THE

CHAIRS

A Play

EUGENE IONESCO

Translated by
DONALD WATSON
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SAMUEL FRENCH

LONDON
THE CHAIRS

Produced by The English Stage Company Ltd, at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on the 18th June 1958, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

The Old Man George Devine
The Old Woman Joan Plowright
The Orator David Buck

Directed by Tony Richardson
Setting by Jocelyn Herbert
THE CHAIRS

Scene—A room.

The room has tall double-doors back c , mounted on a rostrum, with french windows, overlooking the water which surrounds the house, R and L of them. There are, in addition, six other doors or entrances, down R, RC, up R, up L, LC and down L. The french windows have heavy curtains and a stool stands in front of each. There are two bentwood chairs, one down LC and one c. The room is lit by a gas pendant c.

When the Curtain rises, the room is in semi-darkness. The Old Man is standing on the stool, leaning out of the open french window up L. He is aged ninety-five. The Old Woman, aged ninety-four, is standing on the chair c, with her back to the audience, lighting the gas pendant, which has been lowered for the purpose. The lapping of the water which surrounds the house can be heard.

Old Woman (striking a match) Hurry up, dear, and close the window. (She lights the gas)

(The general lighting comes up)

I don’t like the smell of stagnant water, and the mosquitoes are coming in, too. (She pushes the pendant upwards)

(The pendant rises to its normal set position)

Old Man. Don’t fuss!

(The sound of the water fades)

Old Woman (stepping from the chair) Come along now, dear, come and sit down. (She draws her chair down RC, level with the chair down LC) Don’t lean out like that, you might fall in. You know what happened to Francis the First. You must be careful.

Old Man. Another of your historical allusions. I’m
tired of French history, my love. I want to look. The boats
in the sunshine are like specks on the water.

OLD Woman (crossing to him) You can’t see them, it’s
night time, my pet—there is no sun.

OLD Man. It’s still casting shadows, anyway. (He leans
right out of the window)

OLD Woman (pulling him back with all her might) Ah!
You’re frightening me, my dear. Come and sit down, you
won’t see them coming. It’s no use trying. It’s dark.

(The OLD Man steps reluctantly from the stool and sits on it)

OLD Man. I wanted to look. I do so enjoy looking at the
water.

OLD Woman (crossing to the chair rc) How can you, dear?
It makes me quite giddy. Oh, this house, this island, I shall
never get used to it all. Water all round you—water under
the windows, water as far as the eye can see. (She sits on the
chair rc)

(The OLD Man rises, crosses to the Old Woman and sits on
her lap, facing L, as though it were the most natural thing in the
world)

OLD Man. Six o’clock in the evening and it’s dark
already. Remember? It was different in the old days; it was
still light at nine o’clock, at ten o’clock, at midnight.

OLD Woman. So it was! What a memory you’ve got.
OLD Man. It’s all changed now.
OLD Woman. Do you know why it’s changed?
OLD Man. No, I don’t, Semiramis, my pet. Perhaps be-
cause the farther we go, the deeper the rut. It’s all on
account of the earth, which never stops turning, turning,
turning . . .

OLD Woman. Turning, turning, my love.

(There is a short silence)

Oh, yes! You really are a great scholar. You’re so clever,
my dear. You might have become a President General, a
General Director or even a General Physician or a Post-
master-General, if you’d wanted to, if you’d had just a
little ambition in life.
OLD MAN. What good would that have done us? We shouldn’t have had a better life. After all, we have a job to do. Since I’m a caretaker, you could call me a Quartermaster-General.

(The OLD WOMAN fondles the Old Man as if he were a child)

OLD WOMAN. My little pet, angel child . . .
OLD MAN. I’m so tired of everything.
OLD WOMAN. You were more cheerful when you were looking at the water. Just to cheer us up, let’s pretend, as we did the other night.
OLD MAN. Pretend yourself, it’s your turn.
OLD WOMAN. It isn’t—it’s yours.
OLD MAN. It isn’t.
OLD WOMAN. It is.
OLD MAN. It isn’t.
OLD WOMAN. It is.
OLD MAN. Semiramis, drink your tea.

(Naturally, there is no tea)

OLD WOMAN. Imitate February, then.
OLD MAN. I don’t like the months of the year.
OLD WOMAN. There’s no other kind at the moment. Go on, just to please me.
OLD MAN. All right, then. (He rises and crosses to the chair LC) This is February. (He scratches his head like Stan Laurel)
OLD WOMAN (clapping and laughing) Yes, that’s it. (She rises and crosses to him) Oh, thank you, thank you—you really are a sweet little pet. (She kisses him) You’re so clever, you could have been at least a Postmaster-General, if you’d wanted to.
OLD MAN. I’m a caretaker, a Quartermaster-General. (He sits on the chair LC, facing front)

(The OLD WOMAN crosses and sits on the chair RC, facing front. There is a silence)

OLD WOMAN. Tell me the story. You know, the story: “And then we arri . . .”
OLD MAN. What again? I’m tired of it. “And then we
arri...?" That one again? You always ask me for the same thing. "And then we arri..." It's so boring. Every evening, every evening without exception, through seventy-five years of married life, you make me tell the same story, imitate the same people, the same months—always the same. Let's change the subject.

OLD WOMAN. I never get tired of it, my love. It's your life—so exciting.

OLD MAN. You know it by heart.

OLD WOMAN. It's as if I forget everything straight away. Every evening I start with a fresh mind. But I do, my pet, I do it on purpose. I take a purge—I'm as good as new again, just for you, my dear, every evening. (She pauses) Please hurry up and begin.

OLD MAN. All right, then.

OLD WOMAN. Come on, start telling your story. Of course, it's mine as well: what's yours is mine. "Then we arri..."

OLD MAN (turning on his chair to face her) "Then we arri..." my pet.

OLD WOMAN (turning on her chair to face him) "Then we arri..." my pet.

OLD MAN. Then we arrived at a great iron gate. We'd been soaked to the skin, frozen to the bone, for hours, for days, for nights, for weeks—

OLD WOMAN. —for months—

OLD MAN. —in the rain. We were chattering all over, our ears, our feet, our knees, our noses, our teeth—that was eighty years ago, now. They wouldn't let us in. They might at least have opened the garden gate.

(There is a silence)

OLD WOMAN. In the garden the grass was wet.

OLD MAN. There was a path that led to a little square. And in the middle a village church. Where was that village? Do you remember?

OLD WOMAN. No, my dear, I've forgotten.

OLD MAN. How did we get there? Where's the road to it? I believe the place was called Paris.
Old Woman. Paris? There never was such a place, my pet.

Old Man. There must have been once, because it fell into ruins. It was the city of light and four hundred thousand years ago it faded right away. (He turns and faces front) There's nothing left of it now, except a song.

Old Woman (turning and facing front) A real song? That's funny. What is it?

Old Man. A lullaby, a parable. (He sings) "Paris will always be Paris."

Old Woman. Did we get there through the garden? Was it a long way?

Old Man (dreamily; far away) The song? The rain?

Old Woman. You're so clever. If you'd had just a little ambition in life, you might have become a General Editor, an Attorney-General, a General Postmaster-General . . . Oh, dear, all swept away under the bridge—under the great black bridge of time—swept away, I tell you.

(There is a silence)

Old Man (leaning over and touching her) "And then we arri . . ."

Old Woman. Oh, yes! Go on with the story.

(During the following, the Old Woman begins to laugh quietly, crazily, gradually working up into fits of laughter. The Old Man laughs, too)

Old Man. And then we arrived and we laughed till we cried to see the funny man arrive with his hat all awry—it was so funny when he fell flat on his face, he had such a fat tummy. He arrived with a case full of rice: the rice on the ground, all awry—we laughed till we cried—and we cried and cried—funny fat tummy, rice on a wry face, flat on his rice, case full of face—and we laughed till we cried—funny hat flat on his fat face, all awry . . . (He rises)

Old Woman (laughing) Arrived on his rice—(she rises) face all awry, and we cried when we arrived, case, face, tummy, fat, rice . . .
OLD MAN \(\{\) together; laughing\(\})\) And then we arri ... Ah! Arri ... Arri ... Ah! Ah! Ri-ri-rice awry—fat hat awry.

(They change places, the OLD MAN crossing above the OLD WOMAN)

Fat tummy funny—rice—arrived awry. And then we—fat tummy—arri—the case.

(They slowly quieten down)


(The OLD Man sits RC. The OLD WOman sits LC)

OLD Woman (after a pause) So that was your famous old Paris.

OLD Man. Parasite lost.

OLD Woman. Oh, you are, my dear, oh, you are, really. You are so—so—you could have been something in life—(she rises and stands behind the Old Man's chair RC) much more than a Quartermaster-General.

OLD Man. Don't let us be boastful—we should be satisfied with the little we have.

OLD Woman. Perhaps you've wrecked your career?

(The OLD Man suddenly starts crying)

OLD Man. Wrecked it? Dashed it to pieces? Broken it? Oh, where are you, Mummy? Mummy, where are you? Hee, hee, hee, I'm an orphan. (He groans) An orphan, a norphan.

OLD Woman. Mummy's with you, what are you afraid of?

OLD Man. No, Simiramis, my pet. You're not my mummy. An orphan, a norphan, who will look after me?

OLD Woman. But I'm still here, my love!

OLD Man. That's not the same—I want my mummy. Na! You're not my mummy.

OLD Woman (stroking him) You're breaking my heart. Don't cry, little one.

OLD Man. Hee, hee! (He rises and goes down on to the floor
LC) Leave me alone; hee, hee! I feel all cracked and smashed. I've a pain, my career is hurting me, it's all in pieces.

(The Old Woman sits on the chair LC and leans over him)

Old Woman. There, there!

(The Old Man sobs, with his mouth wide open, like a baby)

Old Man. I'm an orphan—a norphan.

Old Woman (trying to coax him into being quiet) My little orphan boy, you're breaking mummy's heart, my pet.

Old Man (sobbing) Hee, hee, hee! My mummy! Where's my mummy? I've lost my mummy.

Old Woman. I'm your wife, so now I'm your mummy, too.

Old Man (giving in a little) It's not true. I'm an orphan. Hee, hee!

Old Woman. My little sweetheart, my little orphan, norphan, porphan, borphan, morphan.

Old Man (still sulky, but coming round slowly) No—I don't want to, I wo-o-ont!


Old Man. No-o-o-o! No-o-o-o!

Old Woman (taking his hands; singing softly) Leelo, lahlo, lulo, lay, norphan-lo, norphan-lu, borphan-lee, porphan-lay.

Old Man. Hee, hee, hee, hee. (He sniffs and gradually calms down) Where is she—my mummy?

Old Woman. In the gardens of Paradise. She can hear you and see you, peeping out from among the flowers. (She shuts his mouth) You mustn't cry or you'll make her cry, too.

