

## CAST

JUDGE  
NOTARY  
ATTORNEY  
OLD MAN  
MARIANA  
SOLDIER  
GUIOMAR  
SURGEON  
ALDONZA DE MINJACA  
PORTER  
TWO MUSICIANS

## THE DIVORCE COURT JUDGE

(El juez de los divorcios)

*The JUDGE enters with the NOTARY and the ATTORNEY.  
He takes his seat. Enter an OLD MAN<sup>16</sup> and his wife, MARIANA.*

MARIANA: At last the divorce judge has taken his place in court! Enough of this shilly-shallying. This time I am going to be set free - free as a bird!<sup>17</sup>

OLD MAN: For pity's sake, Mariana, there's no need to bellow from the roof-tops. Speak more softly. God's wounds, you're deafening the neighbours with your shouting. The judge is right there, so just lower your voice and tell him what's wrong.

JUDGE: Well, good people, what's your quarrel?

MARIANA: Divorce, divorce, divorce. A thousand times divorce!

JUDGE: Who from, madam? On what grounds?

MARIANA: Who from? From this old crock here.

JUDGE: On what grounds?

MARIANA: I can't abide his peevish demands any longer. I refuse to look after his countless ailments all the time. My parents didn't bring me up to be a nurse and handmaid. A very good dowry I brought this old bag of bones who's consuming my life. When he first got his hands on me, my face was as bright and polished as a mirror, and now it's as crumpled as a widow's veil. Please, your honour, unmarry me or I'll hang myself. Just look at the furrows I've got from the tears I shed every day that I'm married to this walking skeleton.

JUDGE: Cry no more, madam. Cease your bawling and dry your tears. I'll see that justice is done.

MARIANA: Let me cry, your honour. It's such a comfort. In well-ordered societies a marriage should be reviewed every three years, and dissolved or renewed like a rental agreement.<sup>18</sup> It shouldn't have to last a lifetime and bring everlasting misery to both parties.

JUDGE: If that policy were practical, desirable, or financially

profitable, it would already be law.<sup>19</sup> But, madam, you must be specific about your reasons for seeking a divorce.

MARIANA: For one thing, my husband is in the winter of life, while I'm in the spring of youth. For another, I lose my sleep getting up in the middle of the night to put hot cloths and poultices on his belly; then I have to fetch him one bandage after another - what I'd give to see him condemned to be bandaged to a post! I have to prop up his pillows at night and bring him cough syrup for the congestion in his lungs. What's more, I have to put up with the stench of his breath - it stinks to high heaven.

NOTARY: He must have a rotten tooth in there.

OLD MAN: That can't be. The devil knows I don't have a tooth in my head!

ATTORNEY: I believe there's a law that recognises bad breath as sufficient cause for a wife to leave her husband, or vice versa.

OLD MAN: The fact is, gentlemen, that the bad breath she complains about doesn't come from my rotten teeth (because I haven't any), or from my stomach (which is in excellent condition). It comes from her ill will. Gentlemen, you don't know what this woman is like. I swear that if you did you'd avoid her like the plague, or else treat her like the devil. She's rude, quarrelsome and capricious, and I've been an uncomplaining martyr for twenty-two years.<sup>20</sup> For the past two years she's been coaxing and pushing me towards the grave. She's almost deafened me and driven me half mad with her scolding and arguing. If she nurses me, as she claims, it's always with nagging, instead of with the gentle voice and manner that you expect from someone who ministers to the sick. I swear, gentlemen, that, thanks to her, I'm the one who's dying, while she's thriving off me - after all, she has complete control over my estate.

MARIANA: Your estate indeed! Everything you own was bought with my dowry! Like it or not, half the belongings we've acquired since we married are mine!<sup>21</sup> If I die tomorrow I won't leave you a farthing - that's how much I love you!

JUDGE: Tell me, sir, when you married your wife, weren't you healthy, carefree and in fine fettle?

