops crying, morosely.)* What the hell... The day before yesterday at the club, they were talking about Shakespeare, Voltaire... I never read them – absolutely never – but I pretended that I had. And everyone else did too. So vulgar! So dishonorable! And all I could think about was that woman who died on Wednesday. I couldn't stop thinking... and I've been haunted by her, and I felt so disgusting, so vile... So I left and had a drink...

*IRINA, VERSHININ, and TUZENBAKH enter; TUZENBAKH is wearing civilian clothes, new and fashionable.*

IRINA

Let's sit here. No one's going to come in here.

VERSHININ

If it weren't for the soldiers, the whole town would have burned. Such great work! *(He rubs his hands with pleasure.)* Excellent men! Akh, a job well done!

KULYGIN

*(Walking up to him.)* What time is it, sir?

TUZENBAKH

It's after three already. It's getting light.

IRINA

Everyone is just sitting in the hall, no one is leaving. And your Solyony is sitting there too... *(To CHEBUTYKHIN.)* Doctor, you should go to sleep.

CHEBUTYKHIN

It's nothing, *madame... Merci, madame. (He combs his beard.)*

KULYGIN

You've certainly had quite a bit to drink, Ivan Romanych! *(He claps him on the shoulder.) In vino veritas,* as the ancients would say.

TUZENBAKH

Everyone is asking me to organize a concert to benefit the fire victims.

IRINA

Well, who's available...

TUZENBAKH

I think we can do it. For example, Marya Sergeyevna plays the piano beautifully.

KULYGIN

Beautifully!

IRINA

But she's completely forgotten. She hasn't played in three years... maybe four.

TUZENBAKH

There's no one in this town who understands music, not one soul, but I do. I understand it so well, and I promise you, Marya Sergeyevna plays splendidly, she's gifted.

KULYGIN

You're right, baron. I love her very much, my Masha. She's a splendid girl.

TUZENBAKH

What must it be like to play so perfectly and at the same time to know that no one – no one – understands you!

KULYGIN

*(Sighs.)* Yes... But would it be proper for her to take part in a concert?

*Pause.*

Of course, ladies and gentlemen, I don't know anything. Perhaps it would be good. Our headmaster is a good man, a wonderful man, and highly intelligent, and he has a number of strong opinions... Of course, it's none of his business, but all the same – if you'd like – I'll talk with him.

*CHEBUTYKHIN takes a china clock in his hands and examines it.*

VERSHININ

I got so filthy at the fire – disgusting!

*Pause.*

Yesterday I happened to hear that our brigade is moving somewhere far away. Some say to *Tsarskoe Polskoye* [Tsarist Poland], some say east to China.

TUZENBAKH

I heard that too. Well? Then the town will be completely empty.

IRINA

And we'll leave!

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(Drops the clock, which smashes).* Bye, bye...

*Pause; everyone is distressed and confused.*

KULYGIN

*(He picks up fragments.)* To break such a precious object – akh, Ivan Romanych, Ivan Romanych! F minus for conduct! You get an F minus for conduct!

IRINA

That was mama's clock.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Maybe... Mama's – so it was mama's. Maybe I didn't break it. Maybe it only looks like I broke it. Maybe, we only think we exist, but in fact we don't. I don't know anything, no one knows anything. *(Through the door.)* Has anybody noticed? Natasha is having a little romance with Protopopov, but you don't see it... You sit there and see nothing, while Natasha's having a little romance with Protopopov... *(He sings.)* "Here's a fig for you..." *(He exits.)*

VERSHININ

Yes... *(He laughs.)* This is all so strange!

*Pause.*

When the fire started, I ran home as fast as I could. When I got closer I could see – our home was safe and sound and out of danger, but my two daughters were standing in the doorway – in their nightgowns – their mother nowhere to be seen – and people were running around, horses everywhere – and the girls were scared to death. I don't know – my heart broke when I saw those faces. My god, I thought, what agony is still ahead for these girls – for the rest of their lives! I grabbed them, and all I could think about was the agony ahead for them!

*Alarm bell; pause.*

I rushed them over here, and their mother was here, screaming, angry...

*MASHA enters with her pillow and sits on the couch.*

And when my daughters were standing in the doorway just in their nightgowns, barefoot, and the street was alight with fire, and with terrible noise everywhere, then I remembered something that happened many years ago, when we were besieged by the enemy — pillaging and setting fires everywhere... and I suddenly realized there was no difference between then and now! But with a little time, some two-three hundred years from now, they will look at our life with horror, or maybe they'll laugh at us – they'll see our lives as ridiculous and strange. Oh, what a life that will be, what a

life! (*He laughs.*) Forgive me, I'm philosophizing again. But permit me to continue, ladies and gentlemen. I'm in the mood for philosophy...

*Pause.*

It's as if we're all asleep. Yes, what a life it will be! Just try to picture it... there will be people like you in this town – in about three generations – the population growing, always growing – and the time will come when it'll be just as you fervently hoped for, when people will be so much better than we are... (*He laughs.*) Today I'm in such a strange mood. I feel so wild. (*He sings.*) "I love both young and old, we must surrender..." (*He laughs.*)

MASHA

Tram-tam-tam...

VERSHININ

Tram-tam...

MASHA

Tra-ta-ta?

VERSHININ

Tra-ta-ta. (*He laughs.*)

*Enter FEDOTIK.*

FEDOTIK

*(He dances)* Gone, gone! Everything's gone – wiped clean...

*Laughter.*

IRINA

Are you joking? Is everything burned?

FEDOTIK

*(He laughs.)* Everything gone. Nothing's left. My guitar's burned, my photographs burned, and all of my letters... I wanted to give you a notebook – but it burned too.

*Enter SOLYONY.*

IRINA

No, please, leave, Vasilii Vasilyich. You're not allowed in here.

SOLYONY

Why is the baron allowed and I'm not?

VERSHININ

We must leave – really. How’s the fire going?

SOLYONY

They say it’s dying down. No, it’s positively astounding to me that that baron is allowed and I’m not  
— *(He takes a flask of perfume and sprinkles himself.)*

VERSHININ

Tram-tam-tam.

MASHA

Tram-tam.

VERSHININ

*(He laughs, to SOLYONY.)* Let’s go downstairs.

SOLYONY

Very well, sir, but I will remember this. *(Looking at TUZENBAKH.)* *Тысп, тысп, тысп...*

*He exits with VERSHININ and FEDOTIK.*

IRINA

Solyony walked in and suddenly the room was filled with smoke... (*Bewildered.*) The baron is sleeping! Baron! Baron!

TUZENBAKH

(*Waking.*) I'm so tired... The brick factory... I know I sound like I'm raving, but it's true – I'm starting work soon in the brick factory, work... I've already had an interview. (*Gently to IRINA.*) You are so brilliant, beautiful, charming... I can feel your brilliance brightening the dark sky, like the sun... I know you're sad, you're dissatisfied with your life... But come away with me, let's work together!

MASHA

Nikolai Lvovich, get out of here.

TUZENBAKH

(*Laughing.*) Are you here too? Really? I can't see you. (*He kisses IRINA's hand.*) Goodbye, I'm leaving... I look at you now, and I remember your twentieth birthday, when you were cheerful, happy, and we were talking about the joy of labor... Oh how happy I was! Where's it gone? (*He kisses her hand.*) You have tears in your eyes. Go to sleep, it's almost light outside... morning is on its way... If only I could just give my life for yours!

MASHA

Nikolai Lvovich, get out! That's enough...

TUZENBAKH

I'm leaving... *(He leaves.)*

MASHA

*(She lies down.)* Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULYGIN

Huh?

MASHA

You should go home.

KULYGIN

My sweet Masha, my dear Masha...

IRINA

She's tired. Let her rest, Fyodya.

KULYGIN

I'll go now... My wife is good, splendid... I love you, my one and only...

MASHA

*(Angrily.) Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.*

KULYGIN

*(He laughs.)* No, isn't she marvelous! I've been married to you for seven years, but it feels like yesterday. My word of honor. No, it's true, you are a marvelous woman. I'm happy, I am happy!

MASHA

I'm sick to death of you, sick, sick... *(She sits up.)* And I can't stop thinking about – such a disgraceful situation. Can't get it out of my head and I can't keep silent anymore. It's about Andrey... He's mortgaged our house to the bank, and his wife grabbed all the money, but you realize of course, this house doesn't belong just to him – it belongs to all four of us! He should know better – if there's an ounce of decency left in him.

KULYGIN

Why are you talking about this, Masha! What's it to you? Andryusha is in debt everywhere, god bless him.

MASHA

I don't care, it's a disgrace. *(She lies down.)*

KULYGIN

We aren't poor. I work, I teach at the high school, then I give private lessons... I'm an honest man.

Simple... *Omnia mea mecum porto*, as they say, “Everything of mine I carry with me”.

MASHA

I don’t need anything, it’s just the injustice that gets to me.

*Pause.*

Go home, Fyodor.

KULYGIN

*(He kisses her.)* You’re tired, rest for a half-hour, and I’ll sit downstairs and wait. Sleep... *(He walks.)*  
I’m happy, I’m happy, I’m completely happy. *(He exits.)*

IRINA

Really, Andrey’s become so shallow, so boring, so old – all from being around that woman! There was a time he was studying to be a professor, and only yesterday he was bragging about his new position in the local *zemsko* council. He’s a member of the council, and Protopopov is the chairman... Everyone in town is talking, laughing, and he’s the only one who doesn’t know anything, doesn’t see... While everyone was running around because of the fire, he was sitting by himself in his room and paying no attention whatsoever. He sits and plays the violin. *(Nervously.)* Oh, it’s so awful, it’s just awful, awful! *(She cries.)* I can’t, I can’t bear it any longer!.. I just can’t!..

*OLGA enters, tidies up around her little table.*

*(Loudly sobs.)* Oh, throw me out of here, just throw me out, I can't take it anymore...

OLGA

*(Frightened.)* What's wrong, what's wrong? Darling...

IRINA

*(Sobbing.)* Where? Where did my life go? Where is it? Oh, my god, my god! I've forgotten everything, I've forgotten... I feel so confused... I don't remember the Italian for window – or even ceiling... I'm forgetting everything, every day I forget more – and life is racing past me – I'll never get it back, never... we'll never go to Moscow... I can see that, we'll never go...

OLGA

Sweetheart, darling...

IRINA

*(Restraining herself.)* Oh, I'm so unhappy... I can't really work, I can't stand to work. Enough! Enough! I wasted my life in the telegraph office, and now I work for the town council and I detest it — I hate everything they give me to do, I hate... I'm twenty-four years old already — I've been working a long time, but my brain has dried up, there's nothing left of it, I've become stupid, old, and nothing, nothing, nothing whatsoever feels good – time keeps passing and everyday I'm moving away from the life I imagined – always moving further and further, toward some dangerous edge. I'm in despair, I'm truly in despair! And why am I still alive? Why haven't I killed myself – I don't understand...

OLGA

Don't cry, my little girl, don't cry... You're making me suffer.

IRINA

I'm not crying, no, I'm not crying... Enough... See, I've stopped crying. Enough... Enough!

OLGA

Darling, I tell you as your sister, as your friend — if you want my advice, marry the baron!

*IRINA quietly cries.*

You know you respect him, you value him highly ... It's true, he's not handsome, but he's so decent, kind... You don't have to marry for love, but just out of duty. That's what I think — I would absolutely marry without love. I would marry anyone who asked me, it makes no difference, as long as he's a decent man. I would even marry an old man...

IRINA

I always thought we'd move to Moscow, and there I would meet my true love. I dreamed about him, loved him so... But it all turned out to be nonsense, everything — nonsense...

OLGA

*(She embraces her sister.)* My sweet, wonderful sister, I understand everything; when baron Nikolai Lvovich resigned from the military and came to see us in his civilian clothes, he looked so unattractive to me – I even began to cry... He asked me, “why are you crying?” How could I tell

him! But if God wants you to marry him, I would be happy. And then everything would be so different — completely different.

*NATASHA with a candle walks across the stage from the right door to the left silently.*

MASHA

*(She sits).* Doesn't she look like she started the fire herself!

OLGA

Oh, Masha, you're so silly. The silliest person in our family – that's you! I'm sorry, forgive me, please.

*Pause.*

MASHA

I want to confess to you, my dear sisters. My heart is bursting to tell... I'll tell you and nobody else... I'll tell you this minute. *(Quietly.)* Here's my secret – I have to tell you everything... I can't be silent anymore...

*Pause.*

I love – I love – I love that man... You just saw him... Well, there's no other way to put it, I love Vershinin...

OLGA

*(She goes behind her screen.)* Stop it. I can't hear you anyway.

MASHA

What can I do? *(She clasps her head.)* At first I thought he was so odd – I even felt sorry for him... but then I fell in love with him... I fell in love with his voice, his words, with his sadness, his two little daughters...

OLGA

*(Behind the screen.)* I can't hear you, so stop it! Whatever foolishness you're talking about, I can't hear any of it.

MASHA

Oh god, you're the strange one, Olya. I love him – ah but such is my fate. Such is my destiny... He loves me... It's terrible, isn't it? I know it's terrible — *(She pulls IRINA by the arm, draws her to herself.)* Oh, my sweet girl... don't worry, we'll get through this somehow – whatever life has in store for us... When you read about falling in love in some novel, it all seems so obvious and trite, but when it happens to you, you think no one has ever experienced this before, no one can possibly understand what you feel... My dear, sweet sisters... I've said it all – now I'll be quiet... Now I'll be like Gogol's madman... shhh... shhh...

*Enter ANDREY, behind him FERAPONT.*

ANDREY

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

FERAPONT

*(At the doors, impatiently.)* Andrey Sergeyich, I've already told you ten times.

ANDREY

In the first place, I'm not Andrey Sergeyich to you, but your Honor!

FERAPONT

The firemen, your Honor, are asking permission to drive through the garden to the river. Otherwise they have to go far, way around – they're wasting time.

ANDREY

Fine. Tell them, it's fine.

*FERAPONT exits.*

I'm so tired. Where's Olga?

*OLGA appears behind the screen.*

I came to see you, give me the key to the cupboard, I lost mine. You have the little key.

*OLGA gives him the key silently. IRINA goes behind her screen; pause.*

Such a huge fire! But it's quiet now. God knows, Ferapont makes me angry – I said something stupid... Your Honor...

*Pause.*

Why are you so quiet, Olya?

*Pause.*

It's about time you put an end to this foolishness and stop this ridiculous pouting. Ah, Masha, you're here, Irina is too – ah, good – let's have this out, once and for all. What do you have against me? What?

OLGA

Stop it, Andryusha. We'll talk about it tomorrow. *(Agitated.)* It's been an excruciating night!

ANDREY

*(He is very embarrassed.)* Calm down. I'm completely calm myself. I'm asking you: what do you have

against me? Tell me honestly.

VERSHININ's voice: "Tram-tam-tam!"

MASHA

*(She rises, loudly)* Tra-ta-ta! *(To OLGA.)* Goodbye Olya, god be with you. *(She goes behind the screen, kisses IRINA.)* Sleep well... Bye bye, Andrey. Leave them alone, they're exhausted... you'll "have it out" tomorrow ... *(She exits.)*

OLGA

Can't we put this off until tomorrow?... *(She goes behind her screen.)* We've got to get some sleep.

ANDREY

I just have something to say and then I'll leave. Now... First of all, you seem to have something against my wife, Natasha, and I've noticed this from our wedding day. If you want to know the truth, Natasha is a wonderful, honest person, true and noble – that's my opinion. I love and respect my wife, you understand, I respect her and demand that others respect her as well. I repeat, she is an honest, noble person, and all of your minor grievances, forgive me, are simply ridiculous. Old maids never love their sisters-in-law – that's a fact.

*Pause.*

Secondly, you seem to be angry because I'm not a professor, that I'm not a famous scholar. But I have a good job, I work in the *zemstvo*, I am a member of the *zemstvo* council and I count my service as sacred and important, just as important as scholarship. I am a member of the *zemstvo* council and

I'm proud of that, if you want to know...

*Pause.*

Thirdly... I have more to say... Yes, I mortgaged the house, without your permission... I am guilty of this, yes, and I ask you to forgive me. I needed to do it because of some debts... in fact, thirty-five thousand... I no longer play cards, I gave it up a long time ago, but the main reason I can justify my own behavior, is because you are girls, you receive a military pension, but I don't have... any real earnings...

*Pause.*

KULYGIN

*(At the door.)* Is Masha here? *(Anxiously.)* Where is she? I can't find her... *(He exits.)*

ANDREY

You aren't listening. Natasha is an outstanding, honest person. *(He walks about the stage silently, then comes to a stop.)* When I was first married, I thought we'd be happy... all of us happy... But my god... *(He weeps.)* My sweet sisters, my dear sisters, don't believe me, don't believe... *(He exits.)*

KULYGIN

*(At the door anxiously.)* Where's Masha? Why isn't Masha here? This is very upsetting. *(Exits.)*

*Alarm bell, the stage is empty.*

IRINA

*(Behind the screen.)* Olya! Who's knocking on the floor?

OLGA

It's the doctor, Ivan Romanych. He's drunk.

IRINA

What an agonizing night!

*Pause.*

Olya! *(She glances from behind the screen.)* Did you hear? They're taking the brigade away, they're moving somewhere far away.

OLGA

It's only a rumor.

IRINA

We're going to be left alone... Olya!

OLGA

Yes?

IRINA

Dearest Olya, dear, I respect the baron, I really do. He's a fine man. I will marry him, yes, I will – only let's go to Moscow! I beg you, let's go! There's no place on earth better than Moscow! Let's go, Olya! Please, let's go!

*Curtain.*

## ACT 4

*The old garden at the Prozorovs' home. A long spruce-lined path, at the end of which the river is visible. On the other side of the river is a forest. On the right side is the terrace; bottles and glasses are on the table; it is apparent they were just drinking champagne. Noon. From the road to the river across the garden passersby walk from time to time; five soldiers quickly cross.*

*CHEBUTYKHIN is in a good mood, which does not desert him in the course of the entire act. He sits in the armchair, in the garden, and waits for them to call him; he is in a peak-cap and with a cane. IRINA, KULYGIN with a decoration around his neck, without his moustache, and TUZENBAKH, standing on the terrace, see off FEDOTIK and RODAY, who are walking downstairs; both officers are in field uniform.*

TUZENBAKH

*(He kisses FEDOTIK.)* You're a good man. We've gotten along so well together. *(He kisses RODAY.)*  
Once again... Farewell, my friend!