Old Man. It's not true—she can't see me, she can't hear me. I'm an orphan for life, and you're not my real mummy. (He is almost calm now)

Old Woman. There now, you see you've nothing to worry about. My little General's a very clever boy. Dry those tears away—all the guests will be here this evening and we mustn't let them see you like this. You haven't smashed
everything, there’s still some hope left. You’ll tell them all about it, you can explain it all—you’ve got a message—you’re always saying you’re going to pass it on—you must live and fight for your message.

OLD MAN. I’ve a message—you’re right. I must fight for it—a mission—I can give birth to a great idea—a message for all men, for all mankind.

OLD WOMAN. For all mankind, my dear, your message.

OLD MAN. It’s true, that’s really true!

OLD WOMAN (blowing the Old Man’s nose and wiping away his tears) That’s the way. You’re a big boy now, a real soldier, a Quartermaster-General.

OLD MAN (rising and trotting excitedly round the room) I’m not like other people, I’ve an ideal in life. I may be clever as you say, I am quite talented, but things don’t come easily to me. I’ve carried out my duties as Quartermaster-General satisfactorily, proved myself equal to the task, come out of quite honourably, that ought to be enough.

OLD WOMAN. Not for you, you’re not like other men, you’re greater than they are; and yet you’d have done much better if you’d got on well with everyone else, just like everyone else. You quarrelled with all your friends, with all the directors, all the Generals, and with your own brother.

OLD MAN. Wasn’t my fault, Semiramis—you know what he said.

OLD WOMAN. What did he say?

OLD MAN. He said, “My dear friends, I’ve caught a flea somewhere, and I’ve come to see you in the hope of losing it again.

OLD WOMAN. Everyone says that, my love. You shouldn’t have taken any notice. But why did you get upset with Carl? Was that his fault, too?

OLD MAN. You’ll make me lose my temper—lose my temper. So there! Of course it was his fault. He came along one evening and this is what he said, “Best of luck, old Kangaroo. I wish you every success, and I hope you get what’s coming to you.” And he bellowed like a horse.

OLD WOMAN. He meant well, dear. It doesn’t do to be so sensitive in life.
OLDMAN. I don’t like that sort of joke. (He sits on the chair.)

OLDWOMAN. You could have been a General Decorator, a General in the Navy, or a General Factotum.

(There is a long silence. For a while they are quite motionless sitting rigidly on their chairs)

OLDMAN (dreamily) It was at the bottom of the—bottom of the garden—and there was a—there was a—there was a . . . What was there, my love?

OLDWOMAN. Paris, of course.

OLDMAN. At the end, at the end of the end of the city of Paris, was—was—was what?

OLDWOMAN. Old friend, was what, old friend, was who?

OLDMAN. The place and the weather were perfect, too.

OLDWOMAN. Was the weather really so hot?

OLDMAN. What the place was like, I quite forgot . . .

OLDWOMAN. Forget it, then, if it worries you . . .

OLDMAN. It’s too far away, I can’t, I can’t—bring it back—where was it?

OLDWOMAN. Was what?

OLDMAN. What I—what I—where was it? And who?

OLDWOMAN. Wherever it was, whatever it was, I’d come with you, old friend, to the end, I’d follow you.

OLDMAN. Ah! I find it so difficult to express myself—and I must tell all I know.

OLDWOMAN. It’s your sacred duty. You haven’t the right to keep your message to yourself; you must reveal it to mankind, everyone’s waiting for it—the whole universe is waiting just for you.

OLDMAN. Yes, yes, I’ll do it.

OLDWOMAN. You’ve really decided? You must.

OLDMAN. Drink your tea.

OLDWOMAN. You might have been an Orator-General, if you’d had a little more will-power in life. I am proud and happy to hear that at last you’ve decided to speak to Europe, to all the countries and all the continents in the world.
Old Man. But I find it so difficult to express myself, things don’t come easily to me.

Old Woman. Once you begin, things come easily enough, like life and death—you just have to make up your mind. It’s as we speak that we find our ideas, our words, ourselves, too, in our own words, and the city, the garden, perhaps everything comes back and we’re not orphans any more.

Old Man (rising and moving to r of her) I shan’t do the talking myself—I’ve engaged a professional Orator to speak in my name—you’ll see.

Old Woman. So it’s really going to be this evening? I suppose you’ve invited everybody? All the important people—all the property owners and all the scientists?

Old Man (crossing down l) Yes, all the learned and the landed.


Old Man. Yes, yes, and the postmen, the typists, and the artists. (He crosses to c)

(The Old Woman follows him to c)

Anyone who could be called a scientist or a property-owner.

Old Woman. The proletarians? The parliamentarians? The functionaries? The reactionaries? The revolutionaries? The mental specialists and the mental patients?

Old Man. All of them, of course, all of them—they’re all scientists and property-owners.

Old Woman. Don’t get so angry, my love. I didn’t mean to upset you, but like all men of genius you are so forgetful. This meeting’s important, they must come this evening, all of them. Are you sure they will? Did they promise?

Old Man (turning and looking at her) Drink your tea, Semiramis.

(The Old Woman sits on the chair lc)
OLD WOMAN (after a pause) The Pope, the popinjays, and the papers?
OLD MAN. I’ve invited them, too. I shall deliver them my message. All my life I felt I was suffocating, and now they’ll know everything, thanks to you and the Orator—the only people who have understood me. (He sits on the chair RC)
OLD WOMAN. I’m so proud of you.
OLD MAN. The meeting will soon be starting.
OLD WOMAN. So it’s really true, they’re going to come this evening? You won’t want to cry any more. When we’ve got scientists and property-owners, we don’t need daddies and mummies. (She pauses) I don’t suppose we could put the meeting off now.
OLD MAN. No, no, no!
OLD WOMAN. I hope it doesn’t make us too tired.
OLD MAN. You really think we shall find it tiring?
OLD WOMAN. You have got a bit of a cold.
OLD MAN (rising) How could we postpone it?
OLD WOMAN. Let’s invite them for another evening.

(A boat can be heard approaching over the water off R)
You could telephone them.
OLD MAN. Don’t be silly—(he crosses to the window up R)
I can’t—it’s too late. They must be on the boats by now. (He peers out of the window)
OLD WOMAN. You oughtn’t to have been so rash.
OLD MAN. I believe that’s someone already. Yes, someone’s coming.
OLD WOMAN (rising and moving to him) Perhaps it’s the Orator.
(The sound of the boat ceases)
OLD MAN. He wouldn’t be in such a hurry. It must be someone else.
(A bell clangs off R)
Ah!
OLD WOMAN. Ah!
(They look at each other)
OLD MAN (crossing to the door down R) Come along.

OLD Woman. I haven’t combed my hair—wait a moment. (She tides her hair and straightens her dress as she hobbles down R, pulling up her thick red stockings)

OLD Man. You ought to have got ready before—you had plenty of time.

OLD Woman. What a sight I look—such an old frock on, all creased up.

OLD Man. You’d only got to iron it. Hurry up—you’re keeping people waiting.

(The OLD MAN exits down R.
The OLD Woman, grumbling, follows him off)

OLD Woman (off) Good evening, madam, very pleased to make your acquaintance. Be careful, don’t spoil your hat. You can take out the hat-pin, you’ll feel more comfortable. Oh, no! No-one will sit on it.

OLD Man (off) Put your fur down there. Let me help you. No, it will come to no harm.

OLD Woman (off) Oh, what a pretty suit—a blouse in red, white and blue. You will have some biscuits, won’t you? But you’re not fat—no—just plump. Do put your umbrella down.

(The OLD Woman backs on down R and holds the door open)

OLD Man (off) Will you come this way, please?

(The OLD Man backs on down R)

My job is a very ordinary one.

(The OLD Man and the OLD Woman turn together to face the audience, moving apart a little, the OLD Man down C and the OLD Woman down RC, leaving room for the Imaginary Lady Guest between them)

(To the Imaginary Lady) You’re not feeling too tired? A little, perhaps.

OLD Man (to the Lady) At the seaside.

OLD Woman (to the Lady) Really most kind of you.
(There is a pause)

OLD MAN (to the Lady) I'll bring you a chair.

(The OLD MAN exits down L)

OLD WOMAN (to the Lady) Meanwhile, why don't you sit here. (She moves the chair RC to C) Rather warm, isn't it? (She sits on the chair LC and smiles at the Lady) What a pretty fan. My husband—

(The OLD MAN enters down R, carrying a chair)

—gave me one something like it seventy-three years ago. I still have it. It was a birthday present.

(The OLD MAN crosses to RC, puts down the chair and sits. The Imaginary Lady is presumed to be seated on the chair C, between the Old Man and the Old Woman. The OLD MAN looks at the Lady, smiles at her, nods his head, rubs his hands gently together and appears to be following what she is saying. The OLD WOMAN does the same)

OLD MAN (to the Lady) Madam, the cost of living has always been high.

OLD WOMAN (to the Lady) You're quite right. (She pauses and listens) I agree with you. It's time there was a change. (In a different tone of voice) My husband may be having something to do with it—he will tell you.

OLD MAN (leaning forward; to the Old Woman) Ssh! Be quiet, Semiramis—it's not time to talk about it yet. (To the Lady) Forgive me, madam, for rousing your curiosity.

(The Lady apparently reacts to this)

Dear Lady, please don't insist.

(There is a pause. The OLD MAN and the OLD WOMAN listen and smile, then laugh. They look as if they are enjoying a story the Lady is telling. Their faces become blank. They look out front. They look at the Lady and smile, then look out front again. They both turn towards the Lady and laugh, then face front. Their faces lose all expression. There appears to be a lull in the conversation. There is a short pause)
(To the Lady) Oh, yes, you're perfectly right.
Old Woman. Yes, yes, yes. Oh, but no!
Old Man. Yes, yes, yes. By all means.
Old Woman. Yes?
Old Man. No?
Old Woman. That's it exactly.
Old Man (laughing) It can't be true.
Old Woman (to the Lady) Oh, well, then! (To the Old Man) She's delightful!
Old Man (to the Lady) The lady's made a conquest, has she? Well done!
Old Woman (to the Lady) You're not like the young people of today.

(The Old Man bends painfully down to pick up an invisible object that the Lady has apparently dropped)

Old Man. No, please—please don't trouble yourself—I'll pick it up. There now—you're quicker than I am. (He straightens up)

Old Woman (to the Old Man) She's younger than you are.
Old Man (to the Lady) Old age is a terrible burden. I wish I could grant you Eternal Youth.
Old Woman (to the Lady) He really means that—it comes straight from his heart. (To the Old Man) My pet!

