

DOSTOEVSKY'S *THE GRAND INQUISITOR*

adapted for the stage by

Gary Graves

in collaboration with Kristin Fitch, Gregory Scharpen,
David Skillman, and Jan Zvaifler.

DRAFT: November, 2012

© CENTRAL WORKS
P.O. Box 9771
Berkeley CA 94706
510-558-1381
gary@centralworks.org

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE GRAND INQUISITOR: an old cardinal, supreme leader of the Inquisition in Spain.

THE OTHER: PEDRO EL MORO, a "familiar", a converted Moor serving as an informer to the Inquisition; MAGDALENA, a blind beggar woman; UGO, the Grand Inquisitor's torturer; the PRISONER, a mysterious man arrested on the streets of Seville.

SETTING

The action takes place in a room in the *Secreto*, the palace of the Inquisition, in Seville, Spain, early sixteenth century.

A NOTE ABOUT THE PLAY

Our departure point in the development of this project is a story in Dostoevsky's great masterpiece, *The Brothers Karamazov*, first published in 1880. In Part Two, Book Five, Chapter 5 of the massive novel Ivan Karamazov turns to his brother, Alyosha, and says:

"...Did you know, Alyosha—don't laugh—I composed a poem about a year ago? If you've got another ten minutes or so, I'll tell it to you."

"You wrote a poem?"

"Oh, no, I didn't actually write it down," laughed Ivan, "I've never actually written a line of poetry in my whole life. But I made up this poem in prose and I've memorized it. I was possessed when I made it up. You'll be my first reader—or listener, that is. Why should an author pass up even one single listener?" smiled Ivan. "Shall I tell it to you or not?"

"I'm all ears," said Alyosha.

"My poem is called *The Grand Inquisitor*. It's a ridiculous thing, but I want you to hear it..."

In adapting Ivan's strange tale to the stage, we have taken certain liberties while, I hope, adhering to the central spirit of the original. We are indebted to the Constance Garnet and Ralph E. Matlaw translations of *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Grand Inquisitor*, respectively. —G.G.

The Grand Inquisitor was developed by Central Works and first performed at the Thick House in San Francisco. The premiere production opened on May 27, 2005, before moving to the Berkeley City Club on July 7, 2005, with the following team:

Gary Graves.....The Grand Inquisitor
David Skillman.....The Other

Jan Zvaifler: director
Gregory Scharpen: sound design
Tammy Berlin: costume design
Robert Ted Anderson: lighting design
Kristin Fitch: stage manager
Laurie Glover: dramaturg

(Lights up in the *Secreto*.)

A throne of sorts stands alone on stage, an old, carved wood, high-backed thing.

A giant cross hangs on the wall above.

A *coroza*--the tall pointed, conical hat--and a *sanbenito*--an embroidered tabard--the traditional garments worn by convicted heretics, rest on a cross-like stand in the room.

The GRAND INQUISITOR looks up into the light beneath a window high above. He is an old man with rotted teeth, dressed simply, in a humble monk's cassock.)

INQUISITOR

(Psalm 51)

Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness, in your abundant compassion blot out my offense. Wash away all my guilt, from my sin cleanse me. For I know my offense; my sin is always before me. Against You alone have I sinned; I have done such evil in your sight that you are just in your sentence, blameless when you condemn...

(He stops. Fires burn, engulfing the entire room in flames. The INQUISITOR looks into the fire.

Blackout.)

2

THE FAMILIAR

2

(A bell in the *Giraldo* tolls, distantly.)

Lights up, some time later. The INQUISITOR lies inertly upon the floor--dead or unconscious?

PEDRO EL MORO enters. He is a Familiar in the service of the Inquisition. He wears a dagger at his side.

He calmly regards the old man's body on the floor, watches and waits.

The INQUISITOR wakes from a nightmare, and cries out in terror.)

Your Eminence?

PEDRO

Who are you?

INQUISITOR

It's me, your Eminence.

PEDRO
Pedro.

Pedro?

INQUISITOR

El Moro. Your servant.

PEDRO
Don't you recognize me?

Where am I?

INQUISITOR

You're in the *Secreto*. This is your private office. You are the Grand Inquisitor of Sevilla.

PEDRO

The what?

INQUISITOR

The Grand Inquisitor, supreme leader of the Inquisition in all the lands of Spain. Are you unwell, your Eminence?

PEDRO

What do you want from me?

INQUISITOR

PEDRO

You sent for me. Your Eminence.

INQUISITOR

I sent for you? I sent for you? No.
(on his knees, he begs)
Let me out of here!

PEDRO

No one keeps you here, your Eminence.

INQUISITOR

I can't breathe. This heat. It's too much. Let me out of here. Let me out!

(The INQUISITOR gasps for air till he finally collapses. A long ghastly exhale, a death rattle. Then nothing. Stillness.)

PEDRO waits, cautiously.

The INQUISITOR revives. He groans. Holds his head, aching. Unaware that Pedro is in the room, he calls out.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Pedro!

PEDRO

Are you hurt?

INQUISITOR

Oh. There you are.

PEDRO

Shall I send for the doctors?

INQUISITOR

No. No more doctors. My head--am I bleeding?

PEDRO

I don't believe so.

INQUISITOR

My toes. I can't feel my toes!

(PEDRO withdraws his dagger, menacingly. He crouches, and removes the old man's sandal.)

PEDRO

Can you feel this?

(He runs the point of the blade
up the old man's foot.)