IRINA

*Do svidaniya* [goodbye].

FEDOTIK

Not goodbye but farewell, we'll never see one another again!

KULYGIN

Who knows! *(He wipes his eyes, he smiles.)* Don't, I'll be crying in a minute.

IRINA

We'll meet again sometime.

FEDOTIK

In ten – fifteen years? But then we'll hardly recognize one another, we'll greet one another as strangers... *(He takes a photograph.)* Hold still... One more time, just one more, for the last time.

RODAY

*(He embraces TUZENBAKH.)* We'll never see each other again... *(He kisses IRINA's hand.)* Thank you for everything... for everything!

FEDOTIK

*(Vexed.)* Don't move!

TUZENBAKH

Yes, yes, God willing, we'll see one another again. Write to us. Be sure to write.

RODAY

*(He shouts, looking around the garden.)* Farewell, trees! *(He cries.)* Hup-hup!

*Pause.*

Farewell, echo!

KULYGIN

Who knows, maybe you'll get married in Poland... Your Polish wife will embrace you and say:  
“*kokhanye!*” [in Polish, “beloved”] (*He laughs.*)

FEDOTIK

(*Looking at his watch.*) Just an hour to go. Solyony's the only one from our battery going on the barge. We're going with the rest of the men. Three battery divisions are leaving today, and tomorrow three more – and then finally, peace and quiet will descend upon this town.

IRINA

Aleksey Petrovich, what happened yesterday near the theater? Tell me the truth.

FEDOTIK

Nothing happened.

IRINA

Word of honor?

FEDOTIK

Nothing... honestly, nothing... It'll all blow over...

RODAY

And where's Maria Sergeyevna?

KULYGIN

Masha's in the garden.

FEDOTIK

I'll say goodbye to her.

RODAY

Farewell, we better go or I'll start crying... *(He quickly embraces TUZENBAKH and KULYGIN, he kisses IRINA's hand.)* We had a splendid time here...

FEDOTIK

*(To KULYGIN).* This is for you to remember me by... a little book with a little pencil... We'll leave by the river...

*They walk away, both looking around.*

RODAY

*(He shouts.)* Hup-hup!

KULYGIN

*(He shouts.)* Farewell!

*Upstage FEDOTIK and RODAY meet MASHA and say goodbye to her; she exits with them.*

IRINA

They're gone... *(She sits on the lowest step of the terrace.)*

CHEBUTYKHIN

They forgot to say goodbye to me.

IRINA

What's the matter with you?

CHEBUTYKHIN

And somehow I forgot to say goodbye to them. But I'll see them soon, I'll be gone tomorrow. Yes... just one little day remains. In a year I'll be retired, then I'll return here and I'll live out the rest of my life with you. Just one little year left until I get my pension... *(He puts a paper in his pocket, takes out another.)* I'll come back to you and I'll turn my life around – you'll see – I'll be so quiet, so well –

well-behaved, so decent...

IRINA

Yes, you need to turn your life around, dear one – you really do.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Yes. I know. (*He quietly sings.*) Tarara... bumbiya... sit in the dirt I may...

KULYGIN

You're simply incorrigible, Ivan Romanych! Incorrigible!

CHEBUTYKHIN

Too bad you weren't my teacher. I'd probably have turned over a new leaf already.

IRINA

Fyodor shaved his moustache. I can't look at him!

KULYGIN

Shhh...

CHEBUTYKHIN

Your wife won't be able to look at you. I should tell you what you look like, but I just can't.

KULYGIN

Well! I like it – it's the *modus vivendi* [way to live]. Our headmaster shaved his moustache, so when I got promoted, I shaved mine. No one likes it, but it doesn't matter. I'm fine about it – with a moustache or without a moustache, I'm just fine... (*He sits.*)

*Upstage ANDREY pushes a carriage with a sleeping child.*

IRINA

Ivan Romanych, my dear, I feel so nervous. Tell me what happened yesterday in town.

CHEBUTYKHIN

What happened? Nothing. Silly stuff. (*He reads the paper.*) It doesn't matter...

KULYGIN

They're saying that Solyony and the baron met yesterday in town near the theatre...

TUZENBAKH

Stop! Just... (*He waves his hand and exits into the house.*)

KULYGIN

Near the theatre... Solyony began to pick on the baron, and he couldn't listen anymore so he said something offensive...

CHEBUTYKHIN

I don't know. It's all nonsense.

KULYGIN

In a seminar once, the teacher wrote "nonsense" on a student's essay, but the student thought it was a Latin word "*renixa*" – which of course, doesn't exist in Latin. (*He laughs.*) So funny! They say Solyony's in love with Irina and hates the baron... I can understand it, Irina is a lovely girl. She's a lot like Masha, thoughtful in the same way. Only you, Irina, are a little softer. Though Masha has an excellent disposition too. I love my Masha.

*From the back of the garden: "Halloo! Hup-hup!"*

IRINA

(*She shudders.*) I'm just so nervous and a little frightened today.

*Pause.*

Yes, I have everything ready. After lunch I'll send off my things. Tomorrow the baron and I will be married and we'll leave for the brick factory, and the day after tomorrow, I'll start teaching. I'll begin a new life. God help me! When I passed the examination and became a teacher, I cried for joy – such bliss...

*Pause.*

Any minute the cart will arrive for my things...

KULYGIN

Be that as it may, but somehow I don't think you're being serious – just fanciful ideas – very little reality. Well anyway, I want to wish you the best of luck – from my heart.

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(With tenderness.)* My splendid, good... my precious girl... You're so far ahead of me, I can't catch up. You're leaving me behind like a bird who's too old to fly. My darling, you must fly with God!

*Pause.*

It was a mistake to shave off your moustache, Fyodor Ilyich.

KULYGIN

Quiet, please! *(He sighs.)* The army is leaving today, and everything will go back to what it used to be. I don't care what they say, Masha is a good, honest woman, I love her very much and I am thankful to God every day for her. God's ways are unknowable to us... There's a man who works as a tax collector. Kozyrev is his name. I went to school with him, and he got expelled because he could never work out the declension of *ut consecutivum*. Now he's so poor, he's ill, and when we meet, I always say: "Hello there, *ut consecutivum*" – yes, he says, "exactly, *ut consecutivum*"... and then he coughs. But I've been so lucky all my life, I'm happy, I've even received the Second Order of Stanislaus and now I'm teaching others *ut consecutivum*. Of course, I'm an intelligent person, more intelligent than most, but that doesn't necessarily make for happiness.

*In the house they are playing "The Maiden's Prayer".*

IRINA

Tomorrow night I won't be here to listen to "The Maiden's Prayer", and I won't have to run into Protopopov...

*Pause.*

Yes, Protopopov is sitting right there in the parlor; he's here again today...

KULYGIN

The headmistress still hasn't arrived?

*Upstage MASHA quietly enters, strolling.*

IRINA

No. They sent for her. If you only knew how hard it is for me to live here alone, without Olya... She lives at the high school because she's headmistress. All day long she's busy with work, and I'm alone, I'm bored, nothing to do, I hate my room... All right, I see I won't ever get to Moscow, all right, so be it. It's my fate. I won't get to do anything... Everything is God's will, that's the truth. Nikolai Lvovich proposed to me. Well? I thought about it and I decided – he's a good man, I mean it's unbelievable how good he is... And when I said yes, suddenly my heart felt lighter, I became more cheerful, my heart felt easier and once again I felt that urge to work, to work... But I just know something happened yesterday – I have a terrible feeling...

CHEBUTYKHIN

*Renixa.* Nonsense!

NATASHA

*(At the window.)* The headmistress!

KULYGIN

The headmistress has arrived. Let's go.

*He exits with IRINA into the house.*

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(He reads the paper and quietly sings.)* Tara-ra... bumbiya... sit in the dirt I may...

*MASHA approaches; upstage ANDREY pushes the carriage.*

MASHA

He sits there, he'll just sit and never get up...

CHEBUTYKHIN

So what?

MASHA

*(She sits.)* Nothing...

*Pause.*

Were you in love with my mother?

CHEBUTYKHIN

Very much.

MASHA

And she?

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(After a pause.)* I don't remember anymore.

MASHA

Is my man here? Once our cook Marfa called her policeman: "my man". Is my man here?

CHEBUTYKHIN

Not yet.

MASHA

When you get your happiness in fits and starts, in tiny little moments and then you lose it – as I’m doing right now – then you act vulgar and start saying awful things. (*She points to her chest.*) I’m raging in here... (*Glancing at her brother ANDREY, who pushes the carriage.*) Look at our Andrey, our brilliant brother... Now all our hopes are lost. A thousand men may work on a bell and finally raise it up – with all their strength – but suddenly it falls and smashes – for no rhyme or reason, it smashes. This is what happened to our Andrey...

ANDREY

When will they finally shut up in the house? It’s so noisy.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Soon. (*He looks at his watch, then winds it; the watch chimes.*) I have an old-fashioned watch, it strikes the hour... The first, second and fifth batteries will leave precisely at one.

*Pause.*

And tomorrow I go.

ANDREY

For good?

CHEBUTYKHIN

I don’t know. Maybe I’ll return in a year. Who cares... it doesn’t matter...

*Somewhere far away a harp and violin play.*

ANDREY

The city is emptying out. It's as if we've been covered by a big blanket.

*Pause.*

Something happened near the theatre yesterday; everyone's talking about it, but I don't know anything.

CHEBUTYKHIN

It's nothing. Stupidity. Solyony started to tease the baron, and the baron suddenly got angry and insulted Solyony – and so finally, Solyony felt he had to challenge the baron to a duel. *(He looks at his watch.)* And it just might be right now, I think... At twelve-thirty, in the State Forest – there – you can see it from here, beyond the river... *(He makes a disparaging noise, then laughs.)* Solyony imagines he's Lermontov – he even writes poetry. Now it's all very funny, but in truth he's fought three duels already.

MASHA

Who?

CHEBUTYKHIN

Solyony.

MASHA

And the baron?

CHEBUTYKHIN

What about the baron?

*Pause.*

MASHA

I feel so confused... In any case, this shouldn't be allowed. He could injure the baron or even kill him.

CHEBUTYKHIN

The baron is a good man, but one baron more or less – does it really matter? Believe me, it doesn't matter!

*Beyond the garden a shout: "Halloo! Hup-hup!"*

Hold on! That's Skvortsov shouting – the second. He's out there in a boat.

*Pause.*

ANDREY

In my opinion, to participate in a duel, or even attend one – even in the capacity of a doctor – is simply immoral.

CHEBUTYKHIN

It just seems that way... There's really nothing here on earth, not even us, we don't exist, it just seems as if we exist... And it doesn't mean a thing!

MASHA

Talk, talk, talk – all day long ... *(She walks.)* You'll still be here talking when it starts to snow... *(She comes to a stop.)* I can't go in the house, I can't go in there... When Vershinin comes, let me know... *(She walks along the path.)* The birds are deserting us already... *(She looks up.)* Swans? Geese?... You beautiful creatures... *(She exits.)*

ANDREY

Our house is finally emptying out. The officers are leaving, you're leaving, my sister is getting married, and I'm left alone.

CHEBUTYKHIN

What about your wife?

*FERAPONT enters with papers.*

ANDREY

My wife – is my wife. She’s honest, respectable, nice, kind, but for all that there’s something inside her that reduces her to a mean, blind, grasping animal. I can’t explain it – anyway, the truth is, you’re the only person I can speak to like this – I love Natasha, that’s true, but sometimes I think she’s unbelievably vulgar. When I see that, I get confused, and I’m not sure how I ever fell in love with her...

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(He rises.)* I’m leaving tomorrow, my friend, maybe we’ll never see each other again, so let me give you a piece of advice. Just put on your hat, pick up your cane and walk away... just keep on walking and don’t look back. The further you get, the better.

*SOLYONY walks upstage with two officers; seeing CHEBUTYKHIN, he turns to him; the officers walk further.*

SOLYONY

Doctor, it’s time! It’s twelve-thirty already. *(He greets ANDREY.)*

CHEBUTYKHIN

One moment, please. I’m so tired of all of you. *(To ANDREY.)* If someone asks for me, Andryusha, then tell them, I’ll be back in a minute... *(He sighs.)* Oh my god...

SOLYONY

“Before he knew what hit him, the bear bit him.” (*He goes with him.*) Why are you groaning, old man?

CHEBUTYKHIN

Shut up!

SOLYONY

Are you sick?

CHEBUTYKHIN

(*Angrily.*) Go to hell!

SOLYONY

Don't worry, *dyedushka* [grandpa] – I'll just have a little fun – I'll just scratch him. (*He takes out perfume and splashes it on his hands.*) Look, I've used up the whole flask, and they still smell. They smell like a corpse.

*Pause.*

So, sir... Do you remember the poem? “But he, restless as a storm, seeks out the storm, as though in the storm there is peace...”

CHEBUTYKHIN

Yes. "Before he knew what hit him, the bear bit him." *(He exits with SOLYONY.)*

*Cries can be heard: "Hup! Halloo!" ANDREY and FERAPONT enter.*

FERAPONT

Papers to sign...

ANDREY

Leave me alone! Get out! Please! *(He exits with the carriage.)*

FERAPONT

But you have to sign papers, what else are they for? You have to sign papers. *(He exits upstage.)*

*Enter IRINA and TUZENBAKH in a straw hat, KULYGIN crosses the stage, crying: "Halloo, Masha, halloo!"*

TUZENBAKH

There's the only man in town who's happy that the army is leaving.

IRINA

I can understand that.

*Pause.*

Our town is emptying out.

TUZENBAKH

Sweet girl, I'll be back in a minute.

IRINA

Where are you going?

TUZENBAKH

I need to go to town to say goodbye to my comrades.

IRINA

I don't believe you... Nikolai, why are you so distracted today?

*Pause.*

What happened yesterday near the theatre?

TUZENBAKH

*(Impatient gesture.)* I'll be back in an hour. *(He kisses her hand.)* My beloved... *(He peers into her face.)* It's been five years since I fell in love with you and I still can't get used to it. You get more beautiful every day. What lovely, beautiful hair! What eyes! I'll carry you off with me tomorrow, we'll work, we'll be rich, my every dream will be realized. You'll be happy. There's just one thing – just one – you don't love me!

IRINA

It's not in me – I'll be your wife, I'll be faithful, and obedient, but I don't feel love – what can I do! *(She cries.)* I have never been in love in my life. Oh, I've dreamed of it, yes, I've dreamed of being in love... but for ages now, my heart has been like a precious piano – locked up with the key lost.

*Pause.*

You look so anxious.

TUZENBAKH

I didn't sleep last night. You know I've never been afraid of anything in my life, but that lost key tears my heart to pieces – I can't sleep because of it. Tell me something.

*Pause.*

Tell me something...

IRINA

What? What? Everything feels so mysterious around us – the old trees stand so silent... (*She puts his head on her breast.*)

TUZENBAKH

Tell me something.

IRINA

What, tell you – what?

TUZENBAKH

Something...

IRINA

Enough! Enough!

*Pause.*

TUZENBAKH

It's crazy how little things suddenly seem so important – suddenly for no reason at all. You try to laugh them off – as meaningless – and yet you can't seem to stop worrying about them. Oh, let's not talk about this! I'm happy. I feel as if I'm seeing these trees for the first time in my life – these

spruces, maples, birches – and they’re just standing there, waiting for me... What beautiful trees, and I want everything close to them to be beautiful too!

*Shout: "Halloo! Hup-hup!"*

I have to go, it's time... Oh, that tree is dead – but look how it sways in the wind along with the others. Yes, it seems to me, if I die, I'll still be part of this life. Goodbye, my sweet girl... *(He kisses her hand.)* The papers you gave me are lying on my table, under the calendar.

IRINA

I'm going with you.

TUZENBAKH

No, no! *(He quickly goes, he comes to a stop on the path.)* Irina!

IRINA

What?

TUZENBAKH

*(Not knowing what to say.)* I didn't have any coffee today. Tell them to have some ready for me... *(He quickly exits.)*

*IRINA stands thinking, then goes upstage and sits on a bench. ANDREY enters with the carriage, FERAPONT appears.*

FERAPONT

Andrey Sergeych, these aren't my papers – they come from the council. I didn't make them up.

ANDREY

Oh, where's it gone? – where's my past? I used to be young, happy and smart. Does anybody remember when I used to dream beautiful dreams and think brilliant thoughts? When did we start being boring, grey, dull, lazy, indifferent, useless, unhappy... Our town has been here for two hundred years, it has a hundred thousand people, and there's not one who's significant, not one passionate soul – past or present – not one erudite person, not one artist, not a single notable person to look up to or admire. They only eat, drink, sleep, then they die... and others are born and they also eat, drink, sleep – and just to keep themselves from dying of boredom, they add gossip, vodka and cards to their lives. They love to sue each other and the wives cheat on their husbands, but the husbands just sit there, pretending they don't see anything, or hear anything – and this goes on generation after generation until any spark from God is extinguished in the children, and they become like corpses – just as pitiful as their mothers and fathers... *(To FERAPONT, angrily.)* What do you want?

FERAPONT

Huh? Papers to sign.

ANDREY

I'm sick of you.

FERAPONT

*(Offering the papers.)* I heard the porter from the state house saying... he says in Petersburg this past winter it was two hundred degrees below freezing.

ANDREY

I hate the present – but when I think about the future, something seems possible to me! – There’s a light in the distance and I have hope – I see it – my children and I will rid ourselves from this great heaviness, from vodka, from too much goose with cabbage, from endless naps after lunch, from this insidious idleness...

FERAPONT

Two thousand people froze to death it seems. The people, he said, were terrified. It was either in Petersburg or Moscow – I can’t remember.

ANDREY

*(Enveloped with a tender feeling.)* My dear, kind sisters, my wonderful sisters! *(On the verge of tears.)* Masha, my sister...

NATASHA

*(By the window.)* Who’s so loud out there? Is that you, Andryusha? You’ll wake Sophochka. *Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormée déjà. Vous êtes un ours.* (“Don’t make noise, Sophie is already asleep. You are a bear.”) *(Becoming angry.)* If you must talk, put the baby somewhere else. Ferapont, take the master’s carriage!

FERAPONT

Yes ma'am. *(He takes the carriage.)*

ANDREY

*(Confused.)* I'll be quiet.