(There is silence for a few moments. They look at the Lady, their faces seen in profile, and smile politely; then they look out front, and back again to the Lady, smiling in response to her smile, then they answer her questions with the following replies)

Most kind of you to take such an interest in us.
Old Man. We live a very retired life.
Old Woman. He's not a misanthropist, but my husband likes peace and quiet.
Old Man. We have the wireless; I go fishing, and then there's quite a regular ferry service.
Old Woman. There are two boats every Sunday morning and one in the evening, not to speak of the privately-owned ones.
Old Man. When the weather's fine, there's a moon.
Old Woman. He still carries out his duties as Quarter-
master-General—it does keep him busy. (She pauses and listens) That’s true. At his age he could take a little rest.

OLD MAN (facing front) I shall have plenty of time for rest when I’m in my grave.

OLD WOMAN. Oh, don’t say that, my love. (To the Lady) The family—what’s left of it—all my husband’s old friends, still used to come and see us from time to time, ten years ago.

OLD MAN (to the Lady) In the winter, a good book, sitting by the stove, the memories of a lifetime . . .

OLD WOMAN (to the Lady) A simple life, but a full one. Two hours every day he works at his message.

(A bell clangs off L)

(To the Old Man) Somebody there. Go quickly.

OLD MAN (rising; to the Lady) Will you excuse me, madam I shan’t be a moment. (In great haste, very tottery, he crosses above the chairs to the door LC. To the Old Woman) Quick! Go and fetch some chairs.

(The bell clangs off L.

The OLD Woman rises, hobbles quickly to the door down R and exits. One hears, discreetly, a few blasts on a trumpet and a few notes of “The Colonel’s Salute”)

Sounds like someone used to giving orders.

(The OLD Man exits LC. After a moment, he backs in LC, freezes into a respectful position of attention)

Ah! Colonel! (He raises his arm vaguely in the direction of his forehead for a salute that is barely recognizable, to the Imaginary Colonel) Good evening, Colonel. This is indeed an amazing honour for me. I—I—I never expected—although—and yet—well, I’m very proud to see you in my humble abode—such a distinguished hero. (He shakes an invisible hand, held out by the Imaginary Colonel, bows ceremoniously and then straighten up) Nevertheless, without false modesty, may I confess that I do not feel myself entirely unworthy of your visit. Proud, yes—but not unworthy.

(The OLD Woman enters RC carrying a chair)
OLD Woman. Oh, what a fine uniform! What pretty
decorations. (To the Old Man) Who is he, my love?
OLD Man (crossing to L of the Old Woman) Can't you see
it’s the Colonel?
OLD Woman. Ah!
OLD Man. Count the pips! (To the Colonel) My wife—
Semiramis. (To the Old Woman) Come and be introduced
to the Colonel.

(The Old Woman comes forward, dragging the chair with
her, and makes a curtsy without leaving go of it)

(To the Colonel) My wife. (To the Old Woman) The Colonel.
OLD Woman. So pleased to meet you. A most welcome
guest. You are an old friend of my husband’s. He’s a
General . . .
OLD Man (displeased) Quartermaster—quartermaster . . .

(The Imaginary Colonel apparently kisses the Old Woman’s
hand. This is obvious from the Old Woman’s gesture of
raising her hand as though to his lips. In her confusion she lets
the chair fall)

OLD Woman. Oh, what a polite man. Anyone can see
he’s out of the ordinary—really superior. (She picks up the
chair. To the Colonel) This chair is for you.
OLD Man (to the Colonel) I beg you to follow me, sir. (He
moves to L of the chairs)

(The Old Woman drags her chair and sets it R of the other
chairs)

Yes, there is someone else here. We’re expecting a large
number of guests.
OLD Woman (to the Colonel; indicating the chair R) Please
take a seat.
OLD Man (moving to L of the Lady and introducing the Colonel)
A young lady of our acquaintance.
OLD Woman. A very good friend of ours—renowned in
military circles.
OLD Man (continuing the introduction) The Colonel.
OLD Woman. Do take this chair.
OLD MAN (moving behind the Lady’s chair c) No, no, can’t you see the Colonel wants to sit next to the Lady.

(The Colonel is presumed to sit on the chair RC. The Lady is presumed to be on the chair c. An inaudible conversation starts up between the two invisible characters sitting next to each other. The Old Man stands behind the Lady’s chair. The Old Woman stands behind the Colonel’s chair. There is a pause. The Old Man and the Old Woman smile and nod as they listen)

OLD WOMAN. Oh! Oh, that’s going a bit too far.
OLD MAN. Perhaps.

(The Old Man and the Old Woman now make signs to each other, above the heads of the two imaginary guests, and react in horror as they listen to the conversation, which seems to have taken a turn that displeases them)

(Suddenly; to the Colonel) Yes, sir, they haven’t arrived yet, but they’re coming. The Orator will be speaking on my behalf—he will explain what my message means.

(There is a pause)

(He suddenly pushes the Old Woman a little up c and stands between the guests’ chairs) Colonel—I really ought to warn you that this lady’s husband may be here at any moment.

OLD WOMAN (to the Old Man) Who is this gentleman?

OLD MAN (moving to the Old Woman) I’ve told you, it’s the Colonel.

(They look at the guests. Invisibly, something not quite respectable is happening)

OLD WOMAN (to the Old Man) I knew it!
OLD MAN. Why did you ask me, then?
OLD WOMAN. To find out. (To the Colonel) Your cigarette Colonel, not on the floor, please.
OLD MAN (moving down L of the Colonel’s chair) Please, Colonel, I’ve forgotten, sir. The last war, did you lose it or win it?
OLD WOMAN (moving behind the Lady’s chair) But, my dear girl, you can’t let him treat you like this.
OLD MAN (to the Colonel) Take a good look at me, sir. Don't I look like a real soldier? Once, Colonel, during a battle...

OLD Woman (moving to L of the Colonel's chair) That's going much too far! (She pulls at the Colonel's invisible sleeve) It's not nice. (She turns to the Old Man) Listen to what he's saying now. Do something to stop him, my love.

OLD Man (going quickly on with his story) All by myself I accounted for two hundred and nine; that's what we called them, they jumped so high in the air trying to escape, though they weren't quite as thick as flies, not so much fun, of course, Colonel, but thanks to my strength of mind, I killed them. (Suddenly) Oh, no! No, please, stop it!

OLD Woman (to the Colonel) My husband never tells a lie: I know we're very old, but we are respectable people.

(A boat can be heard approaching over the water off R)

OLD Man (to the Colonel; forcefully) If a man wants to be a proper hero, he must have good manners, too.

OLD Woman (to the Colonel) I've known you for a long time now, and I should never have thought it of you. (To the Lady) I should never have thought it of him. We do have our self-respect, our own personal dignity.

OLD Man (in a very quavering voice) I'm not yet past the age when I can carry arms.

(A bell clangs off R)

Excuse me, I must open the door. (He makes a clumsy movement and the Lady's chair is upset) I beg your pardon.

OLD Woman (rushing forward) You haven't hurt yourself?

(They help the Imaginary Lady to her feet)

Now you're all dirty—look at the dust! (She dusts the Lady down)

(The Old Man picks up the chair and sets it in its place. The bell clangs off R)

OLD Man. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. (To the Old Woman) Go and bring a chair.
OLD WOMAN (to the Lady) Do sit down. Please excuse us a moment.

(OLD WOMAN exits LC)

OLD MAN (crossing to the door up R) He wanted to put me in a rage. I almost feel cross with him.

(OLD MAN exits up R. After a moment he backs in up R, apparently ushering in two guests)

Why, it’s you, madam! I can hardly believe my own eyes, and yet I—I really wasn’t expecting you—really it’s . . . Oh, how can you say that—when I’ve been thinking about you all my life. All my life, madam, you were known as the Lovely Miss. So this is your husband—I did hear about it, of course. You haven’t changed at all. Yes, perhaps you’re right, your nose really has got longer, it’s filled out, too. I didn’t notice it at first, but now I can see—terribly long. Ah, what a pity! But you didn’t do it on purpose. How did it happen, then? I see—very gradually. (He moves down R and shakes hands with the Imaginary Husband) Oh, I’m so sorry, sir. May I call you a dear friend of mine? You see, I knew your wife a long time before you did. Oh, yes, just the same person but with a quite different nose. My congratulations, sir—you seem to be very much in love.

(OLD WOMAN enters LC carrying a chair. She crosses and places the chair facing up stage, R of the line)

Semiramis, two people have arrived, so we need another chair.

(OLD WOMAN crosses and exits LC)

(He moves down RC. To the new arrivals) Do please come and be introduced to the other guests. Now then, madam . . . (He crosses to c) Oh—Lovely. Lovely Miss Lovely, you were called—you’re nearly bent double, now. Oh dear, sir, she’s still very lovely all the same; such pretty eyes still, behind those spectacles; her hair is white, of course, but behind the white hairs, there are brown ones and blue ones—I’m sure there are. This way, please. (He moves RC, below
the line of chairs and apparently takes something from the Husband)
What's this—a present, sir? For my wife?

(The Old Woman enters down L, carrying a chair which she
places, facing up stage, L of the line)

Semiramis, this is the lovely . . . You know—Mrs Lovely.
(To the Colonel and the Lady) This is Miss—I beg your
pardon—Mrs Lovely—don't smirk, Colonel—and her hus-
band.

(The Old Woman moves LC below the chairs)

(To the Old Woman) A friend of my childhood days. I've
often told you about her.

Old Woman. How do you do?

Old Man. And her husband. (To the Colonel and the Lady)
And her husband.

(The Old Lady crosses to R of the Old Man, faces the
Imaginary Husband R and curtsies)

Old Woman. Most distinguished. A fine figure of a man,
I must say. How do you do, how do you do? (She waves a
hand in the direction of the Colonel and the Lady) Friends of ours,
yes.

Old Man (to the Old Woman) He's just brought you a
present. (He holds out the imaginary present)

Old Woman (taking the imaginary present) Oh, dear! Is it
a flower? (She crosses to L) Or a cradle? A pear tree? Or
a pheasant?

Old Man (crossing to the Old Woman) No, no. Can't you
see it's a picture?

Old Woman. Oh, yes! Very pleasant! Thank you so
much. (She crosses to c. To the Lady) Would you like to see
it, dear?

Old Man (to the Colonel) Would you like to see it,
Colonel?

Old Woman (to the Husband; over her shoulder) Oh, Doctor,
Doctor, I often feel sick, feel hot all over, get cold feet and a
cold in the head, have pains and chilblains and wind round
my heart, Doctor, Doctor.
OLD MAN. This gentleman is not a doctor, he's a photographer.

OLD WOMAN (to the Lady) If you've had a good look at it, you can hang it up. (To the Old Man) I don't mind, he's a charming man, anyway, quite devastating. (She crosses to r and addresses the Husband) I'm not trying to flatter you, but...

(The Old Man crosses to l, turns and addresses Mrs Lovely, who is now l)

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely) I'm quite overwhelmed. You really are you, after all. (He pauses) I was in love with you a hundred years ago. There's been such a great change in you—there's been no change in you at all. I loved you then, I love you now.

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) Oh, really, sir, really!

OLD MAN (to the Colonel) I quite agree with you, Colonel.