OLD MAN: I've told you that I've been married to her for twenty-two years - like a galley slave under the command of

a Calabrian renegade.<sup>22</sup> When I met her I could satisfy all her demands.

MARIANA: That was a nine-day wonder!

JUDGE: Silence, woman. Hold your tongue for God's sake! I find no reason to unmarry you. You enjoyed the fruit when it was ripe, now you must put up with the rotting remains. A husband can't be expected to weather the passage of time. Time waits for no man. Forget the ills he causes you today and remember the pleasures he gave you when he was in his prime. I don't want to hear another word from you!

OLD MAN: Your honour, you'd do me a great favour if you'd put an end to my misery and release me from my prison. I'm at breaking point, so if you don't release me now you'll just be handing me back to my torturer. If that's not possible, let's agree on one thing: she can shut herself away in a convent and I'll go to a monastery. We'll divide the estate and live out the rest of our lives in peace and to the glory of God.

MARIANA: To hell with that! A fine idea to shut me away! A convent's for a girl who enjoys life behind bars, with everything passed through a turnstile and visits supervised by the nuns!<sup>23</sup> Try shutting yourself away - it makes no difference to you: you can't see or hear; your feet will hardly carry you and your hands are useless. I'm in good health, in full possession of my senses. I'm not playing my cards close to my chest. I mean to lay them all on the table where they can be seen.

NOTARY: This woman doesn't mince her words!

ATTORNEY: The husband's a sensible man, but there's a limit to his patience.

JUDGE: Well, I can't grant you a divorce. I find no fault at all . . .<sup>24</sup>

*Enter a well-groomed SOLDIER with his wife, GUIOMAR.<sup>25</sup>*

GUIOMAR: Thank Heaven for this opportunity to speak to your honour. I beseech you with all my heart, be pleased to release me from marriage to this creature.

JUDGE: What do you mean by 'this creature'? Doesn't he have a name? It would be better if you at least referred to him as 'this man'.

GUIOMAR: If he were a man I wouldn't be trying to end the marriage.

JUDGE: What is he, then?

GUIOMAR: A block of wood.

SOLDIER: (*aside*) My God, only a block of wood would take what I put up with and never say a word. Perhaps if I don't try to defend myself and let her have her say, the judge will find against me. He'll think he's punishing me, but he'll be setting me free, just as surely as if he released a prisoner from the dungeons of North Africa.

ATTORNEY: Watch your language, madam, and get to the point without insulting your husband. His honour the Judge, whom you see before you, will see that you are treated fairly.

GUIOMAR: Why, sirs, what's wrong with calling a statue a block of wood if it behaves like one?

MARIANA: It sounds as though this woman and I share a common complaint.

GUIOMAR: In short, sir, I'm saying that I was married off to this man (if that's what you insist on calling him), but this man isn't the one I married.

JUDGE: How's that? I don't follow you.

GUIOMAR: I mean that I thought I was marrying a man who was normal – you might say run-of-the-mill – but I soon found out he was a block of wood, just as I said. He can't tell his right hand from his left, and he makes no effort whatsoever to earn anything to support his family. He spends his morning at Mass or hanging around the Guadalajara Gate,<sup>26</sup> gossiping and exchanging lies and hearsay. In the afternoon, and sometimes in the morning too, he does the round of the gaming houses. There he joins the crowd of onlookers who hang around the gamblers in the hope of a tip – though they're heartily disliked by the people in charge.<sup>27</sup> He shows up for dinner around two o'clock without a shilling to show for his pains because they're no longer in a tipping mood. He goes out again, returns at midnight, has supper if he can find any leftovers, and if not, he blesses himself, gives a yawn and goes to bed. Then he can't sleep and tosses all night. I ask him what's wrong. He tells me he's composing a sonnet for a friend who wants an epitaph. He insists on being a poet, as if that weren't the worst-paid job in the world!