NATASHA

*(Behind the window, caressing her son.)* Bobik! Naughty Bobik! Bad Bobik!

ANDREY

*(Examining the papers.)* Fine, I'll look at the papers, I'll sign what needs to be signed – then take them back to the council... *(He exits into the house, reading the papers; FERAPONT pushes the carriage.)*

NATASHA

*(At the window.)* Bobik, what's your mama's name? Sweetheart, sweet boy! And who's that? That's Auntie Olya. Say: hi, Auntie Olya!

*Vagabond musicians, a man and girl, play on the violin and harp; VERSHININ, OLGA and ANFISA come out of the house and they listen for a minute in silence; IRINA approaches.*

OLGA

Everyone goes through our garden like it's a public walkway. Nyanya, give the musicians

something...

ANFISA

*(Giving the musicians money.)* God bless you, sweethearts. *(The musicians bow and exit.)* Poor dears. If you have enough to eat, you don't have to play. *(To IRINA.)* Hello, Irisha! *(She kisses her.)* Akh, sweet girl, what a life I'm living! What a life! We live in the apartment the high school gives us – it's wonderful with Olyushka – God has provided me with a good old age. Sinner that I am, I've never lived so... The apartment is so big and I have a whole room to myself and a bed. Everything belongs to the state. I wake up at night and – oh, lord, mother of God, there couldn't be a happier person on earth!

VERSHININ

*(Looking at his watch.)* We're leaving now, Olga Sergeevna. It's time.

*Pause.*

I wish you everything, everything... Where is Mariya Sergeevna?

IRINA

She's in the garden somewhere. I'll go look for her.

VERSHININ

Please. I'm in a hurry.

ANFISA

I'll go and look. *(She shouts.)* Mashenka, halloo!

*She exits with IRINA into the garden upstage.*

Ha-lloo, ha-lloo!

VERSHININ

Everything must end. Here we are saying goodbye. *(He looks at his watch.)* The town gave us a breakfast; we drank champagne, the mayor gave a speech and I ate and listened – but my heart was here, with you... *(He looks at the garden.)* I have gotten so attached to you.

OLGA

Will we see each other again?

VERSHININ

Probably, not.

*Pause.*

My wife and both daughters will live on here for another two months; please, if something happens or they need something...

OLGA

Yes, yes, of course. Don't worry.

*Pause.*

Tomorrow there won't be one soldier left in town - it will all be like it never happened... And, of course, we'll begin a new life...

*Pause.*

It never turns out as we hoped, does it.... I didn't want to be headmistress and here I am, headmistress. We'll never get to Moscow...

VERSHININ

Well... Thank you for everything. Forgive me, if everything wasn't... I'm talking too much – forgive me. Remember me kindly.

OLGA

*(She wipes her eyes.)* Where's Masha...

VERSHININ

Well what else can I tell you? What shall we talk about?.. *(He laughs.)* Life is so hard. It seems so vague and hopeless – but you have to agree that things will get better, clearer and maybe easier... I'm sure that it won't be too long before the purpose of life is completely apparent. *(He looks at his watch.)* It's late, it's late. Human beings have always been engaged with war, filling up their entire existence with marches, invasions, victories. These days – no wars – so how do we fill our existence – we're empty – with nothing to fill our days. Of course we're passionately seeking a purpose, and we'll find it. Let's hope it happens soon!

*Pause.*

If only – you know – hard work and education would come together... *(He looks at his watch.)* But it's time...

OLGA

Here she comes.

*MASHA enters.*

VERSHININ

I came to say goodbye...

*OLGA walks away a bit to the side, in order not to interfere with their parting.*

MASHA

*(She looks at him.)* Farewell...

*Extended kiss.*

OLGA

Please, please...

*MASHA violently sobs.*

VERSHININ

Write me... Don't forget! Let me... it's time... Olga Sergeyevna, take her, it's time...I'm late...

*(Moved, he kisses OLGA's hand, then embraces MASHA again and quickly exits.)*

OLGA

Please, Masha! Stop, dear...

*Enter KULYGIN.*

KULYGIN

*(Embarrassed.)* It's nothing, let her cry, let her... My good Masha, my kind Masha... You're my wife,

and I'm happy no matter what... I won't complain, I won't scold you at all... Olga is my witness... We'll begin to live again as we did before, and I won't say a word to you, not a hint...

MASHA

*(Restraining sobs.)* "At the sea, a green oak stands with a golden chain wound round..." I'm losing my mind... "At the sea..." "a green oak..."

OLGA

Calm down, Masha... Calm down... Give her some water.

MASHA

I'll stop...

KULYGIN

See, she's stopped... she's so good...

*A shot is heard from the remote distance.*

MASHA

"At the sea, a green oak stands with a golden chain wound round..." The chain is green... the oak is round... I'm confused... *(She drinks water.)* Such a sad life... I'm fine now... I'm calm... Everything's fine... What does that mean – at the sea? Why is that poem stuck in my head? I feel so confused.

*IRINA enters.*

OLGA

Calm down, Masha – that’s a good girl... Let’s go to our room.

MASHA

*(Angrily.)* I won’t go in there. *(She sobs, but instantly stops herself.)* I will no longer go in that house, I will not go...

IRINA

Let’s sit here together for a minute, quietly. You know I’m leaving tomorrow ...

*Pause.*

KULYGIN

Yesterday in my third year class I took away this moustache and beard from a boy... *(He puts on the moustache and beard.)* I look like the German teacher. *(He laughs.)* True, huh? Boys are so silly.

MASHA

Yes, you look like the German...

OLGA

*(She laughs.)* Yes.

*MASHA cries.*

IRINA

Come, Masha!

KULYGIN

Just like...

*NATASHA enters.*

NATASHA

*(To the maid.)* What? Mikhail Ivanych Protopopov will sit with Sophochka, and let Andrey Sergeyich wheel Bobik around. Children are so much trouble... *(To IRINA.)* You're leaving tomorrow, Irina – such a pity. Stay a while – one more week. *(Seeing KULYGIN, she screams; he laughs and removes the moustache and beard.)* Well you scared me to death! *(To IRINA.)* I'm used to having you around – and do you think I want to lose you? Yes, I'll put Andrey and his violin in your room – let him saw away in there! – and we'll put Sophochka in his room. Amazing, wonderful child! What a sweet little girl! Today she looked at me with those eyes of hers and said – “Mama”!

KULYGIN

Yes, a wonderful child, that's true.

NATASHA

Oh dear, tomorrow I'll be all alone here. *(She sighs.)* The first thing I'll do is have those fir trees cut down, then that maple. It looks so horrible – ugly... *(To IRINA.)* Sweetie, that belt doesn't really suit you... It's so *gauche*. You need something brighter. And yes, I'll put flowers everywhere – flowers – and it will smell so wonderful... *(Severely.)* Why is that fork lying on the bench there? *(Going to the house, to the maid.)* I want to know why a fork is lying on the bench! *(She shouts.)* Shut up!

KULYGIN

She's off and running again!

*Offstage march music plays; everyone listens.*

OLGA

They're leaving.

*Enter CHEBUTYKHIN.*

MASHA

Our beautiful boys are leaving. Well, then... Happy journey to them! *(To her husband.)* Let's go

home... where's my hat and my...

KULYGIN

I put them in the house... I'll get them. *(He exits into the house.)*

OLGA

Yes, we can go home now. It's time.

CHEBUTYKHIN

Olga Sergeyevna!

OLGA

What?

*Pause.*

CHEBUTYKHIN

Nothing... I don't know how to tell you... *(He whispers in her ear.)*

OLGA

*(In fright.)* It can't be!

CHEBUTYKHIN

Yes... unbelievable... I'm tired, I'm worn out, I don't want to say another word... (*Vexedly.*) It doesn't mean a thing...

MASHA

What happened?

OLGA

(*She embraces IRINA.*) Today is so horrible... I don't know how to tell you, my dear...

IRINA

What? Tell me quickly: what? For God's sake! (*She cries.*)

CHEBUTYKHIN

The baron was just killed in a duel.

IRINA

I knew it, I knew it...

CHEBUTYKHIN

(*He takes a seat on a bench upstage.*) I'm so tired... (*He takes a newspaper from his pocket.*) Let them weep...

*(He quietly sings.)* 'Ta-ra-ra-bumbiya... sit in the dirt I may... It doesn't matter...

*The three sisters stand, holding one another.*

MASHA

Listen to the music! They're leaving us – we're alone – they're gone forever and we're alone. We must start over again – we have to go on living... We must live... Yes, we have to...

IRINA

*(She puts her head on OLGA's breast.)* There'll be a time when we'll understand why we had to suffer so much – all the mysteries will be revealed – but in the meantime, we have to live... work, only work! Tomorrow I'll go alone, I'll teach in that school and I'll devote my whole life to people who need me. It's fall already – winter will come soon, and everything will be covered with snow – but I'll work, I'll work...

OLGA

*(She embraces both her sisters.)* The music is so happy, cheerful. Oh yes, I want to live! Oh, my god! The day will come when we're gone forever too – and they'll have forgotten us – our faces, our voices – all forgotten – and they won't even remember there were three of us – but what we suffered will become joy for them – for all those who live after us. Happiness and peace will at last come to the earth, and they'll speak well of us and bless those of us who are living now. Oh, sweet sisters, our life is not finished yet. We'll live! The music is so happy, so joyous, and I can imagine that in just a moment more, we'll know why we're living, why we're suffering... If we only knew, if we only knew!

*The music grows more distant; KULYGIN, happy, smiling, carries MASHA's hat and wrap.*

*ANDREY pushes another carriage, with BOBIK sitting in it.*

CHEBUTYKHIN

*(He sings quietly.)* Tara... ra... bumbiya... sit in the dirt I may... *(He reads the paper.)* It doesn't mean a thing – not a thing...

OLGA

If we only knew – if we only knew...

*Curtain.*

**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.

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1.

What is an interlude anyway? Or, if you prefer to use the Spanish term, what is an *entremes*? My grandfather's trusty 1956 Velasquez Spanish Dictionary, now mine, defines it as:

- An interlude, a farce, an entertainment.
- Interval.
- A side-dish, as in *tapas*.

Please keep these definitions in mind as we review a few facts.

Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra published *Ocho Comedias y Ocho Entremeses Nuevos Nunca Representados* in 1615, a year before his death. In the preface to the collection, he himself admits to being unable to find productions for his stage work. Apparently, after several failed attempts, Cervantes had buried the manuscripts in a chest of drawers, when a lucky meeting with a publisher had brought them back to life, saving them from silence and forgetting, allowing him to place them before the public, and history. In Cervantes' own words:

“I was tired of waiting, so I sold the plays to him....He paid me a fair price; I took the cash with all graciousness, glad not to have to haggle with actors.”

But actors weren't really the problem so much as the mainstream theatre scene of his day.

Effectively excluded from the stage by the arbiters of his time (a period of dramaturgy dominated by his *frienemy* Lope de Vega), Cervantes could imagine the secret joy of actors haggling over the work only after his passing. Now, nearly 500 years from their publication, the Cervantes *Interludes* crave raucous life once again – but in a new way.

2.

An interlude from what?

The word interlude happens to come from the Latin, meaning *in the middle of*; essentially in a time and space of hustle and bustle. By nature, an interlude needs to move fast on its feet and connect quickly in thought and feeling, without too much work or pondering needed.

Many see these short plays as light entertainments to be given at the intervals between the acts of larger, heavier, dramas, often as massive sets were changed behind the stage's curtain. Nowadays at plays, we welcome such intervals to get ourselves a drink, a pee, or to start up a conversation. This behavior was very likely also the case during Spain's Golden Age. So the idea of putting on these plays during transitional moments perhaps does them a disservice, since audience focus would be an issue. It would take a lot to make an audience member forego a restroom break to see what happens next.

Whether presented in the middle of another work, or on their own, in order to truly live these interludes must reflect their audience somehow – whether in a funny-house mirror or as a snapshot in motion. They do not have to be clean, or profound – actually profundity can get in the way, especially if the plays are sandwiched between acts of a larger drama's rhymed hexameter. But they do have to capture the *zeitgeist* of the moment in language and action, and they have to somehow hear the music of the world even as it's being played. And a little sex and music helps a lot too.

3.

I came across the Cervantes *Interludes* nearly fifteen years ago at the now-defunct Apple Tree Theatre just outside Chicago. My play *Blade to the Heat* was in tech, and I was bumming around the Green

Room killing time and happened upon Edwin Honig's Signet paperback version sitting unloved in an ancient bookcase. I'll never forget reading the *entremes del ruffian viudo llamado Trampagos* that first time right there, feeling the presence of Cervantes breathing next to me, fighting through the knock-kneed, over-Anglified, nearly unspeakable English of the translation, making itself new in my mind in the sex and music of the moment, and nearly begging for a contemporary version worthy of the haggling of contemporary actors. A feeling overtook me, the *duende* of my own writing spirit, and told me to be less hung-up on historical and/or literary accuracy, and to engage the spirit and immediacy of the world being created, 500 years ago by the author and now by me the reader – at the same time.

It has taken me many years to get to the point of focusing on this new translation. With my wife, I recently traveled the Cervantine road of Spain from Madrid, via his birthplace in Alcala de Henares, southward through La Mancha and into the *caracoles* of Cordoba and Sevilla, hoping to channel the world Cervantes saw when he saw Spain – that place of *picaros, putas, pleytos, polvos, piedras, puercos, perros, piojos y pulgas* (crooks, whores, lawsuits, dust, stone, pigs, dogs, lice and fleas) celebrated in *Don Quixote*.

But being there made me see more than ever that geography itself is not the key to unlock the joy of these plays.

I live and work in Los Angeles, and I believe that Cervantes would have loved it here. It fits his literary pallet so well. It is a city of unmasked ironies and arrogance, of mudslides and earthquakes, of riots and insurrections, and now of an economic catastrophe that has left entire suburbs upside down. It is a city of Jews and Muslims and Gypsies, Asians and Aborigines, Anglos and Chicanos and Mexicanos, and all the hybridizations therein that intermarriage and co-habitation can offer.

Were Cervantes alive now, I believe he would have seen in many ways a current version of his Spain,

a Golden Age by no means for everyone. Even more to the literary point, Cervantes would recognize in contemporary Los Angeles the same problem he himself faced: the frustrations of getting plays produced. For El Lay is a city with a vibrant underground theatre scene, and an artistically moribund one above ground.

But if Cervantes were here today with us, I would bet on him getting the *Interludes* produced. And they would not be sandwiched between acts of a larger play; they would be free-standing. They would live precisely by being funny, sexy, musical and quick-moving versions of our lives as we really lead them, and they would finagle their way somehow to the stage. They would skewer us in our hypocrisies, even while celebrating our changeable minds and hearts. They would catch us, literally, in the middle of the living of our lives.

4.

Here is the method of translation I have used so far.

I read the original text aloud. This is fun, although my office mates now know that I'm crazy. I do this to try to hear the music of the language and the rhythms at play in the hearts of the characters, and the original heartbeat of the author. As it happens, the Cervantine brand of Golden Age Spanish is remarkably easy to read – a testament to his egalitarian populism. Still, I sit with several dictionaries and other research books, and read footnotes to understand long-forgotten references and *double entendres*.

I read other translations of the plays. On my desk now is Dawn Smith's laudable version of the *Interludes*, along with Honig's paperback, now dog-eared and with its cover taped together (I admit it, I stole it from the Apple Tree!) Reading other translations is a wonderfully helpful way to see how others hear and see the world Cervantes creates in these plays. For the most part, these other

translations adhere to the letter of the original, keeping them firmly in a previous time and space, allowing moments of anachronism only when stuck or when overtaken by their inner leprechaun of wit.

I begin my own work by translating closely. Then, I think about my life now and the way I see and hear the world around me, even in this moment. Allowing the world in to the work begins to change the feeling of the words and phrases. Certain anachronisms become invested with new meaning, or else fall away. Swordplay today simply does not mean what it used to mean, but we do use other kinds of jousting and edgy competition to assert dominance. In this context, a basketball now can function much in the same way as foils or rapiers once did. Similarly, music is a kind of mirror to our true selves. What we think of as the world of Spanish guitar has its place in our lives, but blues and pop and hip hop have each cordoned off huge chunks of our cultural landscape, not to mention personal memory. I try to let in such contemporary connections at the musical, rhythmic, level as early as possible; it helps greatly that Cervantes has included popular song at the beginnings and ends of these short plays.

Most importantly, I admit that Cervantes is passing his life and characters **through me**, a playwright with peculiarities all my own. If the pieces are to live, it must be via collaboration. Both our names must appear, not only in the production poster or on the book's front cover, but in the work. It becomes a question of thumbprint, and of voice. His and my thumbprints are historical, singular, exclusive, fundamentally our own individually. Our voices are something else, something that grow or dissipate depending on how we treat them (ourselves), scarred or deepened by the smokiness of nicotine or alcohol or injury, poverty or wealth, love and loss, and the artistry of our shared experiences if we are to indeed – finally – sing.

The references eventually become Americanized – that is, infused with the spatial and timely

connections that today's Los Angeles audiences might respond to. They have a regional feel; they are California plays. I am curious to make connections between then and now, whenever and wherever possible, because I want these plays to live *now*.

5.

*The Divorce Court Judge* is a play in prose. It dealt with a real ecclesiastical court of the time that heard petitions for divorce, at a time when the Catholic Church maintained that the sacrament of marriage was unbreakable. In other words, it was a place for exercises in futility. Reading the play, I found myself familiar with the format of testimony, not because of my own experience in court, but rather because of the inundation of court cases on American television today. The queen of them all is surely Judge Judy, although she owes a debt of gratitude to Judge Wapner, arbiter of a previous generation's *pecadillos*. Their spawn blanket our daytime TV scene. On a sick day or holiday, there isn't one of us loyal Americans who hasn't watched a bit of the semi-staged small claims court proceedings before channel flipping away, full of its guilty pleasures. The play was eminently translatable. Couples are just as ill-matched as ever, and justice is often blind as a bat. *Dirty Fraud*, *The Widowed Pimp* was originally written in verse. In his philosophizing, the lead pimp Trampagos (the *trampa* of his name became the fraud, and the *trampal* of the world made it dirty) reminded me of Iceberg Slim and his seminal book on pimpology. Although not formally in verse, the language of this translation attempts a playful hip hop interspersed with references to soul and funk music, rhythmically kin to the colorful Oakland patois of San Pablo Avenue immortalized in the blaxpotation movies of the 1970s. California's Oaktown shares much with Cervantes' Madrid, not least in its history of prostitution (in 1585, among other decrees, Philip II unsuccessfully prohibited schemes by prostitutes to promote sales!), but also in the colorful (of color) population of its citizenry, intermixing with one another under the radar. The glorification of pimp style is something that has bled over from the United States to the rest of world through rap music, and the cult of

celebrity even for criminals (The Scary Man of this translation was a real hood named Escarraman, so famous in his day that a dance style was named for him) dogs our sense of decency to this day and titillates our curiosity worldwide. Underneath it all is a combination of love story and business proposition that has been the sticking point between pimps and whores from Shakespeare to Snoop Dogg.