INQUISITOR

(giggles a bit)

That tickles... Help me up.

(PEDRO helps the old fellow to
his feet.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Carefully! Yes. There. Nothing seems to have broken. The
chair. Help me to the chair. Sit. I don't know what came
over me.

PEDRO

Just another spell, your Eminence. All is well.

INQUISITOR

I ache.

PEDRO

A bruise from the fall?

INQUISITOR

What fall?

(points to his sandal)

Shoe.

(PEDRO replaces the old man's
shoe on his withered foot.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Why is it so hot?

PEDRO

It's the summer, your Eminence. Evening comes.

INQUISITOR

No relief. I despise this heat. Will it never end? This
kind of heat can kill an old man like me. It's not the heat.
It's the...moisture in the air. What time is it?

PEDRO

The hour of nine just rang.

INQUISITOR

Nine. Day or night?

PEDRO

In the evening.

INQUISITOR
Is it over then?

PEDRO
Yes, your Eminence. It's over.

INQUISITOR
What's that smell?

PEDRO
The fires are still burning.

INQUISITOR
No. Not that. Just now. It drifted in. The fragrance of Laurel trees. And lemon. Do you smell that?

PEDRO
Not exactly.

INQUISITOR
Yes, laurel and lemon. Lovely. How many?

PEDRO
Thirteen, in the end.

INQUISITOR
We must pray for them.

PEDRO
Yes, your Eminence.

(As the INQUISITOR carefully watches, PEDRO kneels and prays.)

INQUISITOR
Any...incidents?

PEDRO
No.

INQUISITOR
None?

PEDRO
None to speak of.

INQUISITOR
Hm? What?

PEDRO
Nothing, your Eminence.

INQUISITOR
You're keeping something from me.

PEDRO

No, your Eminence. Never.

INQUISITOR

What--what is it--something went wrong.

PEDRO

No, your Eminence, all went exactly according to your instructions.

INQUISITOR

All right. Tell me. Tell me everything. Every detail. Leave nothing out. Every detail from start to finish. What have you seen today? Re-live it for me. You are my eyes, Pedro. Take me through the day.

(beat)

Well?

PEDRO

As you wish, your Eminence... I rise at the hour of four, dress myself, and go immediately to the cathedral. The streets are busy with preparations; a crowd begins to gather all about the cathedral. Inside, Father Diego delivers the mass. All is in readiness. The mass concludes, and I return to the street, just as the procession emerges from the gates below. It is the hour of six.

INQUISITOR

Excellent, excellent.

PEDRO

The crowd is enormous.

INQUISITOR

How many in all?

PEDRO

Truly, it seems all Andalusia waits before the cathedral--

INQUISITOR

How many? Numbers. Numbers!

PEDRO

Carefully, as the day progresses, I estimate two hundred thousand altogether, perhaps a quarter million at its height.

INQUISITOR

A quarter million people--here in the city?

PEDRO

Yes, we are strained to our limits. They camp in the fields, sleep in the streets. Not an empty bed left in all the city.

INQUISITOR

Where will they all defecate? What a stench. No more of that. The procession. Tell me more of the procession.

PEDRO

On they come, the Legion of Zarza first, perhaps eighty in number, marching four abreast, each bearing a great load of wood on his back. Incense clouds the air, rising in the hazy morning sunlight. The great Green Cross approaches, shrouded in a veil of black. Father Diego tolls his old bell as he paces along behind the cross. Then the convicted pass by, all in a line, one by one, each with a rope around his neck, each crowned with a tall, pointed, *coroza*, each draped in a magnificent *sanbenito*, beautifully embroidered with the flames of Hell, and the faces of the damned. First...the Moor.

INQUISITOR

Your cousin.

PEDRO

Yes, to the ever-lasting shame of my family.

INQUISITOR

Oh, despair not, Pedro, in your service to me you may yet one day redeem him.

PEDRO

God willing, your Eminence.

INQUISITOR

Go on. Who next?

PEDRO

Second in line comes the Jew.

INQUISITOR

Ah, Senor Caballeria. He did wear his circumcision upon his sleeve.

(he laughs, till he feels a sharp pain in his chest)

PEDRO

Your Eminence?

INQUISITOR

It's nothing. It's nothing. It will pass.

PEDRO

Is it your heart?

INQUISITOR

No. A bit of gas. That's all. I'm fine. I'm fine. Go on. Where were we?

PEDRO

The convicted.

INQUISITOR

Yes. The convicted. What of the preachers, Verrezuelo and Cazalla?

PEDRO

Now come the Lutherans.

INQUISITOR

Ah, good. At last.

PEDRO

With the two preachers last among them.

INQUISITOR

Are they contrite, or defiant?

PEDRO

Cazalla mutters to himself, unintelligibly.

INQUISITOR

Good, he weakens.

PEDRO

Verrezuelo holds his head high.

INQUISITOR

Hm. He is the most dangerous of them all.

PEDRO

The Standard of the Inquisition follows behind.

INQUISITOR

Let it strike terror in the hearts of our enemies, the enemies of God.

PEDRO

And now the Familiars. All in black robes, and high peaked hoods. Silently they march, on and on they come, the army of the Inquisition.

INQUISITOR

How many Familiars in all?

PEDRO

No one, but your Eminence, knows.

INQUISITOR

Exactly. Were you sorry not to be among them?

PEDRO

Then who would be your eyes for the day?

INQUISITOR

True. True. Go on. Go on.

