

TWO CELLS IN SEVILLA, OR: DON QUIXOTE IS HUNGRY

Chamber opera

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Singable German version available from the librettist

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The COOK, a young girl, mezzo

Don MIGUEL, a nobleman, in debtors' prison, tenor

Brother GABRIEL, a young monk, bass

A SERVANT, baritone

Oboe/cor anglais, clarinet, alto saxophone, violoncello, grand piano



(1) (*Sevilla, second half of the 16th century. A cloister to the left, a prison to the right. The kitchen, with the COOK cooking and the SERVANT sleeping, in the middle. GABRIEL, in his cloister cell, is praying. MIGUEL, in his prison cell, is playing a game of chess against himself. The noon bell tolls. On the last chime ...*)

GABRIEL: Atishoo!

(Various kitchen utensils fall down. MIGUEL has lost the game against himself and angrily wipes the figures off the table.)

GABRIEL (*mumbling*): Paternosterquiesincoelis, sanctificeturnomentuum, adveniatregnumtuum, fiatvoluntastua, sicutincaeloetinerra. Panemnostrumquotidianumdanobis ... (*suddenly loud*) Panem nostrum quotidianum! Our daily bread. Our daily bread give us today!

MIGUEL: And cheese ...

GABRIEL: Our daily bread give us today!

MIGUEL: And chorizo sausage! And ham!

GABRIEL: Pata negra!

MIGUEL: And wine!

GABRIEL: And Sherry!

BOTH: Enough of this watery broth that we are getting every day. Enough. Enough!

COOK (*reading a book*): Enough of this miserable life!

ALL THREE: Enough of this miserable life! Enough of this deplorable life! Enough of this abominable life! Enough of this detestable life! Enough of this revolting life! Of this ever-revolving, revolting life!

GABRIEL: I waste my youth in a cloister cell. No decent food, no fun, no merriment. Just prayers and meditation; yes, meditation and prayers, and watery broth!

MIGUEL: I waste my life in a prison cell. No decent food, no glory, no company. No money, no consolation; no consolation, no money, and watery broth!

COOK (*looking up from the book she is reading*): I waste my life in this kitchen here. No decent men. No dance, no merriment; no merriment, no dance, just stirring the soup!

GABRIEL: Good lady in charge of our welfare ...

MIGUEL: You fairy in charge of our stomachs ...

GABRIEL: ... we humbly beg you ...

MIGUEL: ... beseech and entreat you ...

BOTH: ... to provide us with some decent food!

COOK: What? Decent food for you? Decent food for you useless riffraff?
 I need a man who takes care of me! Not a monk who's kneeling in his cell.
 I need a man who will pamper me! Not a debtor who's locked up in his cell.
(Looking at her clogs) I need a man who buys me fancy shoes!
(Looking at her empty wrists) I need a man who buys me bracelets and rings!
 I need a man who takes me out to dance! A man who acts like in romance!
 For such a man I'd cook delicious dishes! All the haute cuisine he wishes!
 But for you? And for you? Watery broth will do! *(Resumes her reading.)* It will do!

GABRIEL: It cannot go on like this. I'm getting weaker by the day!

COOK: You're a monk. Fasting should suit you!

MIGUEL: It cannot go on like this. I'm getting feebler by the day!

COOK: You're in debtors' prison. Fasting behoves you!

GABRIEL: Good lady in charge of our welfare ...

MIGUEL: You fairy in charge of our stomachs ...

GABRIEL: ... on bended knee we implore you ...

MIGUEL: ... from the bottom of our soul ...

GABRIEL: ... (and our empty stomach) ...

MIGUEL: ... we desperately plead for some decent food!

GABRIEL: She is not listening.

MIGUEL: Not even looking up from her book.

GABRIEL: She's carried away by it.

MIGUEL: I wonder what she is reading?

GABRIEL: Methinks it's not a prayer book.

(2) COOK: Prayer book, my foot! It's a romance I'm reading!
 I want a lover by the book! For such a lover I would cook!
 My lover shall be an errant knight! Protecting me with all his might!
 My lover shall be a charming prince! Who dreamed of me forever since!
 With compliments I shall be wooed! For that, I'll cook delightful food!
 But for you? And for you? Watery broth will do! *(Resumes her reading.)* It will do!