As much as it may seem that I have intruded my contemporary realities upon the original Cervantes concepts, my intent is for the man to live again in these plays. And what a man! A true war hero, wounded and disfigured in a far-off battle with the Turk, returning home with an iffy pension and no promise of a job, working hard to support not only wife but sisters and mother and a mistress or two, Cervantes made the time to translate life as he saw it onto the page and to the stage, and saw little return on his investment until late in life. The arbiters of his time would not open their stages to him, but my intent is that they now will -- finally.

Today the world knows the banquet of his *Don Quixote*, but the *Interludes* promise a tasty *tapas* of insights and interchange over the chasms of time and idiom, made flesh through the blessed haggling of actors now on stage. Cervantes himself said that he had more experience in *reverses* than in verses.

It is time to reverse his bad luck in the theatre.

Cervantes also said, "I am satisfied with little, but I desire much."

He and I both desire that you enjoy these new *Interludes* of Cervantes.

Oliver Mayer

February 9, 2011

DIRTY FRAUD, THE WIDOWED PIMP and DIVORCE COURT JUDGE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*12 actors double cast over two short plays of the Golden Age, recast in an American vernacular.*

DIRTY FRAUD/ ACCUPUNCTURIST, male

BACK PACK/ SOLDIER, male

CHICKYBABY/CROSSING GUARD, male

JUAN BRIGHTASS/ BAILIFF, male

KNOB POLISHER/ ALDONZA, female

TAIL WAGGER/ LADY GUIOMAR, female

STRAY KITTY/ MARIANA, female

WACK JACK/ PROSECUTOR, male

FUNKY FEMALE, female

FUNKY MALE, male

SCARY MAN/CLERK, male

GEEZER, male

JUDGE, female

**DIRTY FRAUD, THE WIDOWED PIMP**

**MUSIC: P.I.M.P. (REMIX) 12” by 50 CENT AND SNOOP DOGG**

Enter DIRTY FRAUD, pimped out, all in black.

BACK PACK shuffles on in NBA jersey, listening to the tune on his IPHONE.

DIRTY FRAUD

Back Pack!

Dirty Fraud changes the tune.

**MUSIC: THE BEEGEES “LONELY DAYS LONELY NIGHTS”**

He sighs funkily, street cred mixed with petulance.

DIRTY FRAUD

Respect for the dead.

(slight pause)

You bring the honeys?

BACK PACK

Why you think they call me Back Pack?

It's in my pocket!

(checks out DIRTY's duds)

*Piamp!!!*

DIRTY FRAUD

You think? I feel so *eb* today.

BACK PACK

But that mourning coat is fly.

DIRTY FRAUD

On the real?

(models it)

Is it *dec* on me? It's RocaWear.

Back Pack examines the cut of Dirty's pants.

BACK PACK

Mmn mmm MMMN!!!

DIRTY FRAUD

You pig. What can I say?

BACK PACK

Is that a third leg?

DIRTY FRAUD

My claim to fame.

BACK PACK

I'll get the rock.

Back Pack shuffles off. Dirty addresses the sky.

DIRTY FRAUD

Ah my Dirty Mule, my dirty shaft mule baby –  
And everybody else's mule baby too, you  
don't gotta remind me! You reached greener  
pastures, the final frontier! Me, I'm still here  
in the shit; but you quit the scene, and the  
worst part is I got no clue which direction that is!  
Despite your **vida loca**, and your body down  
below, I can only hope your soul is rocking it  
up there with the angels!

Looks up. A bird SHITS on him. He cleans himself off, laughing.

DIRTY FRAUD

That's my Dirty Mule! Aw Baby, without you my  
**Vida** will be a lot less **Loca**. Why wasn't I  
at your bedside – that headboard we used  
to knock around – when you gave up the ghost?  
I coulda sucked your spirit out of the air so hard  
your eyes woulda caved in! I'da put you –  
(quotes Mike Myers)  
“In my belly!” Ah human misery! Damn you  
Death! You done us all wrong!  
(in a feminine voice)  
“Yesterday I was Dirty Mule! Saddle me up!

I was chillin'! Today I'm in the cold cold ground –“  
(in his own voice)  
Didn't Tupac say dat?

Enter CHICKYBABY, also pimped out, in a CANDY APPLE CADILLAC.

CHICKYBABY

Is that you, Dirty?

DIRTY FRAUD

Chickybaby. What's up, Son?

CHICKYBABY

Not you! Looking all Grim Reaper! That  
Blackglamma coat is your worst enemy!  
Enough with the widower's weeds!  
Quit buggin'! Don't go all *incognegro* on the Kid!  
Get back in the Game! Dirty Mule is now  
God's moneymaker. Mac! Pimpest of pimpdaddies.  
Game over. Move on!

DIRTY FRAUD

Dun, you talk like the Zen Master Himself!  
Coaching me before the Big Game!

CHICKYBABY

Well it ain't  
(quoting Allen Iverson)  
“practice!”

A NURF BASKETBALL rolls toward Dirty. Chickybaby picks it up and dribbles Allen Iverson style. Back Pack reenters with a portable mini hoop/backboard. Chickybaby raises to shoot. Dirty blocks it. Shoots.

DIRTY FRAUD

Nothing but net, baby! All night long!

CHICKYBABY

Save the net music, Dogg. Now ain't  
the time to ball.

BACK PACK

Shut your meazy! It's always time to ball!  
Don't be shutting down my Man's mad skillz!

DIRTY FRAUD

He couldn't if he tried. Bring my lucky sneaks  
and my Gatorade. I'm fixin' to school this fool.

BACK PACK

I'm on it!

Back Pack exits.

Dirty plays on for a bit, then loses interest.

DIRTY FRAUD

We'll discuss my mad skillz later. Right  
now my Angel Face ties my hands and  
hurts my heart with grief! I'm sensitive!

CHICKYBABY

How old was the Mule when she croaked?

DIRTY FRAUD

Among her friends and neighbors, she  
passed for 32.

CHICKYBABY

Chick was in her prime!

DIRTY FRAUD

But quiet as it's kept, she was 56. Hey.  
Black don't crack! Plus she knew all the  
tricks of the trade, so to speak. Used that  
Grecian Formula for honeys, hid them greys!  
Turned a silver 'fro to gold overnight! The  
6<sup>th</sup> of next month will be the fifteenth  
Anniversary of our little family business, and  
in all that time, we never had a fight!  
Fifteen NBA Finals, Fifteen MVP trophies,  
Fifteen Kobe Bryant buzzer-beaters gone by  
since my little sweet thang became my candy –  
my **panocha**, as the Spanish say – and  
turned that badonkadonk out to make the world

a better place. Man, I'm a bandonkaholic!

CHICKYBABY

Ghettosexual!

(sings)

MORE THAN A WOMAN!

(sings)

SHE'S A LADY! WHOA WHOA WHOA SHE'S A LADY!

(moved)

She was fatttractive!

DIRTY FRAUD

Give it up. Chick was phat.

CHICKYBABY

Pretty Hot and Tempting! What'd she die of?

DIRTY FRAUD

Almost nothing! Couple too many kidney punches. Doctors said if she'da drunk her ginkobiloba juice she'da made it to 70!

CHICKYBABY

She didn't drink her gingko?

DIRTY FRAUD

No, she died!

CHICKYBABY

That was a fool thing to do. Drink that shit down till Judgement Day. Shame. Doctor's shoulda made her sweat.

DIRTY FRAUD

Oh they sweated her fine apple bottom eleven times. Enjerkulated her till her ass looked like a pancake. But no go.

Back Pack reenters with basketball gear.

Dirty Fraud changes from Florsheims to Air Jordans.

CHICKYBABY

I heard she had ulcers on her legs and arms.

DIRTY FRAUD

Sistah dripped like a leaky faucet.

CHICKYBABY

Ew.

DIRTY FRAUD

Despite all, she had the finest flesh that  
you'd ever want to eat out. If it weren't for  
her breath, which did begin to stink, I'd  
still be huggin' up on her! Just like sexin'  
with a rack of baby backs!

CHICKYBABY

Onion booty!

DIRTY FRAUD

Make you wanna cry.

CHICKYBABY

Teeth went rotten though. Altoids  
couldn't fix them pearly whites.

DIRTY FRAUD

It's a mystery! One morning she awoke  
without a tooth in her head!

BACK PACK

That's 'cause she went to bed without 'em!  
Same night she bit me!

(indicates on his ass)

Five perfect little bite marks I counted  
on my stinky, --

DIRTY FRAUD

Who told you to speak? Dumbass!

BACK PACK

Nothing but the truth, baby.

Dirty jumps on Back Pack. Dirty bites his ass. Back Pack howls.

DIRTY FRAUD

It was me!

Dirty grabs the nurf ball. Chickybaby defends the rim.

DIRTY FRAUD

Guard me, Chickybaby! I just remembered  
my phi slamma jamma thunder dunk from  
back in the day! In your face, muthafucka!

**MUSIC: PARLIAMENT. Fonky.** They play till, --

BACK PACK

Hold up! Here come the Honeys.

Enter KNOB POLISHER, TAIL WAGGER, and STRAY KITTY, accompanied by JUAN BRIGHTASS, a male hustler.

BACK PACK

Here come the Knob Polisher, and the  
Tail Wagger, and the Stray Kitty –  
Not to mention that giant Juan Brightass.

DIRTY FRAUD

Come one, come all! 'Tis the Season!

JUAN BRIGHTASS

Thank ya kindly, Dirtyboy!  
(very VILLAGE PEOPLE)  
Is this a dress-up party? Why didn't  
somebody tell me?

KNOB POLISHER

(ass-kissy)

You look sad, Daddy. Maybe I can lift  
your spirits. Shed the blackness. Make you

see colors!

TAIL WAGGER

(low-down)

Ho, Cadillac! You can ride me up and down  
the Avenue, soon as you lose that greasy  
leather get-up!

STRAY KITTY

(skanky chic)

Crackalack! Black on Black! Nuh-uh! Who  
you think you are, Johnny Cash? Drop trow  
this minute!

BACK PACK

Buncha Virgin Marys, huh?

DIRTY FRAUD

Step off, y'all! I'd have to be wack, a punk,  
If I wore my usual mack threads today! This  
ain't the time for fashion, ladies! And Juan!

JUAN BRIGHTASS

I resemble that remark.

DIRTY FRAUD

I lost a diamond mine today! The way she  
covered my ass, I lost me a brick wall! She  
was a shady tree to me, 'cause I burn easy!

JUAN BRIGHTASS

Dirty Mule sure had a golden hole.

DIRTY FRAUD

Kicking back watching TV from twilight till  
morning bright while she plied her trade,  
sixty chips up for every trick – that cheese  
don't come by chance, dig? Dag! I lost it

all down the hole in which she rots tonight.

Dirty Fraud mourns. The Girls approach him.

KNOB POLISHER

I must confess, I was full of green-eyed envy  
for her success – and technique. But I've been  
working on my game.

TAIL WAGGER

Don't get it twisted. It's all about what God  
gave you –

(models her ass)

That'll get you up in the morning! If you  
catch my drift. Is that a banana in your pants,  
or are you just glad to see me?

BACK PACK

These chicks' raps are older than sodypop,  
and just as flat. God, huh? Let's hope he  
comes to you in a dream, and comes hard,  
you silly skanks!

STRAY KITTY

We were all born as we are -- no more, no less.  
I cook what I eat, and I make damn sure my  
Boo is looking good like I know he should. I try  
to look my best too. God don't like ugly –  
(to the other two)  
So he sure don't like you.

BACK PACK

Tell it like it is, Stray Kitty! She hella-fine, and  
neat, and young!

TAIL WAGGER

She's jailbait!

KNOB POLISHER

She's a prostitot!

BACK PACK

Don't hate!

DIRTY FRAUD continues to mourn.

CHICKYBABY

Dag! My man Dirty Fraud is making me sad!

DIRTY FRAUD

My eyes keep dripping.

BACK PACK

Cry me an IV drip – of brandy!

DIRTY FRAUD

I ain't dripping brandy, Clown!

BACK PACK

Be glad it's liquor you're leaking. What?  
You got VD?

Dirty Fraud rises. Chickybaby gets between him and Back Pack.

CHICKYBABY

The way I see it, Dirty, is that it's time  
to stop crying and move on with your life.  
As it was in the Beginning, Is now, and  
Ever shall be, Amen! I mean it's time to  
pick a chick! We ain't getting any younger!

KNOB POLISHER

Chickybaby likes to talk, don't he?

Once again, the women show their stuff to Dirty.

TAIL WAGGER

I may be little, Dirty Baby, but I'm big  
on serving you. I don't have a boo, I  
happen to be looking for a pimpdaddy.  
Plus I got 80 long cheese I been saving  
up and it's all for you!

KNOB POLISHER

I got longer cheddar – 100 easy – and

I'm fast. I get the job done.

STRAY KITTYY

I got 22, maybe 24 – but it's mine. I'm nobody's fool.

The men react.

KNOB POLISHER

Pul-eeeze! Tail Wagger and Stray Kitty trying to gang up on me? You can't compete with me in the sack, --

(to STRAY KITTYY)

You snake in the bush!

(to TAIL WAGGER)

And you, you – heinyburp!!

TAIL WAGGER

Don't get all jazzy on me, you hobosexual! Bumfuck starched up tin angel, trying to lord her skullsucking prowess over us!

STRAY KITTYY

Nobody lords nothing on me unless I say so.

Knob Polisher smacks Tail Wagger. Juan Brightass gets between them.

JUAN BRIGHTASS

Back off, Baby. Tail Wagger's my girl!

Tail Wagger smacks Knob Polisher. Chickybaby gets between them.

CHICKYBABY

I got the Knob Polisher's under my wing (Hopefully polishing my knob)!

BACK PACK

“Can't we all just get along?” No? Okay, the hell with it, knock yourselves out, c'mon Girls, come out fighting, guns blazing!

KNOB POLISHER

Chickybaby, you don't gotta defend me. I'll  
take my pound of flesh with these two hands –  
(boxing stance)  
Y'all musta forgot! I'm *nice* with these!

Knob Polisher goes after Tail Wagger. Juan Brightass gets between them.

JUAN BRIGHTASS  
Knob Sucka, don't be disrespecting the  
Great Juan Brightass!

TAIL WAGGER  
Bring it on! Let her come over here with  
that hole she calls a mouth. I'll stop it up foh shuh!

Enter WACK JACK, tweaking.

WACK JACK  
Po-Po! Po-Po! Sheriff come to mess with our thang!

Wack Jack exits, tweaking.

JUAN BRIGHTASS  
Not good. I ain't sticking around. Gotta cut.

DIRTY FRAUD  
Cool out, y'all. No worries, Sheriff's a buddy  
of mine from the Youth Authority. Nothing to  
be scared of!

Enter Wack Jack, less tweaky, shrugging.

WACK JACK  
False alarm. He went thataway instead of thisaway.

Exit Wack Jack, scratching his ass.

CHICKYBABY  
That was a close one. I'm supposed to be

in another state, I'm still on parole.

DIRTY FRAUD

Chill, my brutha, he wouldn'ta squawked,  
he's been bribed. He's one of us.

Knob Polisher and Tail Wagger smack each other, Juan Brightass in between.

BACK PACK

Quit quarreling, Honeys, and let my  
Man decide upon his next investment.

KNOB POLISHER

I'm cool.

TAIL WAGGER

I'm down.

STRAY KITTY

I'm good.

BACK PACK

Thank the Lord!

(to DIRTY FRAUD)

What don't kill ya makes ya stronger! Time  
to get back in the action.

DIRTY FRAUD

I'm getting tired of the whole biz. Might  
as well choose and get it over with.

STRAY KITTY

God help us.

KNOB POLISHER

If you're slack, Dirty, you're liable to choose  
a slacker.

DIRTY FRAUD

Nothing slack about this ramrod. I'll choose.

STRAY KITTY

God help us all.

DIRTY FRAUD

I choose the Knob Polisher!

Everyone reacts.

JUAN BRIGHTASS

Got his cake and gonna eat it too, Chickybaby.

CHICKYBABY

Tasty cake.

KNOB POLISHER

I'm yours.

(slaps her ass)

Write your name right here between  
the cheeks!

TAIL WAGGER

Bitch!

STRAY KITTY

Just dumb luck, don't envy her. Loyal  
he ain't. Yesterday he buries his Mule.  
Today he's totally forgotten her.

KNOB POLISHER

(confidential to the GIRLS)

I know!

Dirty Fraud whips off his cape. Underneath he is pimpliciously Shaft-like.

DIRTY FRAUD

Disappear this, Back Pack! See if  
the Funeral Director will buy it for 12 bills.

BACK PACK

Bet I can get 14.

DIRTY FRAUD

Then bounce, baby, and while you're at  
it bring back six bottles of the good stuff.

BACK PACK

Five for you, and one for me.

Back Pack exits with the black threads. Dirty sips from a flask.

DIRTY FRAUD

Holy Moly, if I had to wear that undertaker  
crap a minute more, I'd be the dead one!

Knob Polisher ties her colored scarf on him. He primps and preens.

KNOB POLISHER

That's my tall skinny papa! Pimp cotton  
suits you finer than gloom and doom!

Enter TWO FUNKED OUT MUSICIANS, without instruments.

FUNKY FEMALE

Party over here? We smelled liquor.

Dirty passes him the flask.

FUNKY MALE

That's called an educated nose.

DIRTY FRAUD

You're welcome. Where's your ax?

FUNKY FEMALE

In hock. Maybe Back Pack can get 'em out.

As he speaks, Funky Musician Two picks Chickybaby's wallet.

FUNKY MALE

I'll go instead.