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) Oh, really, sir, really! (To the Lady) Thank you for hanging it up—I'm so sorry to have disturbed you.

(The lighting grows stronger and goes on increasing as more of the Invisible Guests arrive)

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely; almost snivelling) Where are the snows of yesteryear?

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) Oh, really! Really! Really! Really!

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely; indicating the Lady) A young friend of ours—a very sweet girl.

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband; indicating the Colonel) Yes, he's a Colonel in the Civil Service, cavalry—an old friend of my husband's—a subordinate—my husband's a General.

OLD MAN (kneeling to Mrs Lovely) Your ears weren't always so pointed—do you remember, my lovely?

(The Old Woman addresses the Husband, mincing grotesquely. She should become more coquettish as the scene goes on: showing her thick red stockings, lifting her numerous skirts, revealing a petticoat full of holes, uncovering her ancient breasts; then throwing her head back, hands on hips, uttering erotic cries, thrusting
her pelvis forward, standing with legs apart, she laughs like an old whore. This aspect of the Old Woman is quite different from anything we have seen up to now or are to see later; it should suggest something in her character that normally remains hidden, and it vanishes abruptly)

Old Woman. I’m too old for that, now. You don’t think so?

Old Man (to Mrs Lovely; romantically) When we were young, the moon was a living planet. Ah, yes, yes, if we had dared—but we were only children. Would you like to live those long-lost days again? Can we go back? Can we go back? Oh, no, no! It’s too late, now. Time has raced past us like a train. It has left its lines in our skin. Do you think plastic surgery can work miracles? (To the Colonel) I am a soldier, and so are you; soldiers are always young; Generals are like gods. (To Mrs Lovely) That’s how it ought to be—but, alas, we have lost everything. We could have been so happy, I tell you. Perhaps there are flowers coming up through the snow.

Old Woman (to the Husband) Flatterer! Naughty boy! Aah! I look young for my age? You’re a dashing little dago, a really exciting man.

Old Man (to Mrs Lovely; still kneeling) May I play Tristan to your Isolde? Beauty lies in the heart. You see, we could have had our share of bliss, beauty and eternity. Eternity! Why didn’t we dare? We didn’t want to enough—now, everything is lost to us, lost, lost, lost.

Old Woman (to the Husband) Oh, no! Oh! No. Oh, la, la! I’m trembling all over. Are you tickled, too? Ticklish or just a tickler? I really shouldn’t! (She laughs) Do you like my petticoat? Or do you prefer the skirt?

Old Man (to Mrs Lovely; rising) It’s a wretched life, a Quartermaster-General’s.

Old Woman (looking towards the Lady) How do you make crêpes de Chine? The egg of an ox, an hour of flour and some gastric juices. (To the Husband) You’ve got very feeling fingers—ah—well, I mean to s-a-a-y! Oh-oh-oh-oh!

Old Man (to Mrs Lovely) My worthy spouse—Semiramis, has taken the place of my mother. (He turns to the Colonel)
But, Colonel, I’ve already told you this before: Truth is where you find it. (He turns to Mrs Lovely)

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) You really, really believe you can have children at any age? Children of any age?

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely) That’s exactly what saved me: the inner life, a quiet home, austerity, my scientific research, philosophy, my message.

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) I’ve never been unfaithful to my husband, the General. Not so hard! You’ll have me on the floor. I’m only his poor old mother. (She starts sobbing) A grand, great, grand—(she repulses him) great—mother. It’s my conscience that’s protesting like this. For me, the branch of the apple tree is broken. You must ask someone else to show you the way. I don’t want to gather life’s roses.

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely) ... preoccupations of a nobler kind ... 

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband and Mrs Lovely) Sit down, sit down, please.

(The Husband is presumed to sit on the chair extreme R and Mrs Lovely on the chair extreme L. The OLD MAN sits on the chair LC, immediately R of Mrs Lovely. The OLD WOMAN sits on the chair RC, immediately L of the Husband. The two chairs between them are occupied by the Colonel and the Lady, the Lady being R of the Old Man. There is a long pause, except for an occasional “Yes” or “No” from the OLD MAN and OLD WOMAN who are listening to what the imaginary guests are saying)

(To the Husband) Yes, we’ve had one son—still alive, of course. He went away. It’s the usual story—a bit strange, perhaps—he left his parents—had a heart of gold—a very long time ago. And we loved him so much. He slammed the door. My husband and I struggled with him to try and stop him going—he was seven years old—the age of discretion. We called after him: “My son, my child, my son, my child”—and he never looked round.

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely) No—no—I’m sorry to say we never had children. I should have liked a son—so would Semiramis. We did what we could. Poor Semiramis, she’s
such a motherly woman. Perhaps it wasn’t meant to be. I myself was an ungrateful child. Oh, dear! Grief, regrets and remorse, that’s all there is—all that’s left.

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) He used to say: “You kill the birds! Why do you kill the birds?” We don’t kill birds—we’ve never hurt a fly. His eyes were full of tears. He wouldn’t let us wipe them away. He wouldn’t let us near him. He would say: “Yes, you do, you kill all the birds, all the birds,” and he would wave his little fists at us. “You’re telling lies, you’re trying to deceive me! The streets are full of the birds you’ve killed and little children dying.” Can’t you hear the birds singing? “No, I can only hear moaning and groaning. The sky is red with blood.” “No, my child, the sky is blue.” And again he would cry: “You’ve deceived me, and I loved you so much. I thought you were good. The streets are full of dead birds, you’ve put out their eyes. Daddy, Mummy, you’re wicked, wicked. I won’t stay with you any more.” I threw myself at his feet—his father was weeping. But we couldn’t hold him back. We could still hear him shouting: “It’s all your fault.” But what does that mean?

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely) I left my mother to die all alone in a ditch. She called after me, crying feebly: “My little boy, my beloved child, don’t leave me to die all alone. Stay with me, I’m not long for this world.” “Don’t worry, Mother,” I said, “I’ll soon be back.” I was in a hurry. I was going to a dance. “I’ll be back soon.” When I did come back, she was dead and buried deep in the ground. I started digging to try and find her—but I couldn’t. I know, I know it always happens, sons leaving their mothers and as good as killing their fathers. Life is like that—but it tortures me—the others don’t mind.

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) He shouted: “Daddy, Mummy, I shall never see you again.”

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely) It tortures me, yes, but not the others.

OLD WOMAN (to the Husband) Don’t talk to my husband about him. He was so fond of his parents. He never left them for a moment. He looked after them, spoiled them, even. They died in his arms and these were their last
words: "You have been a wonderful son to us. God will be kind to you."

OLD MAN (to Mrs Lovely) I can still see her lying in that ditch and in her hand there was a lily-of-the-valley, and she cried out: "Don't forget me, don't forget me!" Her eyes were full of tears, and she called me by the nickname I had as a child: "Little chick," she said, "little chick, don't leave me here all alone."

OLD Woman (to the Husband) He's never written to us. Now and again a friend tells us he's seen him here or there, that he's well, that he's made a good husband.

OLD Man (to Mrs Lovely) She'd been buried a long time when I came back. (He turns to the Lady) Oh, but there is, madam! There's a cinema in the house, and a restaurant, and bathroom.

OLD Woman (to the Colonel) Why, yes, Colonel, it's just because he . . .

OLD Man. When you come to think of it, that's all it really is.

(A very broken conversation, slowly coming to a stop)

OLD Woman. If only!
OLD Man. So I didn't—told him—naturally . . .

(Dialogue completely disconnected, run right down)

OLD Woman. Well . . .
OLD Man. To ours and to theirs.
OLD Woman. To what.
OLD Man. I to him.
OLD Woman. Him, or her?
OLD Man. Them.
OLD Woman. Peppermints—you don't say.
OLD Man. There aren't.
OLD Woman. Why?
OLD Man. Yes.
OLD Woman. I.
OLD Man. Well.
OLD Woman. Well.
OLD Man (to the Lady) Beg pardon, madam.
(They sit motionless on their chairs. There is a long silence during which the sound of the boats is heard, then the bell clangs off L)

(He rises; with an excitement that goes on increasing) They’re coming. People. More people.

OLD Woman (rising) I thought I could hear some boats.

OLD Man. I’ll go and open the door. Fetch some chairs. Please excuse me, ladies and gentlemen.

(The OLD Man exits down L)

OLD Woman (to the Imaginary Guests) Please stand up for a moment. The Orator should be coming soon. I must get the room ready for the lecture.

(The OLD Woman turns the four centre chairs to face up stage, moving them, two each way, close to the chairs extreme R and L so as to form a centre aisle with three chairs each side)

Would you mind helping me? Thank you.

(The OLD Man backs in down L and stands down Lc)

OLD Man (as he enters) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Will you kindly come in? Mind your heads.

(The three or four Imaginary Guests who apparently enter are presumed to be very tall, and the OLD Man has to stand on tip-toe to shake hands with them. The OLD Woman, having arranged the chairs, moves to R of the Old Man)

(He introduces) My wife—Mr—Mrs—my wife—Mr—Mrs—Mrs—my wife . . .

OLD Woman. Why are all these people so tall, my love?

OLD Man. Because they’re journalists. (He pushes her to L) Go and fetch some chairs, dear.

OLD Woman. I can’t see to everything!

(The OLD Woman, grumbling, exits down L. The OLD Man crosses to R and turns)

OLD Man. Mind you don’t drop your camera. (He introduces) The Colonel—the Lady—Mrs Lovely—the Photographer—here are the Journalists—they’ve come to listen
to the lecture. He’s sure to be here soon. Don’t get im-
patient—you won’t be bored—with all of you together.

(The Old Woman enters LC, carrying two chairs)

(He moves up r) Hurry up, there, a little quicker with those
chairs. We need one more.

(The Old Woman places the chairs, side by side, facing up
stage, above the two inner chairs on the right side of the aisle)

Old Woman. All right, all right—I’m doing my best.
I’m not a machine. Who are all these people?

(The Old Woman exits up r. The Old Man moves up c,
turns and faces the chairs)

Old Man (to the Imaginary Guests) Please sit down—the
ladies with the ladies, the gentlemen with the gentlemen, or
the other way round, if you prefer. We haven’t any better
chairs—we have to make do with what we have—so sorry.
(He pauses) Take the one in the middle. (He pauses) Do
you need a pen? (He pauses) Phone Maillot and you’ll get
Monique. (He pauses) Claude is Providence. (He pauses) I
haven’t got a wireless. (He pauses) Yes, I take all the news-
papers. (He pauses) It all depends on a number of things;
I look after the lodgings, but I have no staff—have to
economize, you know. (He pauses) Please, no interviews—
not just now—we’ll see you afterwards. (He pauses)

(The sound of the boats is heard)

There’ll be a seat for you in just a moment, miss—but what
can she be doing?

(The Old Woman enters up l, carrying one chair)

Faster, Semiramis.