MIGUEL: An errant knight. I thought the days of knight errantry were over?

COOK: They are not! It's all written here in this book!

MIGUEL: Books are dangerous. People lose their mind over them.

GABRIEL: Books are dangerous! They always bring me in trouble with my superiors.

COOK: I want a lover by the book!

GABRIEL: For such a lover she will cook!

MIGUEL: All right, all right. A knight in shining armour. *(Grabs pen, ink and paper, starts scribbling.)* There you go:

“The first thing he did was to clean up some armour that had belonged to his great-grandfather, and had been for ages lying forgotten in a corner eaten with rust and covered with mildew. He scoured and polished it as best he could!”

COOK: Does he have a horse?

SERVANT *(speaking in his sleep)*: My kingdom for a horse!

GABRIEL: I wonder who put these words in his mouth?

MIGUEL: Oh, shut up, you villain! For sure he had a horse.

“He next proceeded to inspect his hack. Four days were spent in thinking what name to give him, because (as he said to himself) it was not right that a horse belonging to a knight so famous, and one with such merits of his own, should be without some distinctive name. And so, after having composed, struck out, rejected, added to, unmade, and remade a multitude of names out of his memory and fancy, he decided upon calling him Rosinante!”

GABRIEL *(attracted against his will)*: And now, the lady! Where’s the lady?

COOK: A knight in shining armour ... and his lady!

MIGUEL: She shall be supplied instantly:

“So then, his armour being furbished, his hack christened, and he himself confirmed, he came to the conclusion that nothing more was needed now but to look out for a lady to be in love with; for a knight-errant without love was like a tree without leaves or fruit, or a body without a soul!”

COOK: He will devote all his adventures to her?

MIGUEL *(awakens the SERVANT)*: “If I come across some giant hereabouts, a common occurrence with knights-errant, and I vanquish and subdue him ...”

(mock fight with the SERVANT; he gives him one of his pages for a script, and puts him in motion towards the COOK.)

“... he may fall on his knees before my sweet lady, and in a humble, submissive voice say:”

(The SERVANT stands dumbfounded, paper in hand.)

MIGUEL *(hisses to the SERVANT)*: On your knees!

SERVANT *(kneeling; attempting to read)*: That’s Greek to me!

GABRIEL: I wonder who taught him this.

MIGUEL: Read it, villain, read out loud!

(3) SERVANT (*kneeling at the COOK's feet*):

"I am the giant Caraculiambro, lord of the island of Malindrania, vanquished in single combat by the knight Don Quixote of La Mancha, who has commanded me to present myself before your Grace, that your Highness dispose of me at your pleasure!"

COOK: Yes ... that's exactly what I want ... Go to the well, giant, and fetch water for me!

(*The SERVANT does as ordered.*)

COOK: In the meanwhile ... good Don, tell me how the knight will call me!

MIGUEL: "There was, so the story goes, in a kitchen near his own place a very good-looking girl, and upon her he thought fit to confer the title of Lady of his Thoughts; and after some search for a name which should suggest and indicate that she was a princess and great lady, he decided upon calling her Dulcinea del Toboso!"

COOK: Dulcinea del Toboso! (*Delighted, she conjures all kinds of good food from her larder and starts cooking a meal for MIGUEL – which gets richer and richer as the scene unfolds.*)

SERVANT: Bad luck for the cloister, methinks!

COOK: What do I, Dulcinea, look like?

MIGUEL: "All the fanciful attributes of beauty which the poets apply to their ladies are verified in her; for her hairs are gold, her forehead Elysian fields, her eyebrows rainbows, her eyes suns, her cheeks roses, her lips coral, her teeth pearls, her neck alabaster, her bosom marble, her hands ivory, her fairness snow!"

COOK: How does the knight address me?