FUNKY FEMALE

Hit it. And tell my old man that if someone comes to the barber shop for a shave, they'll just have to wait. I'ma get my *drank* on, sing a couple songs, and then I'll split. Looks like Dirty Fraud got his mack back – it's party time.

Funky Male splits as Back Pack returns.

BACK PACK

Case of Cristal out front.

DIRTY FRAUD

Bring it in, Baby.

BACK PACK

No cups.

DIRTY FRAUD

You can drink Cristal out of a toilet, Jack!  
Trying to make me look bad here?

BACK PACK

Hold yer horses, you can chug-a-lug to  
your heart's content for all I care.  
(under his breath)  
Real *stiff* guy.

Enter A SCARY MAN in jail garb. He stares at everybody, especially the girls.

KNOB POLISHER

OMFG. Am I dreaming? That can't be Scary Man?  
I thought they put him under the jail!

Knob Polisher releases from Dirty and runs to Scary Man.

KNOB POLISHER

Scary Man, my love, my honey baby,

hug me! Heart and soul of our Pimpstitution!

Dirty Fraud recovers from shock, puts on a glad face.

DIRTY FRAUD

Scary Man! Mister Bad-Ass himself! They  
oughta build a statue for you and call it Thugg  
Life! How long you been out? Break it down  
for your bruthas!

Tail Wagger and Stray Kitty encircle Scary Man.

TAIL WAGGER

What kinda clothes are those? Prison chic? Nuh-uh!  
You really a ghost? To the touch you're definitely  
flesh and bone – and wood.

STRAY KITTY

That's the real thing, homegirl.  
(sidles up against him)  
Am I right?

SCARY MAN

Scary Man's the name. Let me tell you  
how it's been.

Funky Male returns with instruments.

The two Funky Musicans accompany him as he speaks:

SCARY MAN

I came to ruin on the Barbary Coast –  
Got-damn Bay Area got it in for us SoCal  
Bruthas – wearing my Laker gear. Who  
knew the Judge moonlighted as a referee  
at Golden State Warrior games? Stone  
cold, he sent me to Quentin. Then two  
months back they moved me to Soledad –  
but I escaped! Made my way by night on  
foot from Salinas to right *chere*, San Pablo  
Avenue, Oaktown! I made a vow to never

change my threads till I made it back to  
the 'Hood, and recovered what's rightfully  
mine.

With that, he reaches out and pulls all three girls to him.

Dirty and Chickybaby try to act cool.

JUAN BRIGHTASS

Talk about drama!

SCARY MAN

So how's my girl Beyonce? Still fine?

JUAN BRIGHTASS

Lives in Granada Hills. She's engaged!

Scary Man saddens.

CHICKYBABY

Ain't that a cock block! He still loves her!

The Girls comfort him.

SCARY MAN

What do people say about me? Anybody  
wrote a rap? I been away a long time.

Stray Kitty shows him her IPHONE.

STRAY KITTY

I googled you, Scary Baby. 32,000 results!  
One of 'em says you're dead already.

TAIL WAGGER

Homies on the street rhyme your exploits.  
There's even a dance called "The Scary Man!"

KNOB POLISHER

You're a god of The Game. Biggie Smalls meets  
IceBerg Slim. What more is there?

CHICKYBABY

All the kids get their freak on to your song –  
“*El Escarraman!*”

Chickybaby demonstrates the dance as the MUSICIANS play.

JUAN BRIGHTASS

The Spanish version.  
(off SCARY MAN’s react)  
It’s Reggaeton.

KNOB POLISHER

The hoochies praise you on the riverwalk.  
The car-park Gypsies wear their dreads in  
your inimitable style.

CHICKYBABY

Your hair’s more famous than Lady Ga-Ga!

STRAY KITTY

They feel your pain in Indio and Rome!

SCARY MAN

Rome, Italy?

BACK PACK

No, Idaho. These fools have done wore out  
their kicks imitating your moves. They’ve  
pounded you like peppercorns and crushed  
you like a flower. Of all the styles out there,  
they had to go and pick yours as the prize.

SCARY MAN

Give me fame, and you can tear my ass to bits.  
(sings)

BURN BABY BURN  
BURN THAT MUTHA DOWN!

The Musicians extemporize the following:

MUSICIANS

WHEN BRAVE SCARY MAN  
BUSTED OUTA SAN QUEN-TAN  
5-0 GOT MIGHTY MAD  
HIS GOOD, THEIR BAD!

SCARY MAN

Is this my song? You think I can't  
break it down no more? I'm a little  
lighter in the loafers since Soledad.

Everyone reacts. Juan Brightass smiles.

SCARY MAN

It's a prison thang. Don't knock it.

(sings)

SO PLAY ON PLAYA  
OR GET OUTA THE WAY  
I'M COMING IN THE PAINT  
AND I'M COMING TO STAY!

Grabs the nurf basketball and thunder dunks it.

TAIL WAGGER

He is light on his feet!

BACK PACK

Guess that's what it takes!

Knob Polisher returns to Dirty; Tail Wagger joins Chickybaby. Stray Kitty stops short of joining Back Pack.

JUAN BRIGHTASS

Let's honor the wedding of Dirty Fraud  
and the Knob Polisher! *Orale!*

Juan Brightass begins to dance with Scary Man.

SCARY MAN

Get down, Big Man!

FUNKY FEMALE

Follow me and you won't get lost.

SCARY MAN

I got ants in my pants and I'm itching to dance!

KNOB POLISHER

Perfect wedding party!

Everyone prepares to line dance.

FUNKY FEMALE

Y'all ready?

CHICKYBABY

We was born ready!

They dance together as Funky Female sings/raps:

FUNKY FEMALE

HE'S BACK!!!

GONNA SHOW THE PACK

HIS MAD SKILLZ

PIMP MOVES

ILL STYLE AND SLAMMIN GROOVES

BROKE HIS HEART AND DICK TO SEE

THAT BEYONCE'S GONE OFF WITH JAY-Z

BUT JUAN BRIGHTASS IS HERE TO STAY

WHO KNEW? SCARY MAN IS GAY!

TAIL WAGGER WAG THAT TAIL

SHAKE THEM TTTS STRAY KITTY

DANCE TILL YOU GET THROWN IN JAIL

COME ON BACK TO PIMP CITY!

DIRTY FRAUD

Scary Man, you're the King. But I got the girl!

KNOB POLISHER

Loving you in that ghetto way!

They kiss.

Scary Man and Juan Brightass dance together.

SCARY MAN

Bubangbang!!

FUNKY FEMALE

SCARY MAN IS GAY!

EVERYONE

*Escarraman!*

FUNKY FEMALE

SCARY MAN IS GAY!

SCARY MAN

And proud of it!

Wack Jack reenters on the run, tweaking.

WACK JACK

Oh shit! The Cops!!!

SCARY MAN

(to JUAN BRIGHTASS)

I'm Outie!

DIRTY FRAUD

(to KNOB POLISHER)

Let's Motivate!

Everyone splits, hopping into the Caddy and running all different ways.

**DIVORCE COURT JUDGE**

A crowd television court room – very Judge Judy -- in a Latin country, crucifix displayed next to the scales of Justice. **THEME MUSIC.**

Enter CLERK and PROSECUTOR.

Enter GEEZER and MARIANA, his young wife.

Enter THE JUDGE – short, female, feisty, no-nonsense.

The BAILIFF – tall, black, muscled – addresses the crowd.

BAILIFF

All rise!

MARIANA

Finally! The Divorce Court Judge is at the bench! Kept us waiting long enough! At long last we'll have this settled, I'll be free as a bird!

GEEZER

For the love of Cripes, Mariana, don't shout our business out. Lower your voice, for the love of Pete! The whole neighborhood has gone deaf listening to you holler! Now that you have the Justice in front of you, you can lower your voice when you ask for justice.

BAILIFF

All parties in the matter of Geezer versus Mariana step forward please. Parties have been sworn in, you may be seated.

JUDGE

What's the problem, Good People?

MARIANA

Your Honor, Divorce, Divorce and more

Divorce, a thousand times Divorce!

JUDGE

From whom and on what grounds, Madam?

MARIANA

From whom? This old geezer next to me!

JUDGE

And why?

MARIANA

Because I can't stand his the sound of his voice,  
and I'm sick of taking care of his unending ailments!  
My parents didn't raise me to be a nurse, much less  
run a hospital! When we married I brought a  
big fat inheritance to this basket of bones,  
and in return he consumes the light of my youth!  
When he first got a hold of me, my face dazzled  
the looking glass; now it's like a burlap sack.  
Your Honor, please unmarry me, before I hang myself!  
Look! Look at the wrinkles on my face, thanks to  
the tears I shed each day for being married to this  
skeleton!

JUDGE

No weeping, please, Madam. Lower your voice  
and stop crying, I'll make sure that Justice is served.

MARIANA

I like to cry, Your Honor, it's my only comfort!  
Among civilized nations, there ought to be a time  
limit on marriage – a term limit of three years  
after which you dissolve it or renew it. Like leasing  
a car! That way you don't have to drive a lemon  
for a lifetime, to the everlasting misery of the driver!

GEEZER

--And the car!

JUDGE

If that proviso were to be put in practice, and

were financially practical, it would have been done long ago. But just give me the facts, Madam, the events that led you to seek a divorce.

MARIANA

Duh! The December of my husband and the April of my youth! Losing sleep, having to get up at midnight for his hot water bottle and Vicks Vapor Rub! One thing after another all night long, propping him up on pillows and pouring cough syrup down his gullet, all the while having to suffer his dung breath that pongs to high heaven!

CLERK

No doubt an ancient infected tooth.

GEEZER

I object! The Devil knows I don't have a single tooth in my head!

PROSECUTOR

There is in fact a law, or so I've heard, that Halitosis is grounds for annulment between husband and wife, or wife and husband.

GEEZER

The truth, Gentlemen – and Ma'am – is that the bad breath she says I have does not come from rotten teeth – since I have none – nor from my stomach – which is perfectly sound – but from the poison of her breast! Your Honors do not know this woman. If you did, I swear you would need a blessing and a cleansing! For 22 years I've endured her like a martyr, never once complaining of her gall, of her backtalk, and her fits -- and for the last two years there hasn't been a day that she hasn't poked and shoved me closer to the grave! Her screeching has made me halfway deaf, and her scoldings have left me completely without recourse. If she nurses me at all, as she claims, she does so with clenched teeth, instead of with a gentle

hand or any kind of medical care. In conclusion,  
Gentleman – and Ma'am – I am the one who's  
dying under her abuse, and she is the one who  
lives off my wealth, because as my wife she  
controls my property!

MARIANA

*Your* property? And what estate have you that  
wasn't bought with money from my inheritance?  
Whether you like it or not, half of the estate is mine!  
Half of everything! If I dropped dead right now,  
you wouldn't get a dime from my half – not a penny! –  
as a testament to my love!

JUDGE

Tell me, Sir: when you married this woman,  
did you enter into the agreement in good health,  
of sound mind and body?

GEEZER

I already told you that 22 years ago I came  
into this marriage like a sex slave – and she  
was a slave driver, lemme tell you! And back  
then I never let her down.

MARIANA

Now you never get it up!

JUDGE

None of that! Quiet, quiet, both of you!  
Go with God, because I see no  
cause to dissolve this union. You ate the  
fruit when it was sweet, now suck the core;  
no husband is obliged to outrace  
the speeding rush of Time, Time that will sweep  
your youth away soon enough.  
Discount the bad times now and think of the  
good times he used to give you.

(MARIANA starts to interject)

And don't say another word!

GEEZER

If it were possible, you'd do me great mercy,  
Your Honor, if you'd free me from my misery  
and release me from this bondage. Because  
if you leave me as I am, now that we've aired  
out all our dirty laundry, as soon as we're out  
the courtroom door she'll start all over  
again lashing me till I'm a martyr for real.

(off JUDGE shaking her head no)

So if you can't, then let's try this: let her stew  
in a convent, and me in a monastery. We'll  
split the estate, and with any luck we'll live  
what's left of our lives in peace and service to God.

MARIANA

The heck with that! You think I want to stew  
in a convent? You go stew, you who like to  
suffer, blind as a possum, deaf as a subway rat,  
lame and fingerless as a fish! But me, I'm healthy  
and strong and I've got all my five senses, and I  
want to use them out in the open, not in the dark,  
playing blind man's bluff!

JUDGE

Bluff.

MARIANA

I like to play it in the buff.

CLERK

(to BAILIFF)

Real women's libber!

They laugh till the Judge stares them down.

PROSECUTOR

The husband is commendable – but there's  
nothing he can do.

JUDGE

Well, I will not grant this divorce. I find no cause.

BAILIFF

Case dismissed. Step down.

Still bickering, Geezer and Mariana step down.

MARIANA

You haven't made us very happy.

JUDGE

I don't want to make you happy. It's  
the furthest thing from my mind.

(silences MARIANA with her hand)

Good! Next!

BAILIFF

All parties in the matter of Case 51,  
step forward please. Parties have  
been sworn in, you may be seated.

Enter a uniformed SOLDIER, and his wife LADY GUIOMAR in their place.

LADY GUIOMAR

God blesses me, granting my wish to  
come before your exalted presence,  
Your Honor, so that I can beg you in  
the extreme to please unmarry me from  
this – this – *eh!*

JUDGE

What do you mean, "this?" Doesn't he  
have a name? The least you can do is call  
him "this man."

LADY GUIOMAR

If he were a man, I wouldn't want a divorce.

JUDGE

Then what is he?

LADY GUIOMAR

A bump on a log.

SOLDIER

My God, I'd have to be a log to suffer  
like this in silence!

(confidentially to GEEZER)

But maybe if I don't defend myself or  
contradict this woman, the Judge  
will be inclined to condemn me, and,  
thinking she's punishing me she'll actually  
save me from this captivity, freeing me  
from the Abu Ghraib of this marriage.

PROSECUTOR

Ma'am, please speak more civilly, and  
relate your business without insulting  
your husband. Know that the Divorce  
Court Judge is here to see that justice  
is served evenly.

LADY GUIOMAR

Then your Honors don't want me to call  
him a drugstore mannequin with no more life in  
him than a bump on a log?

MARIANA

(from the crowd)

Hey Lady. We got the same problem!

LADY GUIOMAR

The short and tall of it is, Ma'am, that I  
married this man -- since that's what Your  
Honor wants me to call him -- but this?

(looks him up and down)

This is not the man I married.

JUDGE

What are you playing at? I don't get it.

### LADY GUIOMAR

I mean to say that I thought I married a man with all normal working parts, but after a few days I found out that instead I'd married a bump on a log, if you catch my drift; because he doesn't know his ass from a hole in the wall, and he won't even try to earn a few dimes to sustain his house and family. Mornings, he goes to yoga and then to Starbucks to catch up on the gossip, get the news on the street, and listen to lies. Afternoons, and some mornings too, he goes from one casino to another, watching the players and looking for a handout – although the big-time gamers hate this kind of moocher, or so I'm told. Around 2pm he comes home to eat, without having earned a single dime, because apparently he's a lousy beggar too! Then he leaves again, gone till midnight, eats if there's anything to be eaten, and if not, he shrugs, yawns and goes to bed. All night long he squirms around. When I ask him why, he tells me he's composing a rap song in his head for a friend. Because this is what he really wants to be – a poet, as if it weren't the absolute worst-paid profession in the entire world!

### SOLDIER

My sweet lady Guiomar, in everything you say, you haven't missed a thing. And if I weren't just as sure of what I do as what she says I do, I would have left the military and procured some employment here or there, and you would see me the way you see lots of other noisy little guys with a crackberry in their hand, driving a Prius, doing 70 in the carpool lane. And in my trunk, I'd have a change of clothes plus some Slim Jims and Cheez Whiz and some Wine Cooler – just in case I got lucky.

(winks at the BAILIFF)

And with my wages, I'd go down the Boulevard looking for that certain someone to flick my bick,

and several days later I'd come home with what's left of my wages and a half-eaten bucket of KFC, supporting my house as well as any poor sinner can. 'Cause that's the current state of married life! However, since I do not have such a profession or an estate, much less a Prius, but just this –

(points to his uniform)

--I don't know how else to fill out my days. There's no one wants to hire me here-- 'cause I'm married to her! So with all my will and heart, with our economy in the toilet, I ask Your Honor to separate us from one another.

#### LADY GUIOMAR

It's worse than that, Your Honor! When I see my husband so worthless, I am dying to take charge, but I can't because, after all, I'm an honest woman, I don't want to do something I'll be ashamed of later!

#### SOLDIER

For that alone, this woman deserves to be loved. I bet you're thinking that, right? But underneath this point of her honor lies the true nasty nature of the girl. She's jealous without cause, screams for no reason, she's pretentious without the cash to back it up, and since she knows how poor I am, she has less regard for me than a parrot for the straw he shits on. And the worst part of all, Your Honor, is that as a condition of her fidelity, she expects me to suffer all manner of indignities.

#### LADY GUIOMAR

Well, why not? Why shouldn't you honor and respect me, good as I've been?

#### SOLDIER

Listen, my dear Lady Guiomar. Here, in the presence of these gentlemen – and Lady – I must say this: Why do you boast to me about how good you are, when it's your simple duty as a wife to be good? You come from a good Christian family and upbringing, so you owe it to yourself to be good! Crazy how

women expect their husbands to respect them for being true, as if this is the one thing that determines their perfection! Meanwhile, they never deign to look at their own inner cesspools that have leaked away a thousand finer virtues! What do I care if you're self-satisfied with being good? I care a lot more about the bad you let your servant get away with, and that you walk around scowling, peeved, jealous, moody, extravagant, slothful, indolent, quarrelsome, grumbling, and any number of similar bitchy behaviors that are bound to wreck the lives of two hundred husbands! And yet, in spite of it all, I say Madam Judge, that my wife the Lady Guiomar is not guilty of any of these things, and I confess to being a bump on a log, a complete incompetent, a slow-poke and a lazybones, and that, to uphold the law, if for no other reason, Your Honor is obliged to divorce us: I tell you, I don't have a single objection to what my wife has testified, and I consider the debate closed, and it pleases me to be found guilty.

LADY GUIOMAR

What defense is there to what I've said? You don't even try to feed me or my maid! And she is a bargain! There's only one of her and she's a preemie, she eats like a cricket!

JUDGE

Who cares!

CLERK

Order in the court! Here come more claimants.