PEDRO

Down to the Alcazar the procession makes its way through the city, out into the old square. Up onto the stage. Father Diego's bell falls silent.

INQUISITOR

The Final Judgement.

PEDRO

One by one, Cardinal Valdes reads the sentences. All are condemned and--

INQUISITOR

Relaxed! Relaxed!

PEDRO

Forgive me, your eminence. All are "relaxed" and handed over to the King's Men.

(Sound of a drum beating.)

PEDRO (CONT'D)

A drum beats out the pace, and the journey to the *quemadera* begins. Each heretic is mounted on an ass and herded through the crowd. A chorus of jeers and curses accompanies the procession now. Many spit at the poor wretches as they pass, some throw garbage, and worse. The whole great, roiling mass churns its way down the *Arenal* till at last, there in the distance, the stakes rise, standing tall, at the ready, in the open space by the river's bend.

INQUISITOR

Behold your fate, Unbelievers!

PEDRO

Cazalla is stripped naked. He falls to his knees and weeps.

INQUISITOR

What does he say?

(beat)

What are his words?

PEDRO

"I have betrayed the one true God."

(Sound of a roaring crowd,
"Ole!")

INQUISITOR

Does he profess his conversion?

PEDRO

He does.

(Again, the crowd roars, "Ole!")

INQUISITOR

He is saved.

PEDRO

Yes, he is saved. All confess, and all will be saved from the agony of the fires. All but one.

INQUISITOR

Verrezuelo?

PEDRO

He alone stands like a man of ice.

INQUISITOR

Of course, he does. A true martyr, eh?

PEDRO

"Your Inquisition is the instrument of the Devil!"

(beat)

INQUISITOR

What did you say?

PEDRO

Verrezuelo's words. The Cardinal immediately orders him gagged, and bound to the stake. But still he keeps a steady gaze, icy, enduring, unyielding.

INQUISITOR

Proceed.

PEDRO

Ugo de Saragossa approaches the first penitent.

INQUISITOR

You mean, your cousin. What was his name?

PEDRO

Enrique.

INQUISITOR

Ah, yes. The false convert. Well?

PEDRO

The executioner grabs the halter round his neck, and quickly tightens the rope, strangling the life out of him. His naked body hands, lifeless at the stake.

INQUISITOR

Be grateful for this mercy. Go on. Continue. Each one down the line.

PEDRO

Each one strangled, on down the line. To Verrezuelo. Only he, defiant and unrepentant, remains alive, eyes open, fixed upon the Cardinal. Torch touches straw. Just a nimble dancing of flames at first. Then with an awful swiftness the fires catch, blazing up, consuming the lifeless corpses, the fortunate ones. Then something strange.

INQUISITOR

Strange--what?

PEDRO

As the flames rise about Verrezuelo, he bares his agony without flinching, to the amazement of all.

INQUISITOR

Impossible.

PEDRO

The crowd falls silent, a silence broken by the fierce crackling of the raging fires. Smoke billows up, blackening the sky. Still Verrezuelo gazes out of the fire's grasping talons. He seems untouched by the flames.

INQUISITOR

No.

PEDRO

His face as hard as flint. No complaint, no trace of pain, nothing but a calm, immovable gaze in his windows. Slowly, the fire blackens his face, burning away the flesh, leaving only a charred visage behind. But still the same gaze in his eyes, darkened sockets in the end, still he stares, till finally all disappears into a heap of fiery embers.

(Beat.)

INQUISITOR

There must be nothing left. All of it. Swept into the river. Before dawn tomorrow. Bones can be sifted out of the ash--a single digit can become a sacred relic. The river takes all away. Always in the river. Is that understood?

PEDRO

Yes, your Eminence.

INQUISITOR

Is there anything else?

PEDRO

No, your Eminence.

INQUISITOR

Are you sure of that--Tariq, son of Ali Al-Rehman, the Moor of Salamanca?

(beat)

Get out.

(PEDRO exits.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

(alone)

Verrezuelo. Old friend. Truly, you were one of the select few. I shall miss you.

(PEDRO re-enters.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

What do you want?

PEDRO

There is one thing more I should mention.

INQUISITOR

One thing more--what do you mean?

PEDRO

Shortly before I arrived here, I met two friends on the *Arenal*.

INQUISITOR

Yes?

PEDRO

They told me...

INQUISITOR

What--they told you what? Out with it?

PEDRO

There is a man.

INQUISITOR

A man?

PEDRO

Well, a man, and not a man.

INQUISITOR

Enough of your riddles, Convert, speak plainly.

PEDRO

He has been seen about the city.

Who is he--what of him? INQUISITOR

They say...it's Him. PEDRO

Who? INQUISITOR

Him. PEDRO

Him? INQUISITOR

(PEDRO nods.)

That is not possible. INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Still, they say it. PEDRO

Who says it? INQUISITOR

Many have seen him. PEDRO

Many? Where? INQUISITOR

Just this evening, at the cathedral, there is a crowd. PEDRO

A crowd? INQUISITOR

He restored sight to a blind woman. PEDRO

According to whom? INQUISITOR

According to both my friends. PEDRO

A trick. A simple ruse. A marketplace stunt. INQUISITOR

That may be, but many believe it's Him. As in the old poem. PEDRO

INQUISITOR

What poem?

PEDRO

"Oppressed with bearing the cross,
The heavenly King in slave's disguise,
Wanders, blessing as he goes,
Throughout our native land."

INQUISITOR

An old wives' tale.

PEDRO

Perhaps.

INQUISITOR

How could it be?