MIGUEL: "Oh my lady Dulcinea del Toboso, perfection of all beauty, summit and crown of discretion, treasure house of grace, depositary of virtue, and finally, ideal of all that is good, honourable, and delectable in this world! What is thy grace doing now? Art thou, perchance, mindful of thy enslaved knight who of his own free will hath exposed himself to so great perils, and all to serve thee?"

COOK: Beautifully said! My dear errant knight ... my knight in shining armour! I am sure he will win every fight?

MIGUEL: No.

GABRIEL: No?

MIGUEL: No. In fact, in pretty much every adventure he gets a hell of a beating.

SERVANT: And his servant with him, I'm afraid.

GABRIEL: How can you do that to him? Won't that disappoint ... fair Dulcinea?

MIGUEL: What do you know about women, my holy friend! They admire the shining armour, but they fall for the underdog.

GABRIEL: Enough. That's enough. Don't lecture me. **(4)** *(To the COOK:)* Say, my dear creature, have you never heard that those noble dons are usually unfaithful to their girls?

COOK: Unfaithful?

GABRIEL: Unfaithful indeed. Now listen to me. *(Grabs pen, ink and paper, starts scribbling.)* There is a don who is "noble, and his fame shall shine like the sun himself!" He will come to your house. You'll be the envy of every lady in the entire province!

COOK: How will he speak to me?

GABRIEL: "My country girl, I wish God had drowned me in the waves that I might have been spared the madness of my love for you!"

COOK: What name does he have for me?

GABRIEL: "Ah, Aminda, wonder of my eyes! Tomorrow, your beautiful feet will walk in polished silver slippers, embellished with buttons of purest gold, your alabaster throat imprisoned in necklaces, and your fingers within their rings will seem to be transparent pearls."

COOK: And what will he do next?

GABRIEL: He will come to your house at night. He will come to your chamber at night!

COOK *(coquettishly)*: My father will never suffer that!

GABRIEL: Your father?

COOK: He is very strict to me. A tyrant indeed! He guards my honour by day and by night. He never allows me the slightest pleasure!

GABRIEL: Trust me, my don will take care of your father. *(Gestures the cutting of a throat.)*

MIGUEL: My knight will come to your rescue!

GABRIEL: Your fiancée will come to your rescue ... maybe, unfortunately, a little early though. Tough luck!

COOK: Oh!

GABRIEL: Now that don ... he's having one affair after the other.

COOK: What?!

SERVANT: Shall I keep a list of all his conquests, sorted by country?

COOK: How dare he be so unfaithful!

SERVANT *(reading another note from GABRIEL)*: "Those who cheat and toy with women will surely have their reward ... after death!"

GABRIEL: His motto is, don't be faithful to one, lest you are cheating all the others!

COOK: He must be punished!

GABRIEL: He will be most severely punished! Rest assured.

(5) COOK: To hell with him! – I love a little shudder in my romance.
GABRIEL: You shall have it. How about a ghost or two?
COOK: Too common.
GABRIEL: The devil coming for him?
COOK: I had that in books by the dozen!
MIGUEL: Can't you do better than that?
GABRIEL: All right, all right. The old man whom the don has murdered, he gets a splendid funeral. They erect a statue in his honour. Life-size. White marble.
COOK: How pretty!
GABRIEL: The don sees it. Mocks the statue: If you are so cool, come to my palace and have dinner with me!
SERVANT: Don't mock the dead! They'll take revenge.
GABRIEL: The don thinks that's a capital joke. But the statue indeed comes. The don has a stone guest for dinner! And now the don has to return the favour. – Atishoo! - The other day he must come to the graveyard. And there, under thunder and lightning, the statue of the dead man takes the don to hell!

(The rich meal, originally prepared for MIGUEL, now sways to the other side.)