Enter an ACCUPUNCTURIST, and his wife ALDONZA.

BAILIFF

All parties in the manner of...Ah forget it.

ACCUPUNCTURIST

On four very excellent counts, I come to beg  
Your Honor to divorce me from my wife here, Aldonza!

JUDGE JUDY

Do you now? Four counts, huh?

ACCUPUNCTURIST

First, I'd rather look at the devils in hell than  
see her face. Second, for a reason only *she* knows.  
Third, for something I'd rather keep silent about.  
Fourth, because not even the Devil will take my  
soul, if I have to remain in her company till  
Death do us part!

PROSECUTOR

Now that's what I call an opening statement!

ALDONZA

Your Honor! Madam Judge! I beseech you  
to listen and consider that, if my husband  
has four causes to apply for divorce, then I  
can list four hundred! First, because every  
time I look at his face, I think I'm looking  
at the Devil himself; Second, because he  
deceived me when he married me, because  
he told me he was a doctor –

PROSECUTOR

I'm an acupuncturist –

ALDONZA

A *real* doctor! Not some guy who sticks  
needles into people and proscribes tea!  
He's not a real doctor and he sure doesn't

get paid like one! Third, because he's  
jealous of the sun when I try to get a tan;  
Fourth, because I can't stand the sight of

him, I want to put two million miles between us!

CLERK

How the hell can these two clocks keep time  
when they are both cuckoo?

ALDONZA

Fifth, --

JUDGE

Lady, Lady, if you think you're going to present  
all four hundred counts, I'm not going to be here  
when you do it. None of us have the time!  
Your case will be taken under advisement.  
So go with God. There's other business to  
officiate.

ACCUPUNCTURIST

How many more reasons can we give,  
Besides that I don't want to die with her,  
and she doesn't want to live with me?

JUDGE

If that was all you needed to settle a divorce,  
untold millions would be shaking off the yoke  
of matrimony.

Enter a CROSSING GUARD, with a STOP sign.

CROSSING GUARD

Your Honor, I'm just a lowly crossing guard,  
I'm not ashamed to say, but I'm Born Again,  
trying to live good and by the Law; and if it  
weren't that I sometimes smoke a bit – heck,  
let's be honest, I smoke my brain! – I would have  
been a real Traffic Cop by now. But, leaving that  
aside, because I have a lot to say on that account,  
I would like to tell the Judge that when I was  
high I promised to marry a certain lost woman.  
When I came to, I kept my promise and married  
this lady so as to save her from sin. I set her  
up in the Plaza with a real nice hot-dog stand.

Now she's gotten so uppity and ill-tempered that no one buys a frankfurter for fear that she'll start a quarrel. She drops the food on the ground, and if they complain she slaps them upside their head or wherever she can land a shot! She curses their grandparents' parents' grandmomma! She never has a moment's peace or gives one to any of the other vendors, and I gotta go and defend her with my STOP sign and knock some heads, and we don't earn enough to pay the fines for all the trouble she gets us into. I would like, if Your Honor would be so kind, that you dissolve our union, or at the very least, that you make her change her disposition so that she's more even-tempered and more mild-mannered. And I promise Your Honor that I'll make all the cars stop and all the little children get out of the way when you drive by, because I have that power, thanks to this!

(raises his STOP sign)

#### ACCUPUNCTURIST

I know the wife of this good man, and she is just as bad as my Aldonza. She spat on my hot dog! Need I say more?

#### JUDGE

Look, People! Even though some of you have come today have given good and sufficient reasons for a verdict of divorce, nevertheless it must all be set down in legal form, in triplicate, and in sworn testimony by witnesses. Therefore, all of your cases will be taken under advisement.

The room reacts.

#### JUDGE

But what have we here? Music and guitars in my courtroom?

#### BAILIFF

That's a first.

Enter the Funky MUSICIANS from the previous play.

FUNKY FEMALE

Your Judgeship, that disagreeable couple that  
you calmed and pacified the other day now  
are waiting to throw a big party for you at their  
house, and they sent us to show Your Honor  
the way.

JUDGE

I could use a drink. Sure why the hell not?  
Let's hope the rest of you find a way to make  
up the way they did.

FUNKY MALE

Why wait? Let's start the party now!

THE MUSICIANS PLAY AND SING, as the room begins to dance.

FUNKY MUSICIANS

WHEN MARRIED COUPLES GO AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS  
IT'S JUST LIKE BEATING A DEAD HORSE

BETTER TO BURY THE HATCHET AND RECONCILE  
THAN GO TO COURT AND PROVE YOU NEED A DIVORCE

STOP BEATING A DEAD HORSE  
STEER WAY CLEAR OF DIVORCE

UNLESS YOU'RE BLIND TO PAIN & THE SIGHT OF BLOOD  
AVOID DIVORCE COURT LIKE THE CLAP  
KEEP YOUR FEELINGS TO YOURSELF, PUT ON A SMILE  
KISS YOUR PARTNER, AND LISTEN TO MY RAP

BURY THE HATCHET AND RECONCILE  
DIVORCE AIN'T GONNA MAKE YOU SMILE

WHEN JEALOUSY RAGES IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS

SAPS YOUR STRENGTH AND NUMBS YOUR BRAIN  
TAKE A CHILL PILL, DUDE, RELAX YOUR ASS,  
DON'T LET YOUR MARRIAGE MAKE YOU INSANE  
AVOID DIVORCE LIKE VENEREAL DISEASE  
KISS YOUR PARTNER IF YOU PLEASE

BAILIFF

Court is adjourned!

All dance.

**Oliver Mayer** is the author of over 20 plays. He recently debuted FILO AL FUEGO (the Spanish version of his play BLADE TO THE HEAT) at the Teatro Prometeo in Miami. He opened THE WIGGLE ROOM at Company of Angels last October, and will premiere THE WALLOWA PROJECT at Son of Semele Ensemble this April. He won an Alfred P. Sloan Initiative Science and Technology award for DARK MATTERS, an original play about particle physics. “The Hurt Business: a Critical Portfolio of the Early Works of Oliver Mayer, Plus,” is published by Hyperbole Books; “Oliver Mayer: Collected Plays” is published by NoPassport Press. He wrote the libretto for the opera AMERICA TROPICAL, composed by David Conte, published by E.C. Schirmer and Sons. As associate professor at the University of Southern California, Oliver is Resident Faculty Master at Parkside International Residential College. He is the winner of a USC Zumberge Individual Award, and a USC Mellon Mentoring Award for Excellence in Faculty Mentoring of Undergraduates.

## OUR WAY OF LIVING

Daniel Brunet

If we are to believe Shakespeare, one of theater's primary functions is "...to hold a mirror up to nature...", providing artists and audience alike the opportunity to reflect on the world around them or, as Falk Richter so succinctly puts it in the subtitle of *Electronic City*, "*unsere Art zu leben*" ("our way of living").

Indeed, as the world continues to move towards ever-more pervasive digitization and globalization, humanity's current "way of living" seems to differentiate itself from what has come before. The boundaries of the private and public spheres are dissolving, the Internet has created an information superhighway free from the constraints of geography, and a new generation, the so-called "digital natives", are coming of age as the very first members of the human race to deem the dizzying amount of technological innovations to be as normal, as natural as the air they breathe.

With *Electronic City*, Richter throws all of this into question: Is humanity the master or the servant of technology? What is the human cost of round-the-clock accessibility? Can the digital realm, with its inherent malleability, be trusted as instinctually as its counterpart, the analog? These are questions well worth asking.

Contemporary German drama has often been distinguished as "post-dramatic", moving behind a tightly constructed, often naturalistic world of a play with living, breathing, three-dimensional characters in a heightened reality existing behind a fourth wall. *Electronic City* is a textbook example of this. The text can truly be seen as the blueprint for the production, providing provocative source material, which ultimately must be shaped and interpreted by an artistic team to be realized theatrically. This is no "paint-by-numbers" play calling for the team to simply follow the stage directions of the playwright. The only stage direction found is a list of characters, specifying only that, in addition to the lines attributed to Tom and Joy, there is a team of "5 to 15 people" to whom every other line is allocated.

This allows the action, the "story" of the piece to travel through multiple ontological levels of reality, posing existential questions as it goes. Is this the story of Tom and Joy, two real lovers desperately trying to overcome the flow of limitless 0s and 1s to reunite? Is it a "making of" feature, possibly found as an extra on the DVD of *Joy's World*? Is the actual theatrical reality that of the team, ostensibly video producers, as they attempt to create their media product?

Literary translation is a delicate act, one of adaptation, interpretation and craft as opposed to the literal, strict 1:1 substitution of a word in one language for another.

As I sit down to translate a play, I feel as though I am about to attempt something very strange, nearly impossible and yet artistically thrilling, like painting a song or sculpting water. Usually, at the time of this sensation, I will have been living with the German script for weeks, reading and rereading it, discovering how the playwright has elected to work with language and becoming

acquainted with the world and characters of their play. My first linguistic strokes are tentative, careful to leave myself enough space for the necessary finesse on later passes through the play. A sentence or phrase will occupy my consciousness for weeks, being turned over and over again as possible translations are examined and rejected, seeking just the right nuance and tone.

I deeply enjoy the later phases of the work, the delicate revisions, the subtle shaping, the search for the proper musicality and theatricality in my language as I read and reread the translation to myself out loud. There's something magical to me about rolling up my intellectual and artistic sleeves and diving deeply into the playwright's world, seeking to transpose their cultural and linguistic idioms into those of my own. There's something exhilarating about searching for just the right combination of words to reveal and release the ideas contained in a play written halfway around the world.

I find the very concept of translation enthralling; the notion that ideas, idioms, the use of language itself can somehow be communicated, transposed, even transmuted between languages. I relish the challenge inherent in finding the proper tone and style for each individual play and playwright I translate, in identifying the lens through which the writer sees the world. The tension between the familiar and the strange, between the domestic and the foreign that comes sharply into focus through the act of translation is thrilling, the realization of how much two different cultures have in common yet how distinct they are in expressing it is profound. Each individual play, of course, dictates my approach as a translator. A naturalistic, straight forward, plot-based play generally calls for a similar translation style, where an audience member may never suspect that the text is a translation. A piece with more focus on formal and linguistic experimentation, however, requires a translation which reflects just that.

In the case of *Electronic City*, the script began speaking back to me in English the first time I read it. It felt startlingly contemporary. I was shocked, even, in the way it sought to make sense of the inexorably changing world around us. I have been asked before if there is much difference between the original German text and my US English translation. There is no simple answer. Every act of translation is an act of adaptation. While I have certainly not changed any of the events in Richter's story, every translator would almost certainly provide a different translation. A translation is as uniquely marked by its translator as the original work is by its author.

1

Our Way of Living  
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Final Translation US English as of February 1, 2010

# Electronic City

by

Falk Richter

Translated by Daniel Brunet

Final Translation US English as of February 1, 2010



## Characters

Tom

Joy

A team of 5-15 people

- Tom enters the building he's been living in for about two weeks
- knows no one
- endless hallways
- 25 apartments in every hallway
- The city?
- Los Angeles
- New York
- Berlin
- Seattle, Tokyo, New Mexico
- he's not so sure himself
- he walks uncertainly along the hall
- and looks at the key in his hand
- looks at the wallpaper
- that seems so strangely bland
- there is nothing here, absolutely nothing, that he can use to get his bearings and
- yeah, exactly, he doesn't know anymore himself, Europe, North or South America
- it could be an apartment complex over the mall in Brisbane, Queensland, too
- in Melbourne or Sydney
- somewhere in Hong Kong, Taipei or Singapore

- at this moment he has no idea
- he doesn't know anyone and can't remember anything: Have I been here before? Is this the right floor, the right hallway, was it to the right or left of the elevator and most importantly: IS THIS EVEN THE RIGHT BUILDING?
- Changed places too many times recently and completely lost his bearings: Where is Joy, where is Joy?, have I really already been here for two weeks or or ...I don't know: two HOURS, when did I arrive here and more importantly: How? On which flight? Or did I walk here? No, that can't be, it can't, no, wait, I...silence in my brain, I, I...nothing here reminds me of anything, nothing, the plain gray, the carpet, the view from the window: it could be anywhere.
- "If I had only brought my cell phone with me – my Palm, my organizer, my laptop – or at least a compass"
- Or a discman, then I could listen to some music until somebody comes by here."
- He has a notebook where he writes down which floor in what city he's rented his room
- and he needs these PAPERS, fuck, shit, my flight, how am I going to make it? I need these fucking-, things, papers for the connecting flight, otherwise I don't even need to go there in the first place and and – 7 – 1 – 7 – 2 – 4?? 7 – 1 – 7 – 2 – 5?? This fucking password, if I only knew which city I was in then then, and what is going on with this sudden power failure in my brain, all numbers deleted, everything gone, JOY? Where is Joy? That is her name, isn't it, my wife, girlfriend, that is her name?, what genre is this, actually? Have we already decided?

TOM            Horror, hectic, metropolis, banks, stock markets, streams of money flow, testosterone flows, streams, the entire building, two are the same all over the world, I always have the feeling of arriving, never leaving, I travel but I don't move, my brain always tells me: you were already here. My brain recognizes everything even when I know, no, I was never here before, there's no way I can recognize this, but the rooms always look exactly alike, the rooms say: "Welcome home", BUT THIS IS NOT MY HOME    GODDAMN IT I LIVE HERE BUT THIS IS NOT MY HOME

*Short pause for breath.*

- But where is it then? Where could it be?
- But what genre is this? Have we already decided?
- Managers on psychotropic drugs, somewhere on the other end of the world in skyscraper beds, camping places, half-day accommodations where they lie down, collapse for a minute,

and rest so that they can make their next flight a few hours later, to merge, to invest, to speculate

- and wherever they go, everything thing looks the same
- and wherever they go, they meet the same people
- and wherever they go, they collapse exhausted in hotel rooms
- which, wherever they go, have the exact same design and can't be told apart
- so that, wherever they go, they have the feeling that they haven't moved at all
- so that, wherever they go, they have their home and always return to the same place at night, after work.

TOM            I have the feeling that I'm always sitting with my laptop on my lap in some lobby waiting room business lounge and I know all of the people around me very well they are all my friends even though I have never seen them before in my life even though I have never exchanged a single word with them and then my cell phone rings and the cell phone of the man sitting next to me and then the cell phone of the man sitting next to the man sitting next to me rings and then, simultaneously, we are all saying into our cell phones that we're almost there, that we are just waiting for our luggage, that we are exactly four and a half minutes late because our flight arrived exactly four and a half minutes late and therefore we will be four and a half minutes late to the meeting and so we ask for the meeting to start four and a half minutes later, is that ok sorry I mean is that possible, could all of you please wait four and a half minutes or do all of you have to leave right away? Have they all already left?, on the way to the next meeting?, hello, is anyone there? Hello something is wrong with the connection what? You're breaking up, hello! Fuck!

- You can't tell business lounges in airports apart from each other anymore and you have the feeling that you're sitting in a giant waiting room or reading room having a drink with a colleague after a hard day's work and letting the day die

*All simultaneously but not synchronized:*

BUT WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE WAITING FOR GODDAMN IT WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE WAITING FOR

- for the connecting flight
- for a number to be called
- someone to tell us what we are supposed to buy sell hold get rid of

- my charger fuck shit help where is my charger!!
- can this fucking airplane fly any faster, I have to get there and make this deal in Seattle or was it Rome? I don't know anymore, I'm going to miss everything, so go faster, can you do that, please, hello, faster, fucking shit, faster, otherwise I'll miss everything and then I'll be out – out of what?, just asking – but I'll never answer the question because that would just slow me down and I need to be fast otherwise I'll crash and all of these security precautions will be utterly worthless, whoever crashes, crashes and that's that, you can all put your life vests on as we crash into the forest, but I'm not going to, not me, goddamn it, faster!
- connect, bring together, delay
- flexible workforce flexible reengineer restructure reeducate reinforce reduce remeasure

*All:*

- reassure redirect reform reconfirm
- downsize download
- outsource out task
- downed by downers
- upped by uppers

*All:*

- very very flexible
- 7-14-**25** or 7-14-**26**, he can't remember anymore, he absolutely cannot remember, he can't even name one place he has been to recently or what he actually did there
- comparing numbers, estimating stock exchanges based on exact data and now he remembers:

*Now Tom and the previous speakers simultaneously:*

*He screams in a whisper:*

TOM / – I have to find the fucking room I need those papers the dates the numbers otherwise everything will break down tomorrow and it will be my fault –7-14-27-**9** 7-14-27-**10** I don't know it anymore, zero, loading error, my brain isn't reading the commands anymore, everything is blurring, everything looks the same, Help! Help!, goddamn it: IS ANYONE

HERE?

- Closeup: Tom runs through the building, no idea where he is going, no bearings, can't make any decisions, he staggers, stops, stands still, tries to sit
- but there are no chairs, he tries to lean against the wall
- but he keeps sliding off, the material has no grip
- Suddenly the elevator disappears, now he won't be able to get out
- CUT!
- People lie around in hotels that are also short-term clinics and vacation homes.

TOM            Is this a hotel or a short-term clinic? Is this a hallway, a high- security area or am I in intensive care Am I on vacation? There are a lot of things to do in your free time, right? Where's the gym?

- Tom sweats over the exercise bike at the gym
- next to him are twenty other men, who look exactly like him:
- Weak shoulders, chicken breast and pot belly
- the typical banker, really
- but trying
- yeah, still trying to pull the best out of his exhausted body
- angry, sweaty, alone, unloved, without sex.

TOM            For weeks only the hotel's porno programs. And that's the same everywhere as well. Sometimes you realize that you're in Australia because there are suddenly more Asians on the screen. You recognize Tokyo through the hard core scenes, a lot of anal sex, a lot of equipment, a lot of lesbians in leather. Texas is always a little weak, you've got to bring your own DVDs and watch them on the computer, otherwise you can completely forget the modicum of pleasure that such a business trip can offer.