PEDRO

No one knows how. No one knows why. They just know it's
Him. They flock to Him--

INQUISITOR

Flock?

PEDRO

Everywhere he goes, people surround him, they follow him.
Quietly, he walks among them, passing through the streets
with a gentle smile on His face, a look of infinite
compassion. The sun of love burns in his heart, radiance,
wisdom, enlightenment--power shines through his eyes. And
they love him. He holds out his hand to them, he blesses
them; he has the power to heal the sick, with only a touch.

INQUISITOR

This cannot be.

PEDRO

A woman in the crowd, a blind beggar woman. After a lifetime
of blindness, he restored sight to her eyes.

INQUISITOR

I do not believe this. What--is this the Second Coming? Is
the Apocalypse upon us then? I want this man arrested. You.
Arrest him.

PEDRO

Me?

INQUISITOR

What did you say?

PEDRO

Forgive me, I only thought--perhaps the King's Guard--there could be trouble--

INQUISITOR

You have all the Familiars of the Inquisition at your disposal. Take whomever you need along with you. Find him, and arrest him. There will be no trouble. I order it. What are you waiting for?

(PEDRO starts to go.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

One other thing.

(PEDRO stops.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

This blind woman who had her sight restored...
(chuckles)

What is her name?

PEDRO

I believe it's...Magdalena.

INQUISITOR

Magdalena?

PEDRO

So I was told.

INQUISITOR

I know of no blind beggar woman by the name of Magdalena. And I know every beggar in Sevilla. I want this woman arrested, as well. Immediately. Is that understood?

(PEDRO nods.)

The INQUISITOR waves him away.

PEDRO exits.

Alone, the INQUISITOR looks up into the light.

Blackout.)

3

THE BEGGAR

3

(Lights up on the INQUISITOR
circling about the *Secreto*.)

INQUISITOR

(continuing Psalm 51)

*Truly, was I born guilty, a sinner, even as my mother
conceived me. Still, you insist on sincerity of heart; in my
inmost being teach me wisdom. Cleanse me with hyssop, that I
may be pure; wash me, make me whiter than snow...*

(MAGDALENA, the beggar woman
enters.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Who are you?

(beat)

What are you doing in here?

(beat)

Come forward.

(beat)

Who are you?

MAGDALENA

(terrified)

My name is Magdalena la Ciega, your...Worship...full...ness.

INQUISITOR

Oh. Yes. You.

(beat)

Well?

MAGDALENA

What am I to do?

INQUISITOR

Do you know why you're here?

MAGDALENA

No. I know nothing.

INQUISITOR

Come closer.

(beat)

Closer.

(beat)

Closer.

(he looks into her eyes)

I can look into a soul's eyes and read what is written in the
heart. Are you aware of that?

MAGDALENA

No. What have I done?

INQUISITOR

What have you done? Why, what makes you think you've done anything at all?

MAGDALENA

A man...approached me in the street. A Moor. He and several others. "Come with us," he said, "in the name of the Holy Inquisition." I am just a poor beggar woman, I said. What would the Holy Inquisition want with me?

INQUISITOR

Yes?

MAGDALENA

But he gave me no answer. He told me nothing. They brought me here...to this...this...place.

INQUISITOR

It is called the *Secreto*.

MAGDALENA

I hear people...in pain here. Is this a prison?

INQUISITOR

No, my dear, this is much, much more than a prison.

MAGDALENA

What have I done?

INQUISITOR

That is what you must tell me. I do not know your face. You are a stranger here in Sevilla.

MAGDALENA

I came from Granada, just two days ago.

INQUISITOR

Granada?

MAGDALENA

Yes, a poor old woman with nothing to my name.

INQUISITOR

Why have you come to Sevilla?

MAGDALENA

I was told of the great generosity of the Church here.

INQUISITOR

To beg in Sevilla you must have a license.

MAGDALENA

A license?

INQUISITOR

Yes. Do you have such a license?

(beat)

I see.

MAGDALENA

I had no idea.

INQUISITOR

Yes, lately we have been overrun with charlatans and frauds in the city here, pretenders who pose as the maimed and the crippled. They crowd about the church doors and the market square, assailing our citizens with piteous cries and wretched groans, begging for alms, in the name of God. Brother Felipe recently completed a treatise on the subject. According to his calculations there are no some thirty thousand beggars living in the streets of Sevilla, and an increasing number of them, according to Brother Felipe, are mountebanks.

MAGDALENA

Mountebanks?

INQUISITOR

Some cover their bodies with false scars, some feign they have only one arm, some will even stoop to the pretense of a death scene while their companions pass the hat for money to bury the poor fellow.

MAGDALENA

I know nothing of such trickery, your Worship...full...ness.

INQUISITOR

Really. I understood...that you were blind.

MAGDALENA

Why, yes. I was.

INQUISITOR

You were?

MAGDALENA

Yes. It was a miracle.

INQUISITOR

A miracle?

MAGDALENA

Yes. It was Him.

INQUISITOR

Him--who?

MAGDALENA

Him.

INQUISITOR

I don't understand.

MAGDALENA

Today. Just this evening. But a few brief hours ago. Can it be? Oh, what a wondrous day. This morning I awoke under the eaves of the cathedral, in utter darkness, the same familiar darkness I have known all my life. And tonight, here I stand, gazing at...

(looks at the Inquisitor)

INQUISITOR

How is this possible?

MAGDALENA

It was Him

INQUISITOR

When exactly did this happen?