MIGUEL: It cannot stay like this. He's stealing my thunder ... my girl ... and my food!
GABRIEL *(addressing the COOK)*: Hear the voice of God!
MIGUEL *(likewise)*: Hear the voice of chivalry!
GABRIEL: God's calling you to my side!
MIGUEL: Love is calling you to my side!
COOK: I'm torn between the two! Now, how can I decide?
MIGUEL: A duel would be the most appropriate way. But, alas, I cannot challenge a monk!
GABRIEL: I excommunicate you! The inquisition will come after you! Your name will be anathema!
MIGUEL: We have not even been introduced.
GABRIEL: So, what would be your name?
MIGUEL: Cervantes.
GABRIEL: Cervantes? Your servant.
MIGUEL: In full: Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra.
GABRIEL: Brother Gabriel. Also known as Tirso de Molina.

MIGUEL: Molina? Milling around? Molina? Windmill? Brother windmiller, you windy monk! I cannot duel you, but my knight will fight you and your breed until the bitter end.

"I engage you in fierce and unequal combat! Fly not, you windmills! Cowards and vile beings, for a single knight attacks you. Though ye flourish more arms than the giant Briareus, ye have to reckon with me."

GABRIEL: What knight? What don? I will show in my writings how deceitful they are!

COOK: On whom shall I bestow my soup? Who deserves the prize?

(6) SERVANT: Oh, I almost forgot: I have a letter to deliver to you. It came a long way from abroad! (*Shows the letter to the COOK.*)

COOK: A letter? Let me hear what the letter says to me.

SERVANT: "Ask me no reason why I love you; for though Love use Reason for his physician, he admits him not for his counsellor. You are not young, no more am I; go to then, there's sympathy: you are merry, so am I; ha, ha! then there's more sympathy: you love sack, and so do I; would you desire better sympathy? Let it suffice thee, Miss,—at the least, if the love of soldier can suffice,— that I love thee. I will not say, pity me; 'tis not a soldier-like phrase: but I say, love me. By me, Thine own true knight, By day or night, Or any kind of light, With all his might, For thee to fight, John Falstaff."

GABRIEL, MIGUEL, COOK: Falstaff? John Falstaff? For God's sake, who is that?

SERVANT: A fat knight in England who fears battle, but loves sack (which is sherry), and women!

GABRIEL, MIGUEL: A fat knight, a coward, and such a letter?

COOK: Ah! Such a letter! (*Suddenly the meal she has been preparing moves away from both GABRIEL and MIGUEL.*)

SERVANT: No, methinks he has not written that letter all by himself. I believe another Englishman wrote it for him. They call him William Shakespeare.

COOK: William Shakespeare. He can write such letters? Does he write many such niceties?

GABRIEL, MIGUEL: We won't suffer that. We shall fight him! Him and his whole country.

SERVANT: A fanfare. That's the town crier! (*Exit.*)

GABRIEL, MIGUEL: This Master Shakespeare – how dares he interfere with us? How dares he intrude in this realm?

COOK: Bring him here! I want to see the man who composes such letters! I will cook dinner for him! He'll have tapas and paella, and no more fish and chips!

GABRIEL, MIGUEL: We cannot suffer that. We must fight him! Him and his entire country! We must fight him! Him and his country!

MIGUEL: We'll destroy the windmills all over England!

SERVANT (*comes back, excitedly*): War!

ALL THREE: We shall destroy them, we shall destroy the entire country!

SERVANT: War! War on England!

GABRIEL: War on those heretics! We'll root out all heresy in England!

ALL THREE: We shall destroy it!

GABRIEL: We'll cuckold all married men of England! Our gracious king is calling all able men to arms! He will muster an armada! The greatest armada the world has ever seen!

MIGUEL: I lost the use of one arm against the Turkish infidels. I have another arm left to deal with those heretics!

SERVANT: Cloisters and prisons must release their inmates to join the armada!

ALL THREE: Let's go, let's go!

COOK: Masters must release their servants to join the armada!

ALL THREE: Let's go! Let's go! (*Exeunt.*)

COOK (*suddenly left alone with the manuscripts, reading them*): "The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha." – Hm. Sounds like a good story to me. – "Don Juan. The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest." – Well ... not bad either! (*Begins to read, and to enjoy the delicious food she has cooked.*) – We shall hear more of these gentlemen, methinks! – Atishoo!

The end.

Using quotations from

Don Quixote: Translation by John Ormsby

Don Juan: Translation by Robert O'Brien

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