- Porno moans
- a woman fakes an enormous orgasm

- a woman in an empty room everything dark candlelight
- she wears a leather skirt and a mask
- someone sticks a massive object into her genitals
- pours candle wax over her
- she rides on a black rubber penis
- while a group of men in suits stand around her and masturbate
- at the same time the noise of seven hundred businessmen in the “Welcome Home” Hotel chain
- lie next to their laptops on the bed and masturbate
- into the comforter of the “Welcome Home” bedding series
- heavy breathing
- finally they walk into the “Welcome Home” bathroom, past the “Welcome Home” Reproduction series “Alpha 2000” –a reproduction of an impressionistic work in the style of Monet made by a Belgian artist who is under contract with “Welcome Home Incorporated” and wipe their sperm into a sort of Bounty Quicker Picker Upper “Welcome Home” paper towel with “Welcome Home Dash Clean gives you a smile” printed on it
- seven hundred business men fall exhausted onto their beds
- heavy breathing
- then they log on to their email account and keep working
- can’t lose any time
- a quick come and keep going.

TOM            Is this a hotel or a porno theater or is it my gym, I check in, Electronic City, enter my code, which I can never forget or otherwise I’ll be lost, I’ve been living here for years already, haven’t I? Someone was taken away, two hours later someone new moved in who looked exactly like him: exchanged, just exchanged, no one notices.

- Rest, collapse,
- Take some pills, watch tv

- Get away from everything, wait
- Wait, but for what, for what?
- So that everything can keep going tomorrow.
- But where, where?
- I don't know, it's on a memo that my Palm forwarded to my cell phone that I'll find as a text message tomorrow next to my bed, while the water for my coffee boils in the closet next to the ironing board, which I quickly suck down before my plane.
- People stand frozen in hallways and try to remember their passwords, they look into mirrors and don't recognize what they see...

TOM           Am I the guy in my bathroom mirror, is that me? I can't remember the last time I looked like that.

- ...because their neighbors are no different from them in any detail
- because they can't remember their own history
- because they have no history
- just a chain of the same events

TOM           For years already, right? When, I can't remember anymore, when did all of this actually start?

- Tom begins to count

TOM           16 15 14 13 12 11

- he quietly sings a song that he suddenly remembers
- weak voice
- barely audible
- more like a cautious whisper
- the voice of a man who only sings when he has to calm himself down
- who doesn't even know that he has voice he can sing with
- who only sings when he is suddenly afraid, when he can't think of anything else

- doesn't know how he'll get out of a situation over which he has completely lost perspective

TOM *sings* "Let's just close our eyes, I just forget myself ... what I want is a real thing!"

- The sound of the ocean, then a quiet buzzing in an endless hallway

TOM Why isn't anyone talking here? Why is it so horribly quiet? Hello, does anyone hear me?!

- He screams

*Both voices simultaneously: Tom's voice and the previous voice.*

"Hello, does anybody hear me!! HELLO IS ANYBODY HERE!!!?"

- but only his face

- searching

- confused

- just before the moment where he realizes that he won't be able to find his way out of here.

TOM 17 21 12?

17 22 14?

19 25 3?

- He screams

*A scream that breaks off abruptly*

- something screams inside him that isn't HIM.

- He would never dare to make a noise

- people would think he was crazy

- or call the police

- Tom, scream again

TOM No, I can't

- Just try it

TOM No, I can't, please, I can't

- He pulls himself together and remains quiet, a voice screams inside of him that he doesn't

recognize.

- He stands, panicked and confused, next to the elevator and waits for someone to come by, his brain computes possible numerical combinations, unsuccessfully, he holds on to the outer door of the elevator tightly, his heart races, shhh, shhh, this is the place where the hotel becomes a clinic, but he doesn't have his medication, where is the fucking Thorazine?

TOM            17 28 19 3 404 0 5 1 7 17 22 32 where is the fucking Thorazine? Where am I how do I get out of here?!!

- He searches through his pockets, he finds a picture of a woman.
- A woman in a mall. At an airport, where where? Where could it be?
- Clues? Clues?
- She's standing behind a cash register?
- Tokyo? New York?
- London, Berlin, Taipei, Melbourne, Madrid?
- The products on the shelves behind her don't give any clue as to where she could be.
- A woman.
- A somehow
- very normal, average woman
- dark hair, average face
- a little stressed, a little sad, definitely sad, tired, lonely, no distinguishing characteristics
- who is this woman?
- *where* is this woman?

*Now simultaneously with Tom*

TOM / -        17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 11

*Again without Tom:*

- He sings a song by the Eurythmics that he suddenly remembers, from a movie that he saw with her that was about a couple *Not singing*: "I want to walk in the open wind I want to talk

- like lovers do want to dive into your ocean if it's raining with you"

TOM *simultaneous, very quiet, weak, between speaking and singing* ". . . I want to walk in the open wind I want to talk like lovers do want dive into your ocean if it's raining with you. So baby talk to me like lovers do, walk with me like lovers do, talk to me like lovers do . . ." and then strings, synthesized strings in my head, controlled by a computer, beautiful, calming, comfortable.

- 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

TOM "I want to walk in the open wind, I want to talk like lovers do, want to dive into your ocean if it's raining with you", Numbers, numbers, numbers, come on, faster, faster come on, don't miss it, call, sell, stop, further, quickly pull the suitcase off the baggage claim belt.

- The elevator races past,

- barely a noise, nothing,

TOM Every sound is so muffled here that you don't even realize you're alive, you can't feel anything, you can't hear anything but it explodes in my brain like a plane crash, I'm falling, I'm crashing, emergency, look out, I can't do it anymore, I'm defective, I'm lost, I'm not getting a signal from the terminal, no one's helping me, no one's guiding me to the runway, where am I going? Where am I going? Now I'm going to turn myself off for a minute, I'll try to reboot, Tower? Mayday, hello? 7 11 14 12 70 3 24 12 does anybody hear me, my brain is computing, it's trying every possible combination of numbers, there are still ten seconds until impact 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 zero zero zero

*Horribly loud crash sound, a crash.*

*A loud voice:*

- CUT!!!

*Silence, then:*

yeah okay that was very good, but can we have that last part one more time, Tom

*No answer.*

Tom!

*No answer.*

Tom!!

TOM No, not again, please

- Just try it again

TOM No, please I can't, please, please no

- Tom, get up, we're going to do the crash again, something isn't right with the impact, seventeen C please, the second, crash and blood, please:

*Horribly loud crash sound, a crash.*

- Tom is lying next to the runway

- Snow

- Snow storm

- i can't move

- everything is racing past me

- this is the moment where everything stops

- everything crashes, we're lying next to the runway, comfortable, silence

- another beautiful image in this film: thousands of bleeding businessmen next to the frozen runway: quiet breathing, a beautiful moment

- a very very beautiful moment

- yeah, I worked on it for a really long time

- two airports completely shut down for the shooting

- all of these crashes, you can't fake them, you have to do them for real, it was really expensive, but I had this idea and I just had to do it: airplanes racing into the tower, bleeding businessmen on the runway, I've been dreaming about it for a very long time, it had to become reality.

TOM We were all lying there. No one was moving, everyone was looking at the wreckage of the planes and all of the monitors were showing cancelled or twelve hours delay

- Yes, definitely yes: Trade: Wares, weight and worth in the world market today, new horizons,

consumption as life's purpose, business architecture, flexibility will become the proscribed behavior pattern, the new form of memory loss, facelessness, incomprehension of one's own hysterical life form, the compulsion to participate, the adjustment is then reinterpreted in the freedom of self expression; the staging of world politics: the production of the images, the market developments and the war, uncontrollable processes jointly form an uncontrollable system, whose functionality is no longer understandable by anyone and which ultimately can no longer be represented by an image or a story since it itself is the image and absence of narration, if you understand what I mean

- Yeah, I get that, I understand it completely.
- Cut! Cut to a sweaty young woman, dark hair, inconspicuous, no distinguishing characteristics.
- Her first day as a temp at the airport lounge in
- let's say...
- London Seattle
- Rome
- Sydney Madrid
- New York
- Hamburg Berlin Tokyo
- New Mexico Atlanta
- Rome
- we already said Rome
- her first day at this store
- fear in her face
- growing fear
- she's a "stand-in" so-called "stand-by help"
- she gets her schedule over email at 10:00 at night and is flown to different places all over the world, in case someone, somewhere, doesn't make it.
- Always the same supermarket chain with the integrated "Pret a Manger" fast food stand for the upper middle class, almost always in the same place in the different airports, same design,

same product line, same assignments for the personnel, she starts her shift at one in the morning, she takes over the cash register from a co-worker, it's only happened twice in her career that she's met the same co-worker in a store, once in Seattle, once in Madrid, it was Amy from Ohio and they had a quick cup of coffee together and chatted a little, and were amazed that their lives were so similar. And this, even they though came from two completely different parts of the world. They both especially liked "The Golden Girls", they talked about their favorite episodes, about "Sex in the City", which they both found funny but a little too sexual, they both found Al Bundy a little too drastic, but "ER", that was their world, they felt at home there, George Clooney, and they both laughed and looked at each and knew exactly what the other was thinking and they both repeated the name "George Clooney, George Clooney" and somehow it was clear that this man didn't just have a pretty face, there was something to find under the hospital gown that would be worth a little accident, giggle, giggle, do you want another cup, no, I have to get back, they're already called me, but maybe, maybe next Tuesday, I have shift 37b in section A in Toronto, aren't you somewhere in Vancouver then or something?

- don't start daydreaming now, please
- the line is always getting longer

JOY How does this work?

- nothing has ever happened here
- everything is always so perfect
- and she's really only there to hold the fucking infrared scanner to the label and press "total" at the end,
- take the money and put it in the register
- The change comes out automatically and falls into a little bowl next to the register
- the customer can pick it up themselves
- while she scans the next sandwiches and sushi

JOY And I'm really only there to hold the fucking infrared scanner to the label and press "total" at the end, take the money and put it in the register, the change comes out automatically and falls into a little bowl next to the register and the customer can pick it up themselves while I scan the next sandwiches and sushi. Before that I spent three weeks sorting Calvin Klein underwear according to size in a warehouse in Singapore and before that I worked in a freezer for United Airlines somewhere in the airport complex in Atlanta, where I had been working on the telephone for Coca Cola in the customer service department – this freezer

was about as big as three football fields and we had to store beef in little airplane sized aluminum packages and when an order came in over email, some guy in the office in Manchester – it went through Manchester somehow – had to steer a computer controlled forklift thing through this football field size freezer and get the desired portion and load it on the airplane and we- myself and two fat Mexican women who were always flown back to Mexico City on the weekends because they didn't have any working papers – we were only there to go into the freezer when the hook got stuck on something, or an aluminum package of beef fell out or got jammed, that was it, the rest of the time we sat in the waiting room, smoked cigarettes and watched "ER", that was my most comfortable job

- Okay thanks Joy, but actually I don't think anyone asked you
- please talk only when the red lamp is on on the monitor next to you, thanks
- so, can we rewind all of that
- we're going back again
- everyone back to positions, we're doing this again, ready:
- her first day in the store
- Fear in her face
- growing fear
- she's a "stand-in" so-called "stand-by help"
- the line is always getting longer

JOY How does this work?

- the Infrared scanner is frozen
- something isn't working
- she can't read the barcodes
- a strange loud noise and an unpleasant blinking
- as the line at the register grows
- grows and grows
- twenty-seven businessman with sushi in their hands, all of them are in a hurry, they're all annoyed by this overworked woman at the cash register who's too stupid put the scanner up to this stupid barcode thing

- and she's really only there to hold the fucking infrared scanner to the label and press "total" at the end, take the money and put it in the cash register. The change comes out automatically and falls into a little bowl next to the register and the customer can pick it up themselves while she scans the next sandwiches and sushi.
- Fuck God damn it what the hell the businessmen are getting loud
- slowly going mad
- At this point in the film you suddenly get an idea of what it would be like if these people didn't function in such a controlled manner, if they suddenly lost it and in such a high security area like an airport, right there where the system they work for is most vulnerable: stock exchanges and air travel. They show men in a situation where it would only take a spark for them to begin destroying everything, burning everything down, running amok.
- Yeah this potential has always interested me: The system imminent terrorist. Or maybe we should say: the accident: the broker who runs through the mall shooting everything, maybe you can best compare it to a plane crash, the broker who crashes and in crashing destroys everything in his environment. The system imminent catastrophe.
- The western version of the suicide bomber, but acting without a motive?
- That would be interesting, of course, to find out if these men believe, at the moment they start to destroy, that they have a motive, that they believe they know exactly at that point what their action is working for or against.
- A thought that we would call sick
- Of course it's a thought that we would have to call sick, but still a thought that we have to take seriously, when we find out how it's motivated and how it can be resolved.
- and with that back to the cash register, Joy and the businessmen.
- fuck
- fuck fuck
- fuck fuck fuck
- my flight
- fuck
- fuck
- fuck

- no time
- I have to get there
- hurry hurry hurry
- faster
- fucking shit
- my connection
- I'm going to miss it I won't catch it cancel it now and my cell phone doesn't work here
- fuck fuck fuck
- could this girl maybe go faster
- very very fast
- maybe figure out how that thing works
- these people always know less about what they do
- they're always hiring these idiots who don't have a clue and don't fucking care since they'll quit after three days anyway
- who never know how something works
- fuck
- I have to get there
- I'm hungry
- lunches have been cut on my flight
- now there are these Pret a Mangers all over and the people who work there are too stupid to use the fucking scanner
- fuck
- fuck
- fuck fuck
- fuck fuck fuck

- fuck
- fuck
- fuck fuck
- fuck fuck fuck

JOY Don't you have to put in a number to enter the codes by hand 12-58-3 12-58-4 or 59-4 what was it to change to manual? Oh god,

- she dials the number for emergencies 17 16 4 28 003

JOY / - *simultaneously* 17 16 4 28 003

- an answering machine somewhere on the other end of the world
- New York probably
- Washington, Detroit or Copenhagen
- she heard that the headquarters moved from New York or Atlanta to Copenhagen for financial reasons
- or Helsinki
- or definitely somewhere in Northern Europe, there is this answering machine and no one is picking up. Which language should I speak? Maybe Finnish?
- No, she waits for the beep and then she leaves a message:
- Joy

JOY "The infrared scanner is out of service, the infrared reading machine the machine to read the ciphers the numbers the codes with the code reading machine hello it doesn't work anymore and I am the only one in the store and I can't leave the building to ask my colleague next door hello I'm all alone here and there are only these business men who are about to kill me I need help how do you do this manually without the laser how does it work?"

- And at this moment she thinks:
- "Laser,
- Phaser,
- Lieutenant Uhura from the Starship Enterprise, completely alone on the command bridge

- her husband is somewhere on another planet, searching, under difficult circumstances, for the password that will allow him to beam back to his home universe

- Joy:

JOY “Call me here in uhm fuck wait Seattle I think well the number here is what was the number here where am I? What city!”

- Minus 7.53 plus 8.94 minus 12.86 plus 13.11 minus 0.72 minus 0.33 plus 1.85 minus 16.33 minus 3.44 minus 11.44 minus 12,14 can't be definitively proved it isn't open and shut renewed unrest the police are facing a puzzle human and technical errors the victim of the attack was a fourteen year old student revenge threatened further sinking growth rates under 0.8 percent estimated the investigating committee for the finance scandal the opposition demands a full explanation seventeen year old Bettina is still missing shot into the crowd seventeen students died at the scene high alert in the city bomb threat at airport twenty injured died on the way poison gas his entire family after the release only the seventeen year old Maren survived the attack

*Simultaneously with:*

- A look into the store, but nothing in its selection calls up any memory, monitors with CNN and stock tickers everywhere, running quickly under the picture, while the travelers pull their suitcases in the direction of the boarding gate. Images of crashes, war, crisis regions, NATO bombers, dictators, oil companies, military helicopters, happy businessmen putting their sweet little daughters to bed from a cell phone on the other end of the world, a suicide bomber at a children's home in Tel Aviv, revenge, offices are bombed, a happy family at breakfast, aware of the growing interest of their equity funds, they still don't know anything about the impending crash, they're still sitting next to each other and laughing and across from them: Starbucks, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, a Hugo Boss store, Versace, Bodyshop, Paul Smith, where am I? a number next to the cash register: “you are at cashier desk 9 0 8 at location 00 7 0 8 – PQ 12, ahh, okay”

JOY “Hello listen call me 908 / 00708/ PQ12 and please hurry up I'm here all alone and I don't know the code to do anything else, there's no one besides me in the store”

- thirty-two panicked businessmen all in the same suit in transit not a second of time go faster faster go

- and she tries to repair this thing this fucking thing but she has no clue

JOY absolutely none

- has absolutely no idea how the thing works

JOY I have absolutely no idea how this thing works. What are you supposed to do when it suddenly stops reading?

- The only woman here in the supermarket with her shitty ugly red-checked apron which has her first name JOY stuck on it
- It's three thirty in the morning the men in the line are getting restless Joy panickedly smashes the infrared scanner repeatedly against the cash register tries to scan codes again,/  
*speaker underneath begins, holds back the tears of rage*
- and the actress playing Joy holds back the tears of rage quite masterfully

JOY "Go finally please please do it go"

- she starts to search for the papers in the drawer, the instruction manual
- and the actress who plays Joy finds exactly the expression that's needed to show the growing despair that is there but that can't be brought to the surface, that can't be shown, that you don't want to expose, show no sign of weakness, never allowed to show how overloaded she is with this fucking machine, she thinks, while she plays Joy and plays her so well that there's no difference anymore between the actress Joy and the real person Joy who is recognizable as the model for the character here. I am no longer estranged from my work, my work has made me completely insane. The instruction manual, fuck, where is it? Where is it fuck fuck where is it fuck fuck fuck where is it where where where where where is it fuck fuck I'm going into a spiral I'll never fuck get out fuck fuck fuck of this alone help. She searches, hectic, desperate
- but there is nothing there
- absolutely nothing there,
- a couple sheets of paper,
- canceled checks,
- then she finds a photo of a man in a suit, standing in front of a door with a numeric combination somewhere in an endlessly long hallway

TOM 7-1-7-2-4

- he hold an open Nokia cell phone to his ear like in the film The Matrix and looks playfully into the camera like an undercover agent.

JOY Tom, oh God, Tom,

- she takes her cell phone, dials a number, we hear it ring.

*A cell phone rings.*

- Back to the hallway
- somewhere in another city
- wherever
- Tom is still next to the elevator
- he waits
- he waits
- he cries
- he's pissed his pants
- he's hit himself repeatedly in the face to pull himself together
- Tom's voice as a voiceover above a sea of numbers, airport lounges, suites of rooms, hotel beds, hospital beds, porno booths, everything is blurry, everything flows together, the sound of an elevator going up and down, always racing past Tom as he hits himself in the face, sobbing with rage:

*TOM as he hits himself in the face, sobbing with rage*

You know it fucking shit, pull yourself together this fucking brain or this shitty brain computer needs to work now! Go, do it, compute, think, go, fucker, otherwise I'll rip you apart, I'll throw you away! A computer that doesn't work ends up in the garbage, understand!