SOLDIER: My dear wife, everything you say is perfectly reasonable – just as everything I do is perfectly reasonable. If it were not so, I would have managed to get hold of some small official favour – like many clever wheedlers I know, who land themselves a staff of office and a small bad-tempered mule

(the kind you can hire from a livery stable when they have nothing else available, and that comes without a groom). In one saddlebag they carry a clean shirt and collar, in the other a wedge of cheese, a loaf of bread and a wineskin; they're wearing their city clothes, with leggings and a single spur added for the journey; their commissions are gnawing at them inside their shirts.<sup>28</sup> Out across the Toledo Bridge<sup>29</sup> they clatter, urging on their stubborn mules; a few days later they send home a salted leg of pork and a length of unbleached linen – in short, items that can be bought cheap in the places they've been sent to, and that help to put food on the table at home. However, I enjoy neither job nor patronage. I don't know what to do because no one wants to hire a married man. With the gentry so tight-fisted and my wife so insistent, I've no choice, your honour, but to implore you to grant us a divorce.

GUIOMAR: There's something else, sir. Since I know my husband is so puny and inadequate, I do my best to help, but there's a limit: after all, I'm a respectable woman and I don't have to do anything I'd be ashamed of!

SOLDIER: On that score alone this woman deserves to be loved; but look beneath those scruples and you'll find the most ill-natured creature alive. She turns jealous for no reason at all, starts screaming without provocation, has far too high an opinion of herself and turns her nose up at me because I'm poor. But the worst part, your honour, is that in return for remaining faithful to me, she expects me to put up with her bad temper and disagreeable ways.

GUIOMAR: Well, why not? Seeing that I'm such a virtuous woman, why shouldn't you treat me with the honour and respect that I deserve?

SOLDIER: Just listen to me, wife – let these gentlemen hear what I have to say to you: why do you keep harping on how virtuous you are, when that's what any self-respecting Christian lady of decent family is expected to be? Just imagine women wanting their husbands to respect them for being faithful and modest! As if that were enough to make them perfect! They don't notice that all their other virtues have fallen through the cracks! What do I care that you're satisfied with your own moral standards? On the other hand, I care a great deal that you ignore your maid's immoral behaviour,

that you're a spendthrift, and that you're constantly frowning, complaining and arguing; that you're angry, jealous, distracted, lazy, idle, and a lot more besides. That's enough to finish off two hundred husbands! Yet when all's said and done, your honour, my wife Mistress Guiomar doesn't have any of these vices and I admit that I'm a block of wood, good for nothing, negligent, a lazybones. So if for no other reason than to uphold the law, sir, you'll have to give us a separation. I make no objection to what my wife has said; I consider the case closed and I'll be glad to accept your judgment.

GUIOMAR: What objection could you possibly make? You provide nothing to eat, either for me or our servant (take note that I said servant, in the singular), and she's as skinny as a baby born before its time - doesn't eat enough to keep a cricket alive.

NOTARY: Order, there. Here come some more plaintiffs.

*Enter a BARBER-SURGEON dressed as a doctor,<sup>30</sup> with his wife, ALDONZA DE MINJACA*

SURGEON: I come to you, your honour, to beg you to grant me a separation from my wife, Aldonza de Minjaca, on four principal counts.

JUDGE: You've made up your mind already. Tell me what the four counts are.

SURGEON: First, because I can no more put up with her than with all the devils in hell. Second, for reasons that she's aware of. Third, for reasons I can't mention. Fourth, to save my soul from the devil. Just see if I'm going to put up with her company for the rest of my life!

ATTORNEY: You've more than stated your case.

ALDONZA: Your honour, listen to me. I'll have you know that if my husband's asking for a divorce on four counts, then I'm asking for one on four hundred. First, because every time I set eyes on him I believe I'm seeing the devil himself. Second, because he deceived me when I married him: he told me he was a qualified doctor and then he turned out to be a mere surgeon - someone who bandages and attends to minor ailments - he's a far cry from a real doctor. Third, because he's jealous of everything, even the sun that shines on me. Fourth, since I can't abide him, I'd like to put a million miles between us.