MAGDALENA

It was just at the hour of six. I remember, the bells in the Giralda--

INQUISITOR

And where exactly were you?

MAGDALENA

On the steps of the cathedral. I was asking those that passed by for alms, "alms for the blind."

INQUISITOR

You were begging.

MAGDALENA

I was blind.

INQUISITOR

Go on. Tell me exactly what happened. Every detail. Leave nothing out.

MAGDALENA

Well, as I say, I was asking for alms. Many were kind to me. One man placed a sixteen maravedi coin in my hand. "May God bless you," I said. "May God bless you." And then I heard it.

INQUISITOR

Heard what?

MAGDALENA

A crowd of people approaching. "It's Him," I heard someone say. "He has come back to us, the Holy One, the Gentle Lamb!" It was Him.

INQUISITOR

How could you tell it was "Him," if you were blind?

MAGDALENA

How? I...I could feel it.

INQUISITOR

You could feel what?

MAGDALENA

His presence. Everyone could feel it. All about me. And suddenly...

INQUISITOR

What--suddenly what?

MAGDALENA

I could see! It was Him!

INQUISITOR

Just like that? Suddenly you could see again. After--how long?

MAGDALENA

All my life. Since I was a little girl.

INQUISITOR

These eyes? These eyes were blind?

MAGDALENA

Yes, I swear it.

INQUISITOR

You are lying.

MAGDALENA

No.

INQUISITOR

Tell the truth!

MAGDALENA

That is the truth. I can see again. It was a miracle.

INQUISITOR

Are you aware of the penalty for fraud in Sevilla?

MAGDALENA

Fraud?

INQUISITOR

Are you aware of the penalty for blasphemy?

MAGDALENA

But...it was Him.

INQUISITOR

Tell the truth.

MAGDALENA

I told you the truth. It was a miracle.

(beat)

INQUISITOR

Do you know who I am?

MAGDALENA

You are...a minister of the Inquisition.

INQUISITOR

A minister of the Inquisition? I am the very heart and soul of the Inquisition. I am the Grand Inquisitor. I was nominated by His Majesty and appointed by His Holiness for one purpose, and one purpose alone. I am to root out and destroy every last vestige of heresy in all the lands of Spain, from Naples to Cartagena. And my patience with you, my little beggar woman, is entirely exhausted. If you persist in withholding the truth from me, I shall be forced to place you in the care of Ugo de Saragossa, my subordinate. Have you ever heard of Ugo de Saragossa?

(MAGDALENA shakes her head, no.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Perhaps you know of him by his formal title, Master Torturer. He is without rival, I can assure you. His instruments are myriad, and his skill with them is unequalled. The Chair of Confession, for instance. A most extraordinary device. Aptly named, I assure you. The Heretic's Fork. The Saw. The Judas Cradle--ouch. The Cage. The Wheel. The Rack, of course. And finally, the Head Crusher--which needs no explanation. Shall I introduce you?

(She hesitates.)

I see. Very well.

(He starts out.)

MAGDALENA

Please, your Worship. Don't torture me. I beg you!

INQUISITOR

(turning on her)

Tell the truth!

MAGDALENA

(sobbing)

I'm just a poor old woman with nothing to my name. I pose as one of the blind for the charity it brings. I beg you, please, do not torture me. What I did, I did only because I am poor. I am destitute. I have nothing in the world. Forgive me.

INQUISITOR

You were never blind.

MAGDALENA

Forgive me.

INQUISITOR

This man, in the street, is your accomplice.

(beat)

MAGDALENA

Oh, no... It was Him!

INQUISITOR

Still you persist. Why? Why do you hold to this lie?

MAGDALENA

Because I saw Him.

(beat)

INQUISITOR

All right. Tell me again. What did you see? And this time, I want the truth! Or it's off to the Head Crusher with you.

MAGDALENA

All right. The truth. I was on the steps of the cathedral. Asking for alms. Alms for the blind. And suddenly there He was. Surrounded by the crowd. It was Him. Forgetting all else, I stood, and reached out to Him. "My God," I cried out, "It's You!" And just as I did so, someone in the crowd pointed at me and said, "Look, He has given sight to the blind woman!" What could I say? Could I deny it? Could I explain? It was Him. A woman fainted. More cries. They began to put their hands on me. Touching me. "She is healed," they said. "It's a miracle! It's a miracle!" They bowed down before me. Before me. Me.

(beat)

INQUISITOR

What does he look like? Describe his face.

(she hesitates)

Well?

I cannot.

MAGDALENA

Why not?

INQUISITOR

Well, I never actually saw His face.

MAGDALENA

You never saw his face?

INQUISITOR

Not exactly.

MAGDALENA

Then how do you know it was Him?

INQUISITOR

I don't know.

MAGDALENA

You just...believe it.

INQUISITOR

It was Him. I could feel it in my heart. The Soul of Kindness, the Lord of Compassion, the Son of Love. I reached out for Him. Reached out to touch His garment. I fell to the ground and wept. I kissed the dirt where He walked. It was Him. It was Him. It was Him.

MAGDALENA

(long beat)

INQUISITOR

No, my dear, you are mistaken.

MAGDALENA

Mistaken?

INQUISITOR

The man you saw...is an imposter. A fraud. A mountebank.

MAGDALENA

A mountebank?

INQUISITOR

That much you have in common with him.

MAGDALENA

But--

INQUISITOR

Silence!

(beat)

(MORE)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

You were deceived. By a common criminal. A criminal who has offended God most grievously. And one who will pay for his crimes most dearly...at the stake.

MAGDALENA

At the stake?

INQUISITOR

Do you doubt it?

MAGDALENA

No, your Worship...full...ness.

INQUISITOR

And anyone who denies the truth of this might very well share the same fate. Do you understand this, my dear?

(She nods her head, yes.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

I was most cruelly deceived.

(beat)

Say it.

MAGDALENA

(haltingly)

I was most cruelly deceived.

INQUISITOR

Again.

MAGDALENA

I was most cruelly deceived.

INQUISITOR

Again!

MAGDALENA

I was most cruelly deceived!

INQUISITOR

Yes, my dear, you were deceived, but fear not, this imposter shall be punished for his crimes, and you will be there to witness his punishment.

MAGDALENA

Punish him!

INQUISITOR

Yes, and how shall we punish him?

MAGDALENA

Burn him at the stake!

INQUISITOR
As a heretic and blasphemer?

MAGDALENA
Yes, burn him!

INQUISITOR
Again.

MAGDALENA
Burn him!

INQUISITOR
Again.

MAGDALENA
Burn him!

INQUISITOR
Again.

MAGDALENA
Burn him! Burn him! Burn him! Burn him! Burn him!!!

(With a gesture, the INQUISITOR
silences her.)

(She collapses, sobbing.)

INQUISITOR
Very good, my dear. You are forgiven.

MAGDALENA
God bless the Inquisition.

(The INQUISITOR smiles, and looks
up into the light.)

(Blackout.)

4

THE TORTURER

4

(The GRAND INQUISITOR sits,
alone, inertly in his throne,
eyes open, but motionless--dead?)

The distant bell of he *Giralda*
tolls midnight.

UGO DE SARAGOSSA enters, wearing
a black hood, rope in hand.

The INQUISITOR comes to life.)

INQUISITOR

Hm?

(sees Ugo)

Oh. It's you. Is it time?

UGO

Yes, my lord.

INQUISITOR

Was I sleeping? How strange. I'm all tingly. There it is
again. That smell. Laurel and lemon. Do you smell it?

UGO

Shall we begin?

INQUISITOR

Any new arrivals below?

UGO

One.

INQUISITOR

Who?

UGO

Hard to say.

INQUISITOR

Why is that?

UGO

Because he has no name.

INQUISITOR

No name?

UGO

The Moor and a few others brought him in. On your order, he
said. But he gave me no name.

It's him. INQUISITOR

My lord? UGO

This one needs no name. INQUISITOR

Very well. He waits in the Chamber of Souls. Shall we put the Question to him tonight? UGO
(beat)

My lord? INQUISITOR

What? UGO

Shall we put the Question to him tonight? INQUISITOR

I haven't decided. UGO

If we're to put the Question to him, I've preparations to make. INQUISITOR

Yes, I understand. UGO

Well? INQUISITOR

I haven't decided. UGO

I see. (holds up the rope) UGO

Now? INQUISITOR

Describe him. This new prisoner. Describe him. UGO

Not much to say. An ordinary fellow. INQUISITOR

Ordinary how? UGO

In truth, my lord, I took little notice of him. He looks the same to me as any other down there.

INQUISITOR
Nothing at all unusual about this one?

UGO
Nothing at all.

INQUISITOR
Did you see his face?

UGO
I suppose I did.

INQUISITOR
But you didn't recognize him as...anyone?

UGO
He's no one I know.

INQUISITOR
Hm. What's he doing?

UGO
He's not doing anything.

INQUISITOR
Nothing? Nothing at all?

UGO
Sitting. Quietly. Looking up.

INQUISITOR
Looking up? Up at what?

UGO
Up at the window. The little window, up above. A bit of light shining in. From the moon, I suppose.

INQUISITOR
Did he say anything?

UGO
No.

INQUISITOR
Anything at all? To anyone?

UGO
Not a word. You wish me to gag him?
(beat)
You wish me to gag him?

INQUISITOR
No. No. Not yet. I wonder what he'll say? I wonder what his voice sounds like?

UGO
It's getting late, my lord.

INQUISITOR
Ugo.

UGO
Yes, my lord?

INQUISITOR
Would you put the Question to...anyone?

UGO
Well, if they were guilty, I would.

INQUISITOR
Would you put the question to, say, the Mayor of Sevilla?

UGO
The Mayor?

INQUISITOR
Speaking hypothetically.

UGO
Hm?

INQUISITOR
Just...for instance.

UGO
If your Lordship bid me put the Question to him, I would do it.

INQUISITOR
I see.

UGO
Are we to put the Question to the Mayor tonight?

INQUISITOR
No. No. Not tonight.
(a laugh)

(UGO laughs.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)
Would you--again, just speaking hypothetically--I mean, just for instance--would you put the Question to the King himself?

UGO
King Carlos?

INQUISITOR

Yes. I'm curious.

UGO

If your Lordship bid me to, I would do it.

INQUISITOR

You're a rare man, Ugo.

UGO

It's getting rather late, my lord.

INQUISITOR

Yes, I know it is.

UGO

Shall we get on with it?

INQUISITOR

This new fellow.

UGO

Yes?

INQUISITOR

He is a heretic. A heretic as pure as fire..

UGO

Has he confessed?

INQUISITOR

No. He has not. Not yet.

UGO

Then we must put the Question to him.

INQUISITOR

Yes. Yes, you may be right about that.

(UGO holds up the rope.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

All right. All right. Lets get on with it.

(The INQUISITOR kneels in the center of the room.)

UGO moves to place the rope around the old man's neck.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

(stopping him)

Ugo.

UGO

Yes, my lord?

INQUISITOR

Be gentle tonight. I am unwell.
(a faint cough)

UGO

I will go easily, my lord.

(He places the rope, a noose,
about the old man's neck, and
stands behind him.)

UGO (CONT'D)

Sing, heretic, the melody of the penitent. I would hear
Psalm fifty-one, *The Miserere*.

INQUISITOR

*Oh, God, let me hear the sounds of joy and gladness; let the
bones you have crushed rejoice...*

(UGO drapes the *sanbenito* over
the Inquisitor's shoulders.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

*Turn away your face from my sins; blot out all my guilt. A
clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast
spirit...*

(UGO "crowns" the Inquisitor with
the *coroza*.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

*Do not drive me from your presence, nor take from me your
holy spirit. Restore my joy in your salvation; sustain in me
a willing spirit...*

(UGO binds the old man's wrists,
and places a wooden cross in his
hands.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

*I will teach the wicked your ways, that sinners may return to
you. Rescue me from death, God, my saving God, that my
tongue may praise your healing power...*

(UGO leads the old man by the
rope as they circle about the
room, leading him like a penitent
on the way to execution.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Lord, open my lips; my mouth will proclaim your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice; a burnt offering you would not accept. My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit; do not spurn a broken, humbled heart.

UGO

Heretic you are hereby relaxed!

INQUISITOR

(regarding the audience)

I accept your judgement. Your sentence is just.

(he kneels)

I praise the Inquisition. I praise all its ministers. I kiss the *sanbenito*, this garment that I wear with pleasure, more pleasure than I have ever known. I am as dead wood to be tossed upon the fire. I deserve nothing more and nothing less.

(UGO snatches the cross from the Inquisitor's hands, slides it into the noose about the old man's neck, and twists the cross, tightening the rope, strangling the INQUISITOR. He struggles helplessly, kicking, straining, finally sinking to the floor in silence.)

UGO

And so you are reconciled to Mother Church!

(UGO releases the rope, and the old man gasps for air, coughing, heaving. Slowly, he recovers.)

INQUISITOR

Truly, you are the master.

UGO

Thank you, my lord.

INQUISITOR

Bring him to me.

UGO

Who, my lord?

INQUISITOR

The one with no name.

UGO

Are we to put the Question to him?

INQUISITOR

I want to speak with him first. Alone. In here. Bring him to me.

(UGO exits.

Blackout.)

5

THE PRISONER

5

(Lights up on the PRISONER.)

The INQUISITOR peaks out from behind his throne, cowering fearfully, amazed.)

INQUISITOR

You? No. It cannot be. And yet, it is.

(beat)

Who are you? Why have you come to Sevilla? What are your intentions? Tell the truth.

(beat)

You are an enemy of the Inquisition. I don't know who you think you are--and I don't care--but I will tell you something. When the time comes, I will march you out before the gathered citizenry of all Andalusia, and I will have you condemned to burn at the stake as the worst of heretics. Just as I did today, with Verrezuelo. I wonder, were you there? Did you see the Celebration today? As were they, so shall you be "relaxed." And, I promise you, the very same people that kissed your feet today, will rush to heap up the embers of your fire, tomorrow, at the slightest sign from me. Do you realize that?

(The PRISONER looks away.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Yes, perhaps you do. Then again, perhaps you do not.

(beat)

Where was I? Who are you? What am I doing here? Let me out of here.

(beat)

I cannot leave. Is this a dream? Who are you? Speak. Say who you are. Speak, I say! Speak!

(The PRISONER looks at the INQUISITOR. The old man gasps for air, suffering some sort of respiratory attack.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Oh, God. I can't breathe. Air. This heat. This wretched heat.

(beat)

Have I lost my mind? Am I mad? I must be mad. This heat. The fires. I am a dead man.

(beat)

I know who you are. But why have you come? Why now? We have no need of you here. Why don't you leave us alone? Stop meddling in our knickers. Have you come to "make us free?" You and your wretched "freedom." "Free will." "I will make you free." In a pig's eye.

(MORE)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Fifteen centuries it's taken us. Fifteen centuries of cleaning up after the mess you made of things. And now, now that we're finally here... No. I won't allow it.

(beat)

What--you don't believe me? Your freedom is a curse, a blight, a plague upon mankind. And that is where we have succeeded. We have succeeded where you have failed. Now they think they're free. Now they think they're freer than they have ever been. But the truth is, they have brought their freedom to us, and laid it humbly at our feet. This is what we have accomplished. And whatever you may think, the world is a far happier place for it. Your freedom. Damn your freedom to Hell!

(beat)

All right, go on. Say it. Say whatever it is you have to say, and get on with it.

(beat)

Why have you come again?

(beat)

Why?

(beat)

Answer me.

(beat)

Answer me!

(beat)

You know, I have plenty of ways to force an answer out of you. Whoever you are. My man downstairs will be only too happy to make your visit with him an unimaginable nightmare. Unimaginable.

(beat)

I see. Well. All right, I shall summon Ugo de Saragossa.

(starts to go, but stops)

But before I do that...let me ask you something: are you hungry? Hm? Hungry? Food? I could have the jailor bring you some...bread--hm? You must be starved. Aren't you? How long has it been since you've eaten? Days? Weeks? How long?