Old Woman. I’m doing my best. Who are all these
people? (She places the chair, facing up stage, above the inner chair
on the left side of the aisle)

Old Man. I’ll tell you later.

Old Woman. And that girl? That tall thing, my love?

Old Man. Don’t worry about her. (To the Colonel)
Don’t you think, Colonel, that journalism, as a profession,
is rather like a warrior's? (To the Old Woman) Look after the ladies, my dear.

(The bell clangs off L)

(He crosses down L) I'm coming, wait a minute. (To the Old Woman) What about the chairs?

(The Old Woman exits down L)

Old Woman (crossing to r) Forgive me, ladies and gentlemen, if I . . .

(The Old Woman exits rc)

Old Man (off) Come in—come in—come in—come in.

(The Old Man enters down LC, presumably leading in a large number of imaginary people, among them a very small child, whose hand he is holding.

The Old Woman enters rc, carrying two chairs which she places, side by side, facing up stage, above the two outer chairs L)

Nobody should bring a small child to a lecture on science—the poor little chap'll be bored to tears. It'll be a fine thing if he starts yelling and wets all the ladies' dresses. (He crosses to c)

(The Old Woman comes down rc)

May I introduce my wife—Semiramis.

Old Woman. Ladies, Gentlemen . . .

Old Man. These are their children.

Old Woman. Oh, aren't they little dears!

Old Man. This one is the youngest.

Old Woman. Isn't he sweet—sweet—really sweet.

Old Man. There aren't enough chairs.

Old Woman. Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear.

(The Old Woman exits down r. The Old Man mimes lifting the Imaginary Child and placing it on its parent's lap)

Old Man. Take the little one on your lap—the twins can use the same chair. Be careful, it's not a very strong one. These chairs belong to the house, they're the owners'.
(The Old Woman enters rc, carrying a chair which she places above the chair extreme r. There are now two rows of six chairs, divided by a centre aisle)

Yes, children, you’re right, he’ll be cross with us—he’s a nasty old man. He’d like us to buy them, but they’re not worth it. (To the Guests) You don’t all know each other, do you? It’s the first time you’ve all met—but you used to know one another by name. (To the Old Woman) Semiramis, help me to introduce everyone.

Old Woman. Who are all these people? May I introduce—forgive me—may I introduce... But who are they? (She crosses to l)

Old Man (crossing to r) May I introduce you to...-introduce you to—introduce you to her—Mr—Mrs—Miss—Mr—Mrs—Mrs—Mr...

Old Woman (to the Old Man) Did you put your pullover on? (To the Guests) Mr—Mrs—Mr...

(The bell clangs off l)

Old Man. More people!

(The bell clangs off r)

Old Woman. More!

(The bell rings again, then again, and again. The Old Man is overwhelmed. The chairs, the backs turned to the audience so that they face up stage, are lined up in straight rows, as though arranged for a show, and grow more and more numerous. The Old Woman, absolutely exhausted, clippety-clops as fast as she can from door to door, fetching and carrying chairs, while the Old Man, out of breath and mopping his brow, goes from one door to the next and seats the imaginary people. Eventually there are vast numbers of imaginary people on the stage. The Old Couple have to take care not to bump into them, and pick their way through the rows of chairs.

The Old Man exits lc.

The Old Woman exits up r, and re-enters rc carrying two chairs which she places r of the aisle, above the existing rows)
Old Man (off) Come in—come in—come in, ladies and gentlemen.

(The Old Man backs in up L)

If you wait a moment there'll be more chairs. I'll introduce you to everyone later on.

(The Old Woman exits LC.
The Old Man exits down R.
The Old Woman enters down L carrying two chairs which she places L of the aisle, above the existing chairs.
The Old Man enters RC, ushering in more Guests)

Come in.

(The bell clangs off L.
The Old Man exits LC and enters down L with two chairs and places one each at the left end of the two downstage rows.
The Old Woman exits up R and enters down R with one chair which she places R of the downstage row)


(The Old Woman exits down L and enters up L with two chairs which she places side by side at the left end of the upstage row.
The Old Man exits down L)

Old Man (off) Gentlemen—come in—ladies—come in.

(The Old Man enters LC.
The Old Woman exits up R, and enters RC with two chairs which she places side by side at the right end of the upstage row)

It's you, madam. Allow me—yes.

(The bell clangs off L)

Old Woman. There—and there—too many people—there are really too many—too many, really, ah, there, there, there, there . . .
(From outside the noise of the boats on the water can be heard, growing louder and nearer)

**OLD MAN** (moving up c) This table's in the way.

(The **OLD MAN** mimes moving a table, in such a way as not to slow the action down, the **OLD WOMAN** helping him)

There's hardly enough room here, please forgive us.

**OLD WOMAN** (as she helps with the table) Did you put your pullover on?

(The bells clang and clang off R and off L)

**OLD MAN.** More people! More chairs! People! Chairs!

(The **OLD MAN** exits up R.

The **OLD WOMAN** exits down L and enters LC with two chairs which she places L of the aisle above the existing rows)

(Off) Come in, come in, ladies and gentlemen.

(The **OLD MAN** enters RC)

Faster, Semiramis. I'd help you if I could.

**OLD WOMAN** (crossing to R) Excuse me—so sorry—good evening, madam—madam—sir—sir—yes, yes, the chairs.

(The **OLD MAN** gets tied up in the chairs and hardly has enough time to go from one door to the other, for the bells are being rung almost continuously. He exits LC.

The **OLD WOMAN** exits down R and enters up R with two chairs which she places R of the aisle above the existing rows)

**OLD MAN** (off) Yes, straightaway—

(The **OLD MAN** enters down L)

—have you put your pullover on? Yes, yes—coming at once, be patient. Yes, yes—patience.

**OLD WOMAN.** Your pullover? My pullover? (She crosses to L) Sorry—sorry.

(The **OLD WOMAN** exits LC and enters down L with two chairs which she places at the left end of the upstage row.

The **OLD MAN** exits RC)
OLD MAN (off) This way, ladies and gentlemen, this way, please, please.

(The OLD Man enters up R)

Sorry—please—come in—come in—I'll show you—there, the seats. My dear friend, not that way—be careful—you, a friend of mine?

(Then, for some time, not a word, just the continuous sound of the boats and the bells. The movement on the stage reaches a climax. The OLD COUPLE rush about from door to door, without saying a word; they look as though they are on roller skates. The OLD MAN welcomes the Guests, not accompanying them very far, just taking a few steps with them to show them where to sit, he has no time for more.

The OLD Woman exits down R and enters up R with two chairs which she places at the right end of the upstage row, then exits up R and enters down R with two chairs. She places one extreme R of the downstage row and the other at the right end of the second row from the footlights. Occasionally the OLD COUPLE meet and collide, without interrupting the general movement.

The OLD Woman exits R and enters up R with two chairs which she places at the right ends of the second and third rows. After a while, the OLD MAN goes up C, faces front and starts turning from left to right, right to left, etc., standing on the same spot and facing each door in turn. In the same way, he points out seats to the Imaginary Guests, so quickly that his arm is whirling round at great speed. Similarly, the OLD Woman stops, her last chair in hand, sets it down, picks it up and sets it down again, from left to right, from right to left; it looks as if she, too, wishes to go to each door in turn, but only her face and neck are moving, at great speed. None of this holds up the movement of the scene, the OLD COUPLE give the impression, although standing in the same place, that they have not stopped rushing about: the quick little gestures, circular perhaps, that they make with their hands, torso, head and eyes at last, very gradually, begin to get slower; the bell-ringing not so loud and less frequent. Finally the bells cease and one should have the impression that the stage is overflowing with people)
(To an Imaginary Guest) I'll find a place for you—don't worry. Semiramis, where the dickens . . . ?

Old Woman (with a dramatic gesture) There aren't any more chairs, my love. (She suddenly starts selling imaginary programmes in the crammed auditorium, moving up and down the centre aisle and R and L of the chairs) Programme! Programme! Would you like a programme, sir? Programme, madam?

Old Man (moving down L) Don't you get excited, ladies and gentlemen, you'll all be attended to—each one in turn, by order of arrival. There'll be room for you all. We'll manage somehow.

Old Woman (working at the block of chairs) Programme! Programme! Just a moment, madam, please! I can't serve everybody at once, I haven't got thirteen pairs of hands, I'm not a cow, you know. (She crosses to the block of chairs R) Sir, I wonder if you'd mind passing this programme to the lady next to you. Thank you. Change? No, I haven't any.

Old Man. But I've told you we'll find you a seat! Don't get in such a state! (He pushes his way through the imaginary crowds standing in the aisles, and crosses to R) This way, it's this way—there, be careful, now. Oh, how nice to see you.

Old Woman. Programme! Would you like . . . ? Programme—'gramme. (She goes down c)

Old Man. Yes, my boy, she's down there, a little farther down, selling programmes. No such thing as a stupid job. That's her. Seen her? There's a seat for you in the second row. (He pushes his way up R of the block of chairs R) On the right—no, on the left—that's right.

Old Woman. 'Gramme—'gramme—programme. Like a programme? (She crosses down R)

Old Man. Well, what else can I do? I'm doing my best, madam. (To the seated Guests) Pull your chairs a little closer together, please. (He crosses above the block of chairs R and stands up c) A little more room there and you can sit down, madam. That's right.

Old Woman (pushing her way up R) Programme, programme. Would anyone like a programme?

Old Man (pushing his way up L) Ladies, gentlemen, I am very sorry to announce that now it's standing room only.
Old Woman. Choc-icles, toffees—acid drops. (Unable to move an inch, she is so pressed in by the crowd up R she has to throw her programmes and her sweets out at random over the heads of the Guests) Here you are! There you are!

(The Old Man, standing in the crowd up L, is very excited. He is jostled, hits someone in the face, and gets an elbow dug in his ribs)

Old Man. So sorry—oh, I am sorry—do be careful! (Knocked off his balance, he has a job to keep his feet and clings on to someone's shoulders)

Old Woman. Who on earth are all these people? Programme—would you like a programme?

Old Man (pushing his way above the chairs L and standing up c) Ladies and gentlemen, please. Silence for a moment, I beg you.


Old Man (to the Old Woman) Be quiet. An important announcement. (He moves c of the centre aisle) All those who have not been able to find seats are kindly asked to leave the gangways clear. That's right—don't stand between the chairs.

Old Woman (pushing her way above the chairs R to c; almost shouting to the Old Man) Who are all these people, my pet? What are they all doing here?

Old Man. Move to one side, ladies and gentlemen. Those who have no seats must not stand in front of the others, but should line up along the walls there, on the right and left. (He moves down c)

(The Old Woman follows the Old Man down the centre aisle)

Don't worry, you'll be able to see and hear everything, wherever you are.