NOTARY: How the devil can anyone ever make these two clocks chime together? They don't even keep the same time!

ALDONZA: Fifth . . .

JUDGE: Madam, madam, if you plan to give us every one of your four hundred reasons, I'm not disposed to hear them and, besides, there isn't time. We'll hold your case over pending further evidence - so you can go now, God rest you. We have other cases to consider.

SURGEON: What more evidence do you need, since I refuse to die in her company and she doesn't want to live in mine?

JUDGE: If that were sufficient reason for a divorce, there'd be no end of couples in a hurry to shake off the matrimonial yoke.

*Enter a PORTER, wearing his quartered hood.<sup>31</sup>*

PORTER: Mister Judge, sir, I'm a porter - I won't deny that - but I'm a Christian<sup>32</sup> through and through and a truly honest man. If I didn't sometimes get hold of the wine, or, rather, if the wine didn't get hold of me, I could have been a steward in the porters' brotherhood by now. I could say more, but to get to the point, I'd like to inform your honour that once, when I was very sick from my perilous encounters with Bacchus, I promised to marry a lady of the night. When I recovered I kept my word and saved the woman from sin by making her my wife. I set her up selling fruit and vegetables in the market, but she's grown so stuck up and bad-tempered that she gets into a fight with everyone who comes to her stall.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes it's because she gives short measure, or, nine times out of ten, because someone touches the fruit. When that happens she throws a lead weight at their heads, or wherever she happens to aim, and curses them down to the fourth generation. Her gossiping neighbours don't give her a moment's peace and my sword goes in and out like a switchblade in her defence.<sup>34</sup> We scarcely earn enough to pay the fines she gets for selling short and starting fights. If it please your honour, I'd like to be quit of her, or perhaps you could make her less of a shrew, more gentle and ladylike. If you'll do that, your honour, I'll see you get free delivery of all the charcoal you need this summer, for I've a good deal of influence with my fellow porters.<sup>35</sup>

SURGEON: I know this fellow's wife and she's just as bad as my Aldonza. Need I say more than that?

JUDGE: See here, good people, although some of you have made a good case for divorce, you must still present everything in writing with the support of witnesses. So I'm adjourning the court for the time being. But what have we here? People playing guitars in my court? This is something new, indeed!

*Enter TWO MUSICIANS.*

MUSICIAN: Your honour, do you remember that estranged couple you recently brought to their senses, persuading them to kiss and make up? Well, they're throwing a big party at their house and they've sent us to ask your honour to be good enough to join them.

JUDGE: I'll be delighted to do so. I trust all these people will find as peaceful an end to their troubles.

ATTORNEY: If that were to happen the notaries and attorneys of this court would all starve. No, no, let every couple seek a divorce. When all's said and done, most of them end up as they were and we stand to gain by their quarrels and foolishness.

MUSICIANS: Well, for now, let's go and join in the fun.

*(The MUSICIANS sing.)*

To every couple, man and wife,

There comes a time of open strife;

It's better then to kiss and mend

Than choose divorce and make an end.

Facing the problems fair and square

Is one good way to clear the air;

Haggle and shout when you sign the lease,

The rest of the year you can live in peace.<sup>36</sup>

That's the way to revive your pride,

And kindle the flame you thought had died.

It's better then to kiss and mend

Than choose divorce and make an end.

It's said that jealousy brings pain

That saps your strength and slows your brain,

But if the cause is fair as well,

The pain's divine and not pure hell.

I hereby cite an expert's view,

For Love himself swears this is true.

It's better then to kiss and mend

Than choose divorce and make an end.

## THE WIDOWED PIMP

### THE ELECTION OF THE MAGISTRATES OF DAGANZO