(beat)

I know you're hungry. I can see it in your eyes. I know the face of hunger--oh, well I know it. I confront it everyday. I'll give you bread. More bread than you've ever dreamt of. I'll give you enough bread to feed the entire city. I'll open the storehouses. You can stand at the bakehouse gates and welcome them all one by one into your open arms. How would you like that?

(beat)

Bread. Just say the word. And it's yours.

(beat)

Hm?

(beat)

Well?

(beat)

Well?!

(beat)

(MORE)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Humph. Well, perhaps it is you. Fool. You may reject my offer, but I assure you they won't. Oh, no, you can be sure of that. If I offer bread to them, believe you me, they will take it. But not you. Oh, no, you refuse to win their hearts by filling their bellies; you want them to love you of their own free will; you'll tell them "Man does not live by bread alone." But I tell you, one day the hungry multitudes of this world will rise up against you and declare there is no Father, there is no Son, there is no Holy Ghost, there is only hunger!... Feed them first, then demand virtue of them!

(beat)

You see, that's the one thing you didn't count on: they are not so strong as you...or I. They haven't got the same strength of will. They're not quite so convinced. Oh, a few may be. A thousand perhaps. In the whole world there may be a thousand...of us. Would you save that gifted thousand at the expense of all the rest, the untold millions? The millions of millions? Yes, we give them bread. They'd starve if we didn't. We feed the poor, not you. I see to it personally. Then they believe. They believe whatever I tell them to believe.

(beat)

Oh, you're impossible.

(beat)

There it is again. Do you smell that? The fragrance of laurel and... Who are you? Really. You're an imposter. You're a fake. You're a magnificent liar, aren't you? A market square thief with a grand design. Your life hangs by thread, imposter. And there you stand, braving it out, hoping against hope this tired old man will lose his wits altogether and fall for your preposterous masquerade. Ha!

(beat)

Or is it really you?

(beat)

All right. Show me. Prove it. Let me see a miracle--hm? Go on. Blast a hole through the ceiling there and bring down these ancient walls in a cascade of stone and dust. Bring down the whole palace. Level the place. Reduce it to rubble before my very eyes! Well? Why don't you raise the dead? There's a whole army of them buried in the catacombs down there. Or that poor wretch hanging in the cage out there; bring that rotting carcass back to life. Go on, do it. Just one little miracle. No? I know: make me young again. How about that?--a strapping young man of twenty. Ha! Full of life and love... Why don't you just transform yourself into...something. A great beast. You could tear me limb from limb. Devour me. Or better yet--a bird--a dove, of course--yes, why don't you just transform yourself into a dove and fly out that little window up there? Through the bars and out into the night...

(The PRISONER looks up at the window.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Show me. Show me it's you. Please. God, if it's really you... please, show me!

(He gets down on his knees and begs.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

I'll do anything you ask. I'll renounce the Inquisition, my whole life, anything, I swear. Just show me it's really you!

(The PRISONER looks at the INQUISITOR.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

It is you. Humph. You would not win my faith with miracles any more than you would with bread. You want me to surrender of my own free will. It's not enough! Not for them! They must have miracles! Most of them, anyway. That is their nature; they can't help it; that cannot be changed. No matter how extraordinary an example you make of yourself, they will never overcome their craving for miracles. You overestimate them--all but the select few, that is. And I take it you didn't die on the cross just for the handful of us with the same strength of will as yourself. Hm? Listen, if you don't give them miracles, they'll only find them somewhere else--in witchcraft, or alchemy, or the thousand and one false prophets hawking their wares everyday in the marketplace. Miracles satisfy the inborn longing in every soul's heart for the certainty that there is...a higher power. An all-seeing, all powerful, loving God. You're right, man does not live by bread alone--"earthly" bread, I mean. He must have "heavenly" bread as well. He must know why he is here. He must have some reason to live; otherwise he wastes away; though his stomach may be full, his life soon begins to rot like a dead animal. And before long he begins to contemplate self-destruction...just to deaden the pain, to break the monotony, the infernal misery...of your cursed free will.

(beat)

Why have you come again--like this? Have you really come to be crucified again? Why me? Why have you chosen me? Is it because I'm the most powerful man in Spain? It's true, you know. The King himself will tell you that... That's it, isn't it? You want the throne. The King of Kings. And I can give you that. Though it would take some doing. Still, just imagine: the son of God ascends the throne of man. It's so simple. So perfect. It's Revelation. At long last, the truly divine state. The Kingdom of God. Your empire would spread across the face of the earth like the great deluge of old. All humanity would be swept up in one vast ocean of love: unity, order, peace--the Promised Land! That's why you've come to me, isn't it? Well?

(beat)

(MORE)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Ask.

(beat)

Ask and you shall receive!

(beat)

Ask!!!

(The PRISONER looks away.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

My God, it is you. It's really you! Once again, you have rejected the seat of power, because you want their love freely given. How can you be so blind? Don't you see, they must have someone to bow down to. They must be commanded. They must have authority. Your freedom to choose terrifies them. It's worse than the rack, or the wheel, or the saw, or all the other instruments of the Question. Authority is blessing by comparison, a blessing to all but the select few, your chosen elite who have the strength to bear the burden of this cross you've saddled us with--your free will. The rest are helpless in the face of it. They're a flock without a shepherd. They must have their daily bread, they must have their miracles, and they must have authority! You denied them these three basic human necessities, and they have deserted you! But fear not, we have corrected your mistakes. We give them all three. And in so doing, we have accepted he whom you resisted