- Ringing cell phone, more intensely, louder.
- TOM           This fucking cell phone, is that my cell phone?! Is that my cell phone that's ringing goddamn it! Is that my cell phone? Where is it then where? Where is this fucking sound coming from? Where is my room? And for the love of god what is the code for this elevator? And why is there nobody here is everyone dead here? Or are they all hiding or lying dead in their beds? I want to get out of here!!"
- Cell phone rings, louder, now distorted.
- TOM           That is my cell phone. That's my ring tone, I downloaded it from Napster before it went bankrupt!!
- Stay calm now
- quiet, be quiet

- be quiet goddamn it and try to concentrate:

TOM I can't

- pull yourself together

TOM I don't want to anymore I can't I want to get out of here

- you're staying there!

TOM No!

- you're staying there, pull yourself together

TOM I don't want to play this anymore please I want to play something else a different part please please a different part

- You only get this part nothing else and now pull yourself together and end your life without making too much chaos out of it no one has asked anything more of you!

**- Horribly loud unbearable ringing cell phone.**

TOM That is my cell phone, it's laying in one of these rooms and I just need to follow the signal and then I'll know where I live again and all of my papers are there and then I'll know where I have to go again and who I have to call and email and how to get the right information for the meeting tomorrow, fuck I still have no idea what this company is called, the one we're supposed to take over, who wanted to merge with who, and how many shares we're supposed to buy I DON'T KNOW I DON'T KNOW ANYMORE

- The recording on a mailbox, Tom's voice as recorded text:

TOM "Ich bin vorübergehend nicht zu erreichen bitte hinterlassen Sie eine Nachricht, ich rufe umgehend zurück. Hi this is Tom, I am not at my desk right now please leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as possible."

JOY Where are you? Where are you? I can't take anymore...I...how does this work? How? Please call me, please call me, call me please, where are you?

- The moment freezes,

- Joy hangs up and waits,

- now she hears herself, her voice, like in a documentary film, talking about itself.

- The movie of her life:

- A television crew is standing next to her, very nice people, the director, an outspoken, nice, friendly, good looking man, played by me, approaches her, seems to really be honestly

interested in her, he makes time for her, he listens to her, please Joy, sit down, make yourself comfortable, let's not be formal, what do you think Joy, I'm Peter, so, tell me something Joy, just tell me something Joy, how does that sound:

JOY Yes, it was all somehow very frantic, globally networked and rationalized we were like data and we raced through information networks without ever realizing who or where we were. I can't remember anything, like quick pictures, over exposed, lots of pictures layered on top of each other, quickly moving pictures, on which you don't recognize anything, except maybe a wildly colored wave, you feel that somewhere someone is standing or laying or sitting or thinking but you don't recognize anything, everything blurs, that's the memory of my life: A sea of numbers.

- Yes Joy, very pretty, but can you be more specific?

JOY Specific?

- Yes Joy, we want a couple of facts, too, not just pretty pictures, right? *We're* responsible for the metaphors, you just deliver the material and we'll make something out of it, okay, we can do it better, believe me Joy, we did go to school for this, thanks.

JOY Yeah, I went to school, too. Three semesters, at least I think so. Business, then I ran out of money or I wanted some practical experience or something like that and I took a year off and in the first eight weeks I had twenty-seven different jobs, always part-time things because I couldn't stay anywhere longer than three days, a very flexible lifestyle, I was responsible for the computer icons in a fully computerized bakery or I searched for luggage that had flown away, I counted miles for qualifying customers, or cancelled reservations to the Caribbean after terrorist attacks, I auditioned news anchor voices for satires for private television or wrote jokes for early evening series, I developed concepts to write actors who weren't popular anymore out of the daily soaps and I cleaned the video booths in the World of Sex chain primarily in the Benelux countries and Poland, a lot of telephone jobs: telebanking, even investment fund advising, even though I really had no clue at all about it, we had a piece of paper that told us what we should tell the people, we just read from it, stood around on the street a lot and asked people about the new sorts of cheese, which would you choose?, worked on election campaigns, delivered pizzas, cut sushi, worked security for the train station and kept the junkies out, phone sex and recruited students for the police academy and at some point I really wanted to be back in school

- Do you think that's funny, Joy?

JOY Yes, somehow...definitely...funny...yeah, yes confusing too, but also funny

- Joy's voice years later in an apartment in a completely different place

- nicely set up in a life that has already survived a few things,
- finally together with Tom in one place, both at peace, or so it seems, as they speak this sentence quietly, like to a television crew,

JOY There's something very calming about television crews, it always helps me to imagine that everything here is just an episode on a television series, tv shows always have a happy ending, always, and most of all, on tv shows all the questions are answered and all the problems are solved, the bad guys die and the good guys come back together somehow. And you can't say that about THIS FUCKING REAL LIFE OR WHATEVER YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO CALL THIS SHIT, all the questions stay unanswered, the characters are always changing, you completely lose any perspective over the story, none of the characters have a recognizable, comprehensible motive, you get the feeling that you're watching people go insane, you don't understand anything, and NO people DON'T always get back together, they split up before they've even met and their lives tell fifty thousand different stories, none of which they understand and they can never really get into it.

**- Sounds of the sea and wind**

- Difficulty is counterproductive in a flexible system
- Everything has to be simple and understandable otherwise uncontrollable processes will be set into motion

JOY Life is about keeping the complications to a minimum and to simply function for a while without everything collapsing into madness. That would be a goal!

- Joy's voice from the television series "Joy's World", the life of a completely normal woman
- Trailer for "Joy's World-a world of Joy-the story of an average girl in a not so average situation ha ha" wild applause, and here is JOY, more applause, jingle, then the sound of the sea again, wind and "Julia" by the Eurythmics.

JOY "How we met?" Terminal 4, transit, right before the passport control. Both completely frantic, a barely perceptible moment, a wild blurry tracking shot from a security camera."

- CUT! And again, please:

*Trailer, then: she speaks her text, one notices that if one listens carefully, that she knows it by heart.*

JOY How we met? At the security checkpoint. I had to run, I was really late, and no one wanted to let me by, so I shoved my way through, I was directly in front of him and he tried to push me to the side.

- During this, blurred: rows of numbers during this, airport announcements in various languages, a placeless place, numbers, x-ray machines, hospital? Airport? Businessmen in

lounges, totally exhausted, totally empty, a text projection above their faces “I feel empty” and then a wildly confusing chorus of voices / “I feel so empty, I am so fucking empty, I don’t know who I am”

TOM *joins in at /* ... I feel so empty, I am so fucking empty, I don’t know who I am, when I get there I crash into bed and I don’t know where I am, when I get there, I look at the ticket for the next day, I check my email, I read my text messages, I don’t know where I am: in the air, on the ground, am I landing or taking off? Something dead is lying here next to me and I think, yes, I think it’s me.

- Scene 17 Airport Terminal D night

JOY Sorry please I have I have to catch my plane please

TOM Yeah sorry me too

JOY I’ll lose my job

TOM I’ll lose mine too and three hundred thousand other people with me if I don’t get to my meeting on time, so please

JOY But I need the money more than you sorry and now get out of here, you idiot ! But he didn’t want to let me by, he was in just as big a hurry, we almost came to blows, you get so aggressive in airports, people get so aggressive when they run out of time, if they’re going to miss their appointments, so helpless, when you’re held back like a caged animal by a barrier and some guy digs around in his pockets for hours and keeps getting called back and checked again because he always has some money or a key or his cell phone in his pants pockets.

TOM Get out of here or I’ll shoot everything in here dead, I’ll set everything on fire, I’ll kill you all, and you first, you cunt, do you understand.

JOY I hit Tom right in the face. He fell to the ground, jumped back up and hit me, we were bleeding. Both of us. Then we were taken away by the security guards, they took down our information and searched our pockets. “Who are these psychos?”- “We’d better leave them here.” They put us into a glass cube and held us for two hours.

TOM They kept looking in, we were being watched by video cameras.

JOY Every time we talked to each other, one of the guards knocked on the door and waved his finger warningly in the air.

TOM Fucking shit, my plane, now I can forget my meeting, the merger, the take-over, now you can forget about the stock market, it’s already been down so far, well, now it’s REALLY

down. You have no idea what you've just done, my charger fuck shit help where is my charger, my cell phone doesn't work in this fucking glass cube, how am I supposed to make this fucking deal, cancel, announce the right information, connect, bring together, stall, reengineer, restructure, reeducate, reinforce, reduce, reform, make more flexible, downsize, outsource, download, announce the right number, at least announce the right number, to this other Tom, this other guy from our office, who's also named Tom, and he sometimes stands in for me because he looks exactly like me and has the same voice too and all because you, you stupid cunt, couldn't move to the side, I hope you die, I hope you die, you pig. Hundreds of people will die if this meeting doesn't take place, is that clear? Do you understand that? Hundreds of people out of work, a massive slump in production, drop in prices, recession, inflation, no profit, no interest, everyone will starve and the funds, they'll collapse and everyone will be laid off and then what? What should all of them do when they don't have anything to do? They don't need anyone, they don't want anyone, they're just looking at the books, all of these poor workers, but where should all of them go now? What are we going to do with them?

JOY You're very sexy when you get upset, do you know that, you remind me of George Clooney a little, do you know that you've got an erection right now?

TOM God, you're insane!

JOY And Tom races down the hall in a white hospital gown, the intensive care unit that I'm lying in, the right instruments in his bag to take my pain away, to diagnose everything bad and take it out of my body. He was so excited, we immediately had sex in this damn glass cube with all the video cameras, he was in such a rage that he could fuck really well.

*Short pause.*

Later, that didn't happen so often.

- We see Joy and Tom in the glass cube, having sex while a big fat security guard with dirty hair watches everything in the monitor, while other members of the ground staff and hurried travelers pass by and throw a quick glance at the inside of the cube and aren't sure whether this a promotional gag for some kind of startup company or if a porno film is just being shot here, or maybe a television show about sex in public places.
- It's just the retakes for this docusoap "Joy's World – a world of Joy", that never happened, none of it ever happened, it was just shot afterwards because she mentioned something to that effect and they shot it

JOY Bullshit it's all true I lived it myself

- Is Joy saying that or the woman who will play Joy later in the movie?

- In the series.
- How successful was the series?
- Not too successful, it was cancelled really quickly.

JOY Bullshit the series was an absolute hit. “Joy’s World – a world of Joy.” There were over eight hundred episodes, they practically filmed my whole life, it was crazy, it was just great, and the woman who played me was pretty convincing, she played my life much better than I did: She was a better Joy than me.

- CUT!

Back to the group of ever more impatient businessmen in Boss and Yves Saint Laurent pinstripes with sushi and little manager salads and Happy Fitness drinks in their hands who can’t miss their connecting flights and HATE THIS GODDAMNED FUCKING OVERWORKED SWEATY WOMAN WITH THE NAME JOY ON HER CHECKED UNIFORM

- who wouldn’t go to bed with her in their wildest dreams, even if they were in Texas and the goddamned “Welcome Home” porno channel wasn’t working
- Cut, Scene 17 D slash 1, Electronic City, night:
- Joy’s voice electronically distorted on the telephone: “Tom please call me back please sorry you must be in a meeting but ... I can’t take anymore... I have to talk, talk with someone, no one’s here, I can’t take anymore, I can’t take anymore”
- Cut, good, okay, we’re going to move on in a moment, three minute break for everyone and then we’ll shoot Scene 17 D slash 2, Electronic City, night:
- Loud penetrating ringing of a cell phone. On a movie screen we see a man in a hallway running back and forth in a panic in all directions towards the ringing and away again, he looks for it, but he doesn’t find it.
- CUT!
- Let’s shoot that again, please! Okay, listen up, everyone, we’re going to shoot that again.
- Why?
- Sound was shitty.
- Ah, okay, sound was shitty, ok everybody: Please don’t be shitty this time, sound, okay, and please:
- Sound of a cell phone ringing in a hallway, you see a man running back and forth in a panic

in all directions towards the ringing and away again, he searches, but he doesn't find it, this time with optimal sound

- CUT! Sound was great this time, all around, a cell phone symphony, super, super, I love all of you and let's move on:
- 17 D slash 3b, Electronic City, night, yes, sound please and:
- Joy's voice: 17 16 15 14 13 12 11, she sings scared and breathless: "Take me to your heart, why don't you take me to your heart?"
- a Eurythmics song from the album "In the Garden", the first album that Joy bought as a teenager back then in Houston or Brighton or Bonn or wherever it was, Annie Lenox before she became a household name, the Eurythmics unsuccessful and unknown, but there was already this ice cold voice, you sang with it and froze, pure electronica mixed with falling snow Joy's voice quiet, cold, lost, no one knows this song, no one knows what she's singing, no one can sing with her. She waits, it rings, no answer, she looks around and what she sees isn't very pretty, a row of raving businessmen in suits just before losing it, just before they destroy everything
- You're looking for moments in our society which can no longer be defined as "civilized"?
- You can't define our society right now, there STILL isn't a language for it, that still has to be invented. Right now, the ability to revolutionize our society, completely restructure it, is much stronger and will be much more successful than the ability to describe the process, let alone criticize, correct, or stop it.

*-back on the set* We'll shoot the men losing it later, ok, we'll just mix it in later, okay.

- She sings: "So we are living in desperate times, ohh, such an unfortunate time I can't relate to you I just can't find a place to be near you", and she thinks about her husband Tom somewhere on the other end of the globe, she's forgotten what city he's in and what airline he's going to fly back on and whether she was able to set up her work schedule so that she'll be working at the same airport he'll fly into on his return trip stop over lay over OR WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL THIS NEVER ENDING BUSINESS TRIP THAT HE'S BEEN FOR OVER TEN YEARS.

JOY *sings as described above* "Time after time I try to contact you Time after time I try to talk to you but you don't take me to your heart".

-JOY'S VOICE *on voicemail, panicked* "Tom, Tom, can you please call me back, please"

- and we see her husband somewhere in Seattle, Atlanta, London, New York in an apartment painted in soothing colors running panickedly in the direction of the sound of a ringing cell phone. He runs, he holds his head, he hits his head against the wall, enraged, he would love to scream, but he doesn't trust himself to, he's afraid they'll lock him up, that someone will

call the police and they'll take him in and he doesn't have his passport with him and he doesn't have ID, he doesn't know anyone where he is, or the number of his apartment, but he hears his cell phone's ring tone, of course three million other men have exactly the same ring tone, how is he supposed to know if its really his cell phone ringing somewhere next to his suitcase that he hasn't even unpacked yet, how is he supposed to know anything,

TOM I don't know, I don't know anything anymore, I run, I crash, I fall

*He screams in a whisper.*

**JOY Tom Tom Tom call me please help**

TOM Joy Joy Joy fucking shit where are you I love you

JOY Love?

TOM Yes love or at least I need you I really want to be with you right now a lot more than I want to be here I can't take it anymore I can't take it anymore

JOY Love?

TOM Yes something like that or maybe it would just be very nice to fall asleep next to you or watch tv no not tv listen to music or 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

- and now numbers, a sea of numbers: Tom's voice in multiple layers, always hectic, fast, until he collapses in exhaustion:

TOM *then Joy begins later and then after a while all the speakers to create a sea of numbers*

17 47 13 11 -17 48 13 12 - 1 11 17 3 - 5 9 16 2 - 15 19 22 5 - 27 19 13 12 - 14 19 28 12 -  
18 19 22 12 - 7 15 98 3 - 80 99 45 11 - 2 22 23 9 - 100 200 300 12 (and so on.)

*Simultaneously:*

- Tom's and Joy's voices, as they search for the password, the password to input prices in the Pret a Manger store, for the elevator, to turn on the electricity in the apartment and to activate the porno station, the PIN-code for the cell phone, debit card, AMEX, for the email account, for the E-ticket at the airport, for the cell phone, bank account and email and to be able to find the goddamned apartment building in the first place!!

- Both drown in an increasingly blurred background of numeric combinations overlaid with photos of different cities waiting rooms hospitals short-term clinics warehouses shopping malls internet cafesVIP lounges television studios vacation clubs all over the world nothing, absolutely nothing significant, placeless places, in which time freezes into hundredths of seconds, frantic travelers in front of a barrier

at security check point, who will be first to make to the home stretch?, the same suit, same suitcase, a conveyor belt with all the same suitcase, racing businessmen on the way to their connecting flights, broken down business men in Singapore and Hong Kong wait for the next leg of their trip and use every chance to breath, respiratory devices, plane crashes, ambulances, car races, airplane shows, sports competitions, photo finishes, first place separated by a hundredth of a second from second place which is itself half of a hundredth of a second in front of third place

- Joy and Tom, both exhausted, both lonely, walk and walk, run, race, crash, take buses taxis trains ships helicopters airplanes and attempt to hold their “characters” together, find a line through the story of their lives, be “real”, be themselves, to snap up the right information and pass it on, follow all the clues correctly, believable, authentic, flexible, effective
- Sudden silence.

*Pause*

- Sudden silence

*Pause*

- For the blink of an eye, everything is still

*Pause*

- The sound of numbers stops

*Pause, silence, nothing is heard for a while.*

JOY *an ethereal piece of music underneath, not from this world:* “On the Tuesday after this one I’ll be in Amsterdam for seven hours Terminal 4 right by Gate 65, I checked, you’ll be coming in that evening from Madrid and then continue on to Toronto, if you fly via Amsterdam instead of Brussels and can take a later connecting flight, then maybe I could set my shift up so that I take my break exactly between 11 and 11:30 and then we could finally speak with each other “live” again in the KLM Lounge, I would love to be able to put my head on your shoulder again for just a minute...

TOM *continues speaking* ... hold you, kiss you, we could go to the men’s room or there’s this prayer room in Terminal 4, there’s never anyone there maybe we could

*Joy laughs.*

JOY I love you.

TOM The L-word. You’re scaring me.

*Joy laughs.*

TOM            I miss you.

-            We hear them both breath, uncertainly, cautiously

*The following more like questions, without any real confidence.*

JOY We'll make it.

TOM            Yes. We'll make it.

*End.*