(There is a general shift round. During the following speeches, the Old Man crosses below the chairs R and works his way R of the chairs and up to the window up R. The Old Woman crosses below the chairs L and works her way L of the chairs up to the window up L)
Don’t push so, don’t push!
OLD WOMAN. Don’t push so, don’t push.
OLD MAN. Don’t push, don’t!
OLD WOMAN. Ladies, don’t push. Don’t push, gentle-
men.
OLD MAN. Don’t get excited—there’s no hurry. Gently,
please. What the . . . ?
OLD WOMAN. Anyone would think you were a lot of
savages.

(They arrive at last at their final positions, the OLD MAN
near the window up r and the OLD WOMAN near the window
up l. They remain at the windows until the end of the Play)

(She calls to the Old Man) My pet—I can’t see you. Where
are you? Who are they? What do all these people want?
(She points) Who’s that one?
OLD MAN. Where are you? Where are you, Semiramis?
OLD WOMAN. Where are you, my love?
OLD MAN. Here, next to the window—can you hear me?
OLD WOMAN. Yes, I can hear your voice. And a lot of
others, too, but I can pick yours out.
OLD MAN. And you, where are you?
OLD WOMAN. I’m at the window, too. I feel frightened,
my love, there are too many people here. We’re a long way
from each other—we ought to be careful at our age—we
might get lost. We must keep together, you never know, my
love, my pet.
OLD MAN (waving) Hallo!
OLD WOMAN (calling) Hallo.
OLD MAN. I’ve just caught sight of you. Oh, we’ll be
together again, don’t you worry—I’m with some friends.
(He shakes hands with an Imaginary Guest) What a pleasure it
is to shake hands with you again. But of course I believe in
steady progress, steady progress, with setbacks obviously—
and yet, and yet . . .

(Each of them talks separately to the Guests)

OLD WOMAN. Quite well, thank you. What terrible
weather. How beautiful it’s been. (Aside) And yet I’m
still frightened. What am I doing here? (She shouts) My love, my pet...

**Old Man.** To prevent the exploitation of man by man, we need money, money and still more money.

**Old Woman.** My love! (She is monopolized by friends) Yes, my husband's here, it's he who did the organizing. Over there. Oh, you'll never reach him, now—you'd have to push your way through. He's standing with friends.

**Old Man.** Of course not—that's what I've always said—there's no such thing as pure logic—it's just pretence.

**Old Woman.** But you know there are some happy people. In the morning they breakfast in an aeroplane, they have their midday meal on a train and in the evening they dine at sea. They have their night's sleep in lorries that go rumbling, rumbling, rumbling...

**Old Man.** You talk about the dignity of man? At least, let's try to save his face. Dignity's only his back.

**Old Woman.** Don't fall down in the dark. (She laughs)

**Old Man.** That's what your compatriots ask me.

**Old Woman.** Certainly—tell me all about it.

**Old Man.** I've called you all together—to have it explained to you. The person and the individual are one and the same person.

**Old Woman.** There's something pinched about him. He's just out of prison for debt.

**Old Man.** I am not myself, I am someone else. I am the one in the other.

**Old Woman.** Children, learn not to trust one another.

**Old Man.** Sometimes I wake up to find absolute silence around me. That's what I mean by the sphere. It's complete in itself. However, one has to be careful. The whole shape may suddenly disappear. There are holes it escapes through.

**Old Woman.** Just ghosts, after all, nobodies, of no importance whatever. My husband's duties are of supreme importance, quite sublime.

**Old Man.** I'm sorry to say I can't agree with you. I'll let you know what I think about all this in time. I have nothing more to say just now. It's the Orator—we're waiting for him at the moment—who'll answer for
me, who'll explain to you exactly how we feel about everything. He'll make it all clear. When? When the right time comes. You won't have to wait long now.

OLD Woman (to her friends) The sooner the better. But of course. (Aside) There's no peace for us now. If only they'd all go away. Where is my little pet? I can't see him any more.

OLD Man (to his friends) Don't be so impatient. You'll hear what my message is. In a few minutes.

OLD Woman (aside) Ah, I can hear his voice. (To her friends) Do you realize my husband has always been misunderstood? His great moment has come at last.

OLD Man. Listen! Experience of all kinds has deepened my knowledge of life and philosophy. I am not a selfish man: I want all mankind to reap the benefit.

OLD Woman. Ouch! You're treading on my toes—I've got chilblains.

OLD Man. I have perfected my system in every detail. (Aside) The Orator ought to have come by now. (Aloud) I have suffered greatly.

OLD Woman. We have both suffered a great deal. (Aside) The Orator ought to have come by now. It's time he arrived.

OLD Man. Suffered greatly and learnt a great deal.

OLD Woman (like an echo) Suffered greatly and learnt a great deal.

OLD Man. My system is perfect, you'll see for yourself.

OLD Woman (like an echo) His system is perfect. You'll see for yourself.

OLD Man. If only you are willing to follow my instructions.

OLD Woman (echo) If only you'll follow his instructions.

OLD Man. We must save the world.

OLD Woman (echo) Save his own soul by saving the world.

OLD Man. One truth for all men.

OLD Woman (echo) One truth for all men.

OLD Man. Do as I say.

OLD Woman. Do as he says.
OLD MAN. Because there's not a single doubt in my mind.

OLD WOMAN (echo) Not a single doubt in his mind.

OLD MAN. Never . . .

OLD WOMAN (echo) Never as long as you live.

(A great noise and a fanfare of trumpets is heard off)

What's happening?

(The noise increases, then the doors back open wide, with a crash. There is nothing to be seen beyond the doors, but a strong light floods the stage, coming through the doors and the windows, which are also brilliantly lit.

An Imaginary Emperor is presumed to arrive and stand in the open doorway)

OLD MAN. I don't know. It can't be—it's not possible—but, yes—but, yes—it's incredible—and yet—yes—why, yes—yes—it's the Emperor. His Majesty the Emperor.

(The light reaches its maximum intensity, flooding through the open door and the windows, but it is a cold, empty light. The noise ceases abruptly)

OLD WOMAN. My love, my love—who is it?

OLD MAN. Stand up—it's His Majesty the Emperor. The Emperor, in my house, in our house. Semiramis, do you realize?

OLD WOMAN (not understanding) The Emperor—the Emperor, my love? (Then, suddenly she realizes) Ah, yes! The Emperor! Your Majesty! Your Majesty! (She curtsies wildly, grotesquely, a fantastic number of times)

(The OLD MAN bows)

In our house! In our house!

OLD MAN (weeping with emotion) Your Majesty! Oh! My Emperor! My great, my little Emperor! Oh, what a tremendous—like a glorious dream.

OLD WOMAN (like an echo) Glorious dream—glorious.

OLD MAN (to the imaginary crowd) Ladies and gentlemen! Rise to your feet. Our well-beloved Sovereign, our Em-
peror is among us. Hoorah! Hooray! (He stands on tip-toe on the stool up R, to catch a glimpse of the Emperor)

(The Old Woman stands on the stool up L)

**Old Woman (stamping her feet)** Hoorah! Hooray!

**Old Man.** Your Majesty! I’m here, your Majesty. Can you hear me? Can you see me? Well, tell His Majesty I’m here. Majesty! Majesty! I’m here, your most faithful servant!

**Old Woman (echo)** Your most faithful servant, Majesty.

**Old Man.** Your servant, your slave, your faithful hound—(he bays loudly like a hound) aouh, aouh, your hound, Majesty.

**Old Woman (baying)** Aouh—aouh—aouh.

**Old Man (wringing his hands)** Can you see me? Oh, answer me, sire. Ah, I can see you—I’ve just caught a glimpse of Your Majesty’s Imperial countenance—that brow divine—I have seen it, yes, in spite of the courtiers who screen you from view.

**Old Woman.** In spite of the courtiers. We are here, Majesty.

**Old Man.** Majesty! Majesty! Ladies and gentlemen, you can’t let His Majesty remain standing. You see, my Majesty, I’m really the only one who looks after you, who worries about your health. I am the most loyal of all your subjects.

**Old Woman (echo)** We’re your most loyal subjects.

**Old Man.** Well, let me get down, ladies and gentlemen. How can I push my way through such a mob—but I must go and pay my humble respects to His Majesty the Emperor. Let me get down.

**Old Woman (echo)** Let him get down—let him get through.

**Old Man.** Let me through, let me get past, then. (Desperately) Oh, shall I ever reach him?

**Old Woman (echo)** Reach him—reach him.

**Old Man.** But I still lay my heart and my whole being at his feet. There’s such a crowd of courtiers round him. Oh, dear, oh, dear, they want to keep me from him. They’ve a shrewd suspicion, all of them, that I’d . . . Oh,
I know them! I know all about court intrigue—they want to keep me from Your Majesty.

(The floods fade and the doors up c close)

OLD WOMAN. Don’t upset yourself, my love—His Majesty can see you—he’s looking at you. His Majesty just winked at me. His Majesty is on our side.

OLD MAN. The best seat for His Majesty. Near the platform—so he can hear all the Orator says.

OLD WOMAN (standing on tip-toe on the stool and craning her neck as high as she can to have a better view) Someone’s looking after the Emperor at last.

OLD MAN. Thank Heaven for that! Sire—Your Majesty can trust that man, he’s a friend of mine, he’s acting for me. (He stands on tip-toe on the stool) Ladies and gentlemen—children, little children, I implore you...

OLD WOMAN (echo) ’plore—’plore.

OLD MAN. I want to see—move aside. I want—that heavenly gaze, that imposing face, the crown, His Majesty’s radiance—sire, be pleased to turn your illustrious countenance towards your humble servant—so humble. Oh, this time I can see quite clearly—I can see.

OLD WOMAN (echo) He can see this time—he can—he can see-e-e.

OLD MAN. This is the height of happiness. I have no words to express the exceeding measure of my gratitude. In my simple dwelling. Oh, Majesty! Oh, Blazing Sun! Here—here—in this building where I am, it’s true, a General—but in the ranks of your army, I am just an ordinary Quartermaster.

OLD WOMAN (echo) Quartermaster.

OLD MAN. I feel proud, proud and humble at the same time... That’s just as it should be. Alas! I’m a General, I know, but I could have been at the Imperial Court—here my court is a small backyard... Majesty—I—Majesty, I don’t express myself very well—I could have had—a number of things, possessed quite a lot of good things in life, if I’d only known, if I’d wanted to, if I—if we... My Majesty, forgive my emotion.
OLD Woman. The third person, you must use the third person.

OLD Man (maudlin) May His Majesty condescend to forgive me. But you’ve come all the same—we’d given up hoping—we might not have been at home. Oh, my saviour, in my life I have suffered humiliation.

OLD Woman (echo; sobbing) “milia”—“milia” . . .

OLD Man. My life has been full of suffering. I could really have been someone, if only I could have counted on Your Majesty’s support. I have no-one behind me. It would all have been too late, if you hadn’t come. You are, Sire, my last hope in life.

OLD Woman (echo) Last hope in life—sire—’ope in life—’p’inlife . . .

OLD Man. I have brought ill luck to my friends, to all those who have helped me. The lightning struck the outstretched hand.

OLD Woman. stretched hand—retched hand—etched hand . . .

OLD Man. I have always been hated for the right reasons, and loved for the wrong ones.

OLD Woman. That’s not true, my pet, not true. You’ve got me to love you, to be your little mother.

OLD Man. All my enemies have been rewarded and my tried friends have betrayed me.

OLD Woman (echo) Tried friends—’trayed—’trayed . . .

OLD Man. They’ve wronged and persecuted me. And if I complained, it was always they were proved right. Sometimes I tried to revenge myself. I could never, never do it. I had too much pity to lay the enemy low. I’ve always been too good.

OLD Woman (echo) He was too good, good, good . . .

OLD Man. Pity was my undoing.

OLD Woman (echo) Pity—pity—pity . . .

OLD Man. But they had no pity. I would prick them with a pin; they’d attack me with their bludgeons, their knives and their cannons, and mangle my bones . . .

OLD Woman (echo) Bones—bones—bones.

OLD Man. I was robbed of my position, my possessions,
my life—I was a collector of disasters, a lightning conductor for catastrophe.

OLD WOMAN (echo) Conductor—catastrophe—'astrophe.

OLD MAN. In order to forget, Majesty, I tried to take up sport—mountaineering. My feet were pulled from under me—when I tried to climb the stairs, I found the wood was rotten—and the staircase collapsed. When I wanted to travel, I was refused a passport. When I wanted to cross the river, the bridges were blown.

OLD WOMAN (echo) Bridges were blown.

OLD MAN. I tried to cross the Pyrenees, but the Pyrenees had gone.

OLD WOMAN (echo) ... had gone. He, too, Majesty, like so many others, could have been a General Editor, a Director-General, a General Physician, Majesty, or a Generalissimo.

OLD MAN. And then, no-one ever took any notice of me. Nobody ever sent me invitations—and yet it was I, I tell you, it was I and I alone who could have saved mankind—suffering, sick mankind. Your Majesty understands this, as I do—or at least I could have spared men the ills they have endured in the last twenty-five years, if only I had had the chance to pass on my message. I haven't given up hope of saving mankind, there is still time and my plan is ready—but I find it so difficult to express myself.

OLD WOMAN (shouting to the Old Man) The Orator will be here, he'll speak for you. His Majesty is here—so they'll listen to him—you needn't worry any more, you're holding all the trumps—it's not the same now, it's all different.

OLD MAN. May Your Majesty forgive me—with so many cares of State. I have been humiliated. Ladies and gentlemen, move aside just a little, don't stand right under His Majesty's nose, I want to see the diamonds blazing in the Imperial Crown. But if Your Majesty has been pleased to enter my poor dwelling, it must be because he deigns to show some regard for my unworthy self. What a wonderful recompense. Majesty, if, physically speaking, I am stretching up on the tips of my toes, it is not out of pride, but simply to behold your face—morally speaking, I am down on my knees before you.
Old Woman (sobbing) At your knees, sire, we are at your knees, at your feet, at your toes.

Old Man. I once had scabies, sire. My employer gave me the sack, because I would not bow down to his baby and his horse. I have been kicked in the backside, but none of that's important now, sire, because—because... Majesty—look at me—I am here—here.

Old Woman (echo) Here—here—here—here—here—here.

Old Man. Because Your Majesty is here—because Your Majesty will heed my message. But the Orator should be here—he is keeping His Majesty waiting.

Old Woman. I beg Your Majesty to forgive him. He should be coming now. He'll be here in a moment. We've just had a telephone call.

Old Man. His Majesty is most kind. His Majesty would never leave just like that without having heard a word. He will stay to hear everything.

Old Woman (echo) Heard a word—hear everything.

Old Man. It is he who will speak in my name. I'm afraid I can't—I haven't the gift. He has all the papers, all the documents.

Old Woman (echo) He has all the documents.

Old Man. A little patience, sire, I beg you—he is just coming.

Old Woman. He'll be here in a moment.

Old Man (so that the Emperor shall not grow impatient) Let me tell you, Majesty, that the revelation came to me a very long time ago. I was forty years old. I am saying this for you, too, ladies and gentlemen. One day, after the evening meal, I was sitting on my father's lap as usual, before I went to bed. My moustache was bigger than his, and more pointed—my chest more hairy—my hair already turning grey—his was still brown. We had some visitors, grown-up people, at table and they started laughing, laughing.

Old Woman (echo) Laughing—laughing.

Old Man. "This isn't a joke," I told them. "I'm fond of my daddy." And they replied, "It's midnight, and a youngster doesn't stay up so late. If you've not gone to bed
yet, it's because you're a man, don't forget." I wouldn't have believed a word they said, if they hadn't talked about going to bed—

OLD Woman (echo) Bed.
OLD Man. —instead of going bye-byes.
OLD Woman. Bye-byes.
OLD Man. And then I thought—but I'm not married yet. So I must still be a child. And they married me off on the spot, just to prove I was wrong. Luckily, my wife has been a mother and a father to me.
OLD Woman. The Orator should be here now, Majesty.
OLD Man. Just coming, the Orator.
OLD Woman. Just coming.
OLD Man. Just coming.
OLD Woman. Just coming.
OLD Man. Just coming.
OLD Woman. Just coming.
OLD Man. Just coming, just coming.
OLD Woman. Just coming, just coming.
OLD Man. Coming.
OLD Woman. Coming.
OLD Man. Coming.
OLD Woman. Coming—he's here.
OLD Man. Coming, he's here.
OLD Woman. Coming, he's here.
OLD Man (together) He's here.
OLD Woman. Here he is!

(There is a silence and no movement. Turned to stone, the Old Couple have their eyes fixed on the doors up C. The stage remains quite still for a considerable time, about half a minute, then the doors up C open wide, silently and very, very slowly, revealing the Orator on the threshold. A spotlight focuses on the Orator as he steps forward on to the rostrum up C. He is a real person. He looks like the typical painter or poet of the last century, with a moustache and goatee beard. He has rather a smug, pretentious look about him. He wears a wide-brimmed, black felt hat, a loosely tied cravat and an artist's jacket. He carries a scroll. If the Imaginary Guests should appear as real as
possible, the Orator should look unreal. As he steps forward, he takes off his hat and bows)

Here he is!

OLD MAN. Here he is.

OLD WOMAN (looking at the Orator) He’s here all right, he really exists. In flesh and blood.

OLD MAN (looking at the Orator) He exists. And he’s here all right. It’s not a dream.

OLD WOMAN. It’s not a dream, I told you it wasn’t.

(The OLD MAN clasps his hands and raises his eyes to Heaven; he is exulting, silently. The ORATOR greets the Imaginary Emperor with a flourish of his hat, like one of the musketeers, and a little like a robot)

OLD MAN. Majesty—may I present the Orator.

OLD WOMAN. That’s him.

(The ORATOR puts on his hat, looks down over the heads of the invisible public at the chairs and freezes into a solemn pose)

OLD MAN (to the Guests) You may ask for his autograph. (He mimes the passing of some autograph books to the Orator)

(During the following speeches, the ORATOR puts the scroll under his arm and in mime, takes a pen from his pocket and silently and automatically signs and returns countless autograph books)

(He clasps his hands and raises his eyes again to Heaven in exultation)

No man on earth can ask more of life.

OLD WOMAN (echo) No man can ask for more.

OLD MAN. And now, with Your Majesty’s permission, I should like to speak to you all, ladies and gentlemen, young children, my dear colleagues and fellow-countrymen all, Mr Chairman, comrades in arms.

OLD WOMAN (echo) Children in arms—arms—arms.

OLD MAN. Speak to you all, without distinction of age, sex, civil status or social rank, of trade or profession, in order to thank you from the bottom of my heart——

OLD WOMAN (echo) Thank you.

OLD MAN. —as I would thank the Orator—most
warmly, for coming here in such great numbers... Silence, gentlemen.

(The Orator finishes with the autograph books, replaces the pen in his pocket and stands solemn and motionless)

OLD Woman (echo) Silence, gentlemen.
OLD Man. I should also like to thank all those who have made this meeting possible tonight—the organizers—
OLD Woman. Hear, hear!
OLD Man. —the owners of this building, the architect and the masons who were kind enough to raise these walls—
OLD Woman (echo) Walls.
OLD Man. —all those who dug the foundations...

Silence, ladies and gentlemen.
OLD Woman (echo) 'dies and gentlemen.
OLD Man. I wish to give particular thanks—for I am not forgetting them—to the joiners who made the chairs you're sitting on, to the skilful craftsmen—
OLD Woman (echo) 'ilful 'aftsmen.
OLD Man. —who fashioned the armchair, in which Your Majesty so softly nestles, his mind still sharp and keen. Thanks again to all the technicians, mechanics, electrocu-

OLD Woman (echo) 'utioners—'cutioners.
OLD Man. —paper manufacturers and printers, proof-readers and editors, to whom we owe the programmes, so attractively designed. I give thanks to the universal soli-

darity of the human race, thanks to our country, thanks to the State—(to the Emperor) whose ship Your Majesty guides with the skill and knowledge of a true helmsman. Thanks to the programme-seller—
OLD Woman (echo) Happigram...
OLD Man. —for her—(he points to the Old Woman) sweets and ices—
OLD Woman (echo) Sand-ices.
OLD Man. —my wife and comrade—Semiramis.
OLD Woman (echo) 'ife—com’—miss. (Aside) Bless his heart, he never forgets to mention me.
OLD Man. I should like to thank all those who, by their financial or moral encouragement, valuable and efficient
support, have thus contributed to the phenomenal success of our celebration this evening. Thanks once more, and above all, to our well-loved Sovereign, His Majesty the Emperor.

OLD WOMAN (echo) 'jesty th' Emperor.

(There is a silence)

OLD MAN. Quiet, please. Majesty——
OLD WOMAN (echo) 'ajesty—'jesty.
OLD MAN. —Majesty, my wife and myself have nothing more to ask of life. Our existence has found its final consummation... Thanks be to Heaven that we have been granted so many long and peaceful years. My life has been a full one. My mission is accomplished. I shall not have lived in vain, since my message is to be revealed to the world. (He gestures to the Orator)

(The Orator does not notice the gesture. He is busy rejecting requests for autographs with a firm and dignified wave of the arm)

To the world, or rather to what is left of it. (He makes a broad gesture to take in the invisible crowd) To you, ladies, gentlemen and dear friends, the left-over scraps of humanity, from which good soup can still be made. My friend, the Orator...

(The Orator is looking somewhere else)

If I have been misrepresented and misunderstood by my contemporaries for a long time now, it must have been ordained so.

(The Old Woman sobs)

But what does all that matter? Now I can leave it to you, dear friend and Orator——

(The Orator repulses a fresh demand for an autograph, yawns, then strikes an attitude expressing indifference, and gazes round on all sides)

—the task of dazzling posterity with the enlightenment I bring. So make my philosophy known to the Universe.
And do not omit the details of my private life—

—whether they’re comical, painful or touching; my habits and tastes, my gorgeous greed—tell all you know.

Speak of my dear companion—

—of the way she used to prepare those marvellous little Turkish pasties of hers, and her rabbit *rillettes a la Normandille*—talk about Berry, where I was born. I am looking to you, Master Orator. As for me and my faithful spouse, after long years of labour in the cause of human progress, years in which we have fought for what is right and just, it only remains for us to withdraw from the scene—and at once, in order to make the supreme sacrifice. No one demands it of us, nevertheless we are resolved.

Old Woman (sobbing) Yes, yes, let us die in our moment of glory—so that our names become legendary. At least we shall have a street called after us.

Old Man (to the Old Woman) Oh, my faithful wife and companion—you who have believed in me, without a moment’s doubt, for a whole century, who have never left my side, never—today, alas, in our moment of triumph, we are separated by a pitiless mob.

Old Woman (echo) Pitiless mob.

Old Man. And yet I would Have found it good That you and I As one might lie Each bone to bone Beneath one stone Our old flesh breeding The same worms feeding Mouldering together.
Old Woman. Mouldering together.
Old Man. Alas! Alack!
Old Woman. Alas! Alack!
Old Man. Our bodies will fall far from one another, we shall rot in watery solitude. Let us not complain too much.
Old Woman. We must do what is to be done!
Old Man. We shall not be forgotten. The eternal Emperor will always remember us, always.
Old Woman (echo) Always.
Old Man. We shall leave some trace behind, for we are not towns, but people.
Old Woman (together) A street will bear our names.

(The Orator is motionless and impassive)

Old Man. Let us be united in time and in eternity, if not in space, as we were in trial and tribulation: let us die at the same moment. (To the Orator) Once more, then—I am depending on you. You must tell everything.

(The Orator nods)

Bequeath the message to everyone. (To the Emperor) With Your Majesty’s permission—farewell to you all. Farewell, Semiramis.

Old Woman. Farewell to all of you! Farewell, my love.

(The Orator yawns)

Old Man. Long live the Emperor!

(The Old Man throws confetti over the Emperor. Paper streamers fall from the flys up C. A fanfare of trumpets is heard and there is a brilliant light from fireworks, illuminating the doorway up C and the windows)

Old Woman. Long live the Emperor!

(The Old Woman throws confetti over the Emperor, then over the impassive, motionless Orator, and over the empty chairs. There are more paper streamers and fireworks)

Old Man. Long live the Emperor!
Old Woman. Long live the Emperor!

(The Old Couple at one and the same time, both turn and
jump through their windows, crying “Long live the Emperor.” There is a sudden silence. The fireworks' glare fades swiftly. An “Ah!” is heard from both sides of the stage, and the glaucous sound of bodies striking water. The light is no longer coming through the doors and windows; there is only the dim light there was at the beginning; the wide-open windows gape black, with their curtains flapping in the wind. The Orator, who has remained motionless and impassive during the scene of the double suicide, decides, after a few moments' effort, to speak. He opens the scroll and as he faces the rows of empty chairs, he indicates to the invisible crowd that he is deaf and dumb. He uses sign-language. He makes desperate efforts to make himself understood, then from his throat come moans and groans and the sort of gutteral sounds made by deaf mutes)

Orator. He, mme, mm, mm, ju, gou, hou, hou, heu, heu, gu gou, gueu.

The Orator shrugs helplessly, throws away the scroll, drops his arms to his side, bows ceremoniously to the empty chairs and the invisible Emperor, turns and exits up c. The stage is empty, apart from the chairs, the confetti and the paper streamers over the floor. The doors up c are wide open gaping black. The lights dim to Black-Out as—

the Curtain falls

ALTERNATIVE ENDING

(The Orator shrugs helplessly, throws away the scroll and drops his arms to his sides. Suddenly his face lights up, he has an idea. He turns to a blackboard, takes a piece of chalk from his pocket, and writes in large capitals “ANGELBREAD”, then “NNA NNM NWNWNV V”. He turns again to his invisible public and points to what he has written on the blackboard)

Orator. Mmm, mmm, gneu, gou, gu, mmm, mmm, mmm, mmmm.

The Orator, dissatisfied, rubs out the chalk marks with a
series of sharp movements, and puts others in their place. Among them the following can be discerned, in large capitals: ΛΑΔΙΈÛ ΛΑΔΙΈÛ ΑΡΑ. He turns to the audience and smiles questioningly, as though he hopes he has been understood, has really said something. He points out to the empty chairs what he has just written. He waits, quite still for a moment, looking fairly pleased and a little solemn, then, gradually, when the hoped-for reaction is not forthcoming, his smile disappears and his face clouds over. He waits a moment longer, then, suddenly, he bows moodily and abruptly goes to the doors up c. He turns, bows once more ceremoniously to the empty chairs and the invisible Emperor, then exits up c. The stage is empty, apart from the chairs, the confetti and the paper streamers over the floor. The doors up c are wide open, gaping black. For the first time, human noises seem to be coming from the invisible crowd, snatches of laughter, whisperings, a “Sssh” or two, little sarcastic coughs; these noises grow louder and louder, only to start fading away again. All this should last just long enough for the real and visible public to go away with this ending firmly fixed in their minds.

The Curtain falls very slowly
فأوائل القرن الثاني عشر، كان الملك الفاطمي الأعظم غير جلال الدين راكان، الذي كان يعرف برانك اوين، الذي كان يفضل جماعة وانه مزجريسًا. كان يخطط لاستعادة بلاد الشام من الصليبيين، وكان حارثًا عاميًا لل-expanded القوى الفاطمية. لم يكن هناك تأرجح بينه وبين الملك الوسيف، الذي كان يصر على أن يكون للعراق أو على ابنه الفاطمي الذي كان يحتفل بالفاطمية. وكان الملك الوسيف هو الذي كان يحمل القيادة في الحرب ضد الصليبيين، وكان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق. وお勧めًا على الملك الفاطمي الذي كان يسعى لاستعادة إيران والشام، كان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق. وكان الملك الوسيف هو الذي كان يحمل القيادة في الحرب ضد الصليبيين، وكان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق. كان الملك الفاطمي الذي كان يسعى لاستعادة إيران والشام، كان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق. وكان الملك الوسيف هو الذي كان يحمل القيادة في الحرب ضد الصليبيين، وكان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق. كان الملك الفاطمي الذي كان يسعى لاستعادة إيران والشام، كان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق. وكان الملك الفاطمي الذي كان يسعى لاستعادة إيران والشام، كان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق. كان الملك الفاطمي الذي كان يسعى لاستعادة إيران والشام، كان يأمل في السيطرة على العراق.
FURNITURE AND PROPERTY LIST

On stage: 2 stools
2 bentwood chairs
2 sets window curtains
Gas pendant c
Gas pendant lowered
Window up R half open
Window curtains up R closed
Window up L open
Window curtains up L open
All doors closed

Off stage: Off L: 3 chairs (Old Man)
Off L: 13 chairs (Old Woman)
Off R: 17 chairs (Old Woman)
Scroll (Orator)
THE CHAIRS

*In flys:* streamers, confetti
*In wings:* fireworks

*Personal:*  
OLD Woman: matches, handkerchief, confetti
Orator: fountain pen
OLD Man: handkerchief, confetti
LIGHTING PLOT

Property fittings required: pendant gas fitting

Interior. The same scene throughout

The apparent source of light is a gas pendant

The main acting area covers the whole stage

To open: The stage in semi-darkness

Cue 1 The Old Woman lights gas pendant
Bring in pendant
Bring in covering lights

Page 1

Cue 2 Old Woman: "... have disturbed you."
Commence slow increase of general lighting

Page 21

Cue 3 Old Woman: "What's happening?"
Bring in strong floods through doors back c and windows R and L

Page 38

Cue 4 Old Man: "... from Your Majesty."
Fade floods

Page 40

Cue 5 Orator enters up c
Focus spotlight on Orator

Page 44

Cue 6 Old Man: "Long live the Emperor!"
Brilliant light illuminating the doorway up c and the windows

Page 49

Cue 7 The Old Couple jump through windows
Fade light on doorway and windows

Page 50

Cue 8 As the Curtain falls
Dim to Black-Out

Page 50
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cue</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>At rise of Curtain &lt;br&gt;Sound of lapping water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Old Man: “Don’t fuss.” &lt;br&gt;Fade sound of water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Old Woman: “... for another evening.” &lt;br&gt;Sound of boat approaching off r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Old Woman: “... it’s the Orator.” &lt;br&gt;Sound of boat ceases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Old Man: “... be someone else.” &lt;br&gt;Bell clangs off r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Old Woman: “... at his message.” &lt;br&gt;Bell clangs off l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Old Man: “... fetch some chairs.” &lt;br&gt;Bell clangs off l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Follows previous cue &lt;br&gt;A few blasts on a trumpet and a few notes of “The Colonel’s Salute”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Old Woman: “... are respectable people.” &lt;br&gt;Sound of boat approaching off r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Old Man: “... can carry arms.” &lt;br&gt;Bell clangs off r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Old Woman: “... look at the dust.” &lt;br&gt;Bell clangs off r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Old Man: “Beg pardon, madam.” &lt;br&gt;Sound of boats approaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Follows above cue &lt;br&gt;Bell clangs off l</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cue 14 OLD MAN: "... see you afterwards." (Page 27)
Sound of boats approaching

Cue 15 OLD MAN: "... ladies, my dear." (Page 28)
Bell clangs off L

Cue 16 OLD WOMAN: "Mr—Mrs—Mr..." (Page 29)
Bell clangs off L

Cue 17 OLD MAN: "More people!" (Page 29)
Bell clangs off R

Cue 18 OLD MAN: "Come in." (Page 30)
Bell clangs off R

Cue 19 OLD MAN: "Allow me—yes." (Page 30)
Bell clangs off L

Cue 20 OLD WOMAN: "... there, there, there..." (Page 30)
Sound of boats approaching ad lib.

Cue 21 OLD WOMAN: "... your pullover on?" (Page 31)
Bells clang off R, and L, ad lib.

Cue 22 OLD WOMAN: "... as you live." (Page 38)
A great noise and a fanfare of trumpets

Cue 23 OLD WOMAN: "What's happening?" (Page 38)
The noise increases

Cue 24 OLD MAN: "His Majesty the Emperor." (Page 38)
The noise ceases abruptly

Cue 25 OLD MAN: "Long live the Emperor!" (Page 49)
Fanfare and fireworks

Cue 26 The OLD COUPLE jump through windows (Page 50)
Fanfare and fireworks cease

Cue 27 Follows above cue (Page 50)
Sound of bodies falling into water