

Old Man And I've got a signed photograph of him. His advice was always good. His genius was immeasurable. But it's over, girls.

Curtain.

Act Three

Clothes shop in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city. On stage the Old Woman, the Old Man, the Daughter and the Shop Assistant. The counter is covered in fabrics of all colours.

Shop Assistant (*-serving behind the counter*) This material is ideal for a cheerful guest; you can't deny it. Feel it, it's lovely. If people wore this kind of material, there wouldn't be so many wicked individuals in the world.

Daughter I think it could be too light.

Old Woman You mean it won't do?

Old Man (*referring to the Shop Assistant*) Don't be so fussy with the young gentleman.

Shop Assistant We slaves never complain, young man.

Old Woman I'd love to wear lots of ribbons.

Shop Assistant (*to the Old Man*) The demands of my female customers play a role I always defend.

Daughter Could you show us a more sober one?

Old Woman Do you think this isn't smart enough? What do you think, Tony?

Old Man Whatever you want, Neptunia, but hurry up.

Shop Assistant I'll show you a more sober one: we're not limited to just one style in this shop. (*He looks for another fabric.*) Nowadays bright colours are in fashion, but they already existed in Sophocles's day.

Old Woman (*to the Daughter*) Did you hear that?

Daughter The point about all this is that it shouldn't have an immediate impact and then you get bored with it.

Old Man You're not a young girl any more, Neptunia. And it's not that I'm complaining.

Shop Assistant What do you all think of this colour?

Old Woman I'll look like a round temple in the middle of a town square.

Shop Assistant Madam, it's high quality, like all of the selection in this shop.

Old Woman It looks like wool to me.

Old Man Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

Shop Assistant So, you don't like this one, either?

Old Woman I don't know. What do you think, Lola?

Shop Assistant Have you ever held this kind of material in your hands? This material isn't unworthy of anybody. *(To the Old Man, who is keeping out of it.)* Look at it, young man, look at it.

Old Man Me? Everything looks symmetrical to me.

Shop Assistant Did you say symmetrical?

Daughter How much is this one?

Shop Assistant By the metre? I'll help you work it out. *(To the Daughter.)* Is the dress for you, Miss?

Old Man Good gracious, she's already married.

Shop Assistant I'm sorry! Is the dress for you, Madam?

Daughter No. It's someone else's wedding.

Shop Assistant *(to the Old Man and the Old Woman)* Yours, maybe?

Old Man Yes, that's right, young man. That's what we've decided to do. Haven't we, Neptunia?

Old Woman *(looking at the fabric)* Yes, of course. What do you think of it, Lola?

Shop Assistant I can see you've come without any preconceived idea of what you want.

Old Woman We just want to see different samples. Don't we, Lola?

Daughter Of course, Mrs Neptunia.

Old Woman Goodness gracious, don't call me 'Mrs' please! Can't you see it makes me look old? That's not what I need now. You aren't allowed to call me 'Mrs'. My son has never called your father 'Mr' since you got married. We have to be on familiar terms.

Shop Assistant *(laughs)* Of course, some axes are lethal, aren't they?

Old Woman Well, what do you think of this material? Does it suit me?

Daughter Maybe it should be a bit darker?

Old Woman You mean even darker? You want to make me feel old. Just remember, your father must look like the king of the Greeks next to me.

Shop Assistant Bravo! *(He applauds.)*

Old Man Don't say such things, Neptunia.

Old Woman Goodness gracious, why can't I? It's what I think. And I'm proud of it.

Daughter How much is a metre?

Shop Assistant Let's see: this one is a hundred and fifty pesetas.

Old Woman Did you say one hundred and fifty? No, no. Then, show us another darker one, as Miss Madam says.

Shop Assistant *(takes out another fabric)* Look: we've also got this. It's as pretty as the ghost of the night.

Old Woman I'll look like a woman taken from a cart to be sacrificed.

Shop Assistant There's other business to attend to. This material is the same as the one we've got in the shop

window, at the top of the column. It's a quality fabric. Living without any honour is ignominious. Sophocles says so.

Old Woman You know, I don't like having enemies.

Shop Assistant You won't have any disasters with this material.

Old Woman Thank you. We have noble hearts.

Shop Assistant I tell you, I don't doubt it, Madam.

Old Woman What do you think, Lola? Will this material make me look too old?

Daughter I think the best would be a fabric between this one and that one.

Shop Assistant If you want to see what it looks like on you . . . *(He unfolds a few metres of the fabric, and the Old Woman tries it on her.)* You see?

Old Woman You were right, Lola. Don't you have something in between?

Shop Assistant Then, you want this one. *(He takes out another fabric.)*

Daughter I like it.

Old Woman Yes; with this one I'll look more like myself, won't I, Tony?

Old Man It's up to you, it's up to you.

Shop Assistant *(referring to the pile of fabrics he has on the counter)* Oh! It looks like there's been a storm on this counter.

Old Man You're right, young man, you're right.

Old Woman *(the women are utterly absorbed by the fabrics)* Do you mean that . . .

Daughter I like it better than the other one.

Old Woman *(to the Shop Assistant)* And won't it shrink when it's washed?

Shop Assistant Why should it shrink? We don't cheat our customers, Madam. Believe me, you won't regret buying this material.

Daughter What do you think, Neptunia?

Old Woman *(after a pause)* I don't know why, but I'm not altogether satisfied with it.

Shop Assistant *(looks at the Old Man)* Huh!

Old Man *(aside)* We can't do anything, that's the way things are . . .

Old Woman Do you like it, Tony?

Old Man Of course I do, Neptunia: very much!

Shop Assistant Believe me, this material has just arrived. The action begins with you.

Old Man *(aside)* I understand the position you're in, young man.

Shop Assistant *(aside)* At night, I dream I'm conquering Troy.

Old Woman *(referring to the fabric)* I don't know what I'll look like when it's a dress.

Daughter Like a queen.

Old Woman The solution is for you to show us one with a pattern.

Shop Assistant Very good, Madam. *(Aside, to the Old Man.)* It's enough to try the patience of a saint!

Old Man I understand you, but we can't do anything.

Old Woman I'm sorry about this, young man: we won't be long.

Shop Assistant Thank you, thank you! (*He goes and looks for the sample.*)

Old Woman (*to the Old Man*) They've got quality material here, haven't they?

Old Man Oh yes!

Old Woman But to be completely sure, I have to see things with my own eyes.

Daughter Compared with other shops, they've got twice as much here.

Shop Assistant (*shows them the sample he has been looking for*) Look at this one. As pretty as a well-told story.

Daughter Yes, yes, we are all witnesses to that.

Old Woman And is it as pretty at night as it is during the day?

Shop Assistant This will light up your face.

Old Woman That's not the best thing for me: it'll show up my wrinkles.

Shop Assistant It's just a saying. I mean, you'll forget all your problems, because this material is always perfect for special occasions. It's like the prelude to a dream.

Old Woman Poor old me, yes, I'll look so smart!

Shop Assistant Look how carefully it's been woven. Look! Feel it! It's been brought here in secret by an oracle.

Old Woman (*to the Daughter*) What do you think, Lola? Shall we go back?

Shop Assistant Don't go back, now you're here.

Old Woman You don't need to be afraid of our pride, young man.

Old Man Of course not!

Daughter And how much is this one?

Shop Assistant Twice the price of the other one.

Old Woman What? That's outrageous!

Shop Assistant I know what I'm saying, Madam. Twice as expensive, and next week perhaps three times the price. Can't you see all prices are going up? Life is a peaceful shipwreck.

Old Man That's what's wrong, that's what's wrong.

Shop Assistant Believe me, I'm all for people living together. But I don't mind if it's a double fight. We all know. Sophocles was a general.

Old Man I can see, my young man, that you're a dedicated Sophoclean.

Shop Assistant Oh, yes, sir! And what's more, that's my name. Robert Sophoclean Drill, at your service. I never miss a historical film. Have you ever seen *The Centaurs of Numancia*?

Old Man No, I haven't.

Shop Assistant You should, it's well worth it. It's the story of a sacred temple restored by slaves for their fatherland. The ending is really tremendous.

Old Man It's made up, Mr Sophoclean.

Shop Assistant The heroes go into action and they never surrender.

Old Woman (*who was waiting for the Shop Assistant to stop talking*) On the other hand, we're completely sure we don't want the first one you showed us. I want the green one.

Shop Assistant The green one?

Old Woman Yes, sir, the green one.

Daughter Neptunia, I think you should buy the third one he showed us.

Shop Assistant Did you say the third one?

Old Woman No, I don't want it.

Daughter The grey one suits you better: you'll soon get tired of the green one.

Old Woman And why should I pretend, if I like the green one best?

Shop Assistant This happens all the time, ladies.

Old Woman I'd stake my life on the green one.

Old Man Do what she says: I think the girl is right.

Old Woman Why don't you give me a chance?

A Customer enters slowly and remains on one side of the stage.

Old Man (to the Old Woman) My child, don't be like that!

Old Woman If you've just woken up, that's no way to put your oar in!

Old Man I've told you what I think.

Old Woman Neither of you cares what I want!

Daughter Don't be like that, Neptunia!

Old Man We're giving you good advice.

Old Woman No! *(She thumps the counter.)*

Shop Assistant Nobody's been injured here, ladies and gentlemen.

Old Woman I don't like staying in the background.

Old Man This wedding's upsetting you: believe me.

Old Woman No! *(Another thump.)*

Shop Assistant Calm down! Nobody's been injured here, ladies and gentlemen.

Daughter There's no need to take pity on anybody.

Old Woman Why are you both talking like this?

Old Man We're not just sowing seeds anywhere.

Shop Assistant I'm just reporting what I hear.

Old Man I don't think we're going to buy anything.

Daughter That's the way I see things as well.

Old Woman (to the Old Man) I don't exist any more, I live through you and you don't even appreciate it.

Old Man I can't see any hand dripping.

Old Woman The thing is there's nobody who really understands.

Old Man We should try our best to get on with each other.

Old Woman I want the green one!

Old Man Come on, keep your voice down.

Daughter But . . .

Old Woman That's it. That's it. There are no famous asses here worth their salt!

Old Man All right! Let's go then, because these men have to act.

They all go off. Pause. The Shop Assistant sighs and tidies the counter.

Shop Assistant (to the Customer) Can I help you, sir?

Customer (goes up to the counter) Good afternoon.

Shop Assistant A very good afternoon to you. How can I help you, sir?

Customer If it's no trouble, I'd like a dozen handkerchiefs.

Shop Assistant I've got some very nice ones. I'll show you right away.

Customer Thank you!

Shop Assistant *(exits and comes back with various boxes)*
Look. You or whoever told you to buy them will be pleased with them. And I'm pleased to be able to sell them to you. The Greeks always put their faith in the final outcome. They had very fast horses. I recommend you see *The Centaurs of Numancia*, in cinemascope.

Customer And are these other ones the same?

Shop Assistant Oh, yes! *(He opens the other boxes.)* They've got a slightly different pattern. Look at this one; it looks like a meander. Nowadays there isn't a prophetic sense any more. Delphic oracles keep silent. Eternally silent.

Customer I'll have these.

Shop Assistant How many would you like?

Customer A dozen.

Shop Assistant Fine. I'll just wrap them up for you.

Customer Thank you!

Shop Assistant Not at all! You'll be pleased with them. My customers always are. *(Meanwhile he wraps them up.)* These are quality handkerchiefs, they're incomparable. You or whoever told you to buy them will be pleased with them.

Customer Good.

Shop Assistant *(finishes wrapping them up)* Athens was rich in gold. When the sun rose, you could hear the first songbirds. That was the life! Here you are.

Customer Excuse me: have you got any towels?

Shop Assistant Olympus in Greece had everything.

Customer Thank you!

Shop Assistant We're slaves to our customers. I'll show you the towels in a second.

Customer The best you've got, please.

Shop Assistant Here you are! *(He shows him some towels.)*
Look at them: excellent quality. They'll never wear out. Don't worry: they'll last you for ever. I know what I'm talking about. You or whoever told you to buy them . . .

Customer How much are they?

Shop Assistant A hundred pesetas each.

Customer OK. I'd like a dozen.

Shop Assistant Very good. A dozen, as well.

Customer Thank you!

Shop Assistant Thank you! *(He takes the towels and wraps them up.)* These towels are splendid.

Customer And they're the best you've got, aren't they?

Shop Assistant Yes sir, oh yes. In the Barcelona Olympus, we've always offered the best quality goods to our distinguished customers. Don't ever go to the shop next door. Before taking a decision, the Athenians always thought it over carefully. These handkerchiefs and towels will go well together in your home. Or it'll be a nice present, if it's a gift for someone . . .

Customer Excuse me: I've changed my mind and I think for now I'll only buy the towels. Yes, yes, that's what I want. I'll come back soon.

Shop Assistant Oh! As you wish. Fine: as you'll see, in this establishment, we're happy to serve our customers.

Customer Let's change the handkerchiefs for the towels; yes.

Shop Assistant As you wish. *(He gives him the wrapped-up towels.)* I'm your slave and I'm at your service.

Customer Thank you! *(He takes the wrapped-up towels in a determined fashion, puts them under his arm and starts to exit.)*

Shop Assistant Excuse me, sir . . . but . . .

Customer Sorry? What do you want?

Shop Assistant (*nervously*) Those towels cost three thousand two hundred pesetas.

Customer (*firmly*) Yes, we'd already talked about that.

Shop Assistant But I'm sorry . . . you haven't paid for them yet . . .

Customer What do you mean I haven't paid for them! Didn't we agree they were in exchange for the handkerchiefs?

Shop Assistant But you haven't paid for the handkerchiefs either . . .

Customer Of course not! Am I taking them? . . . (*He exits in a determined fashion, leaving the Shop Assistant perplexed, scratching his head and looking at the audience.*)

Curtain.

The Audition

A Dialogue between an Aristocrat
and an Actor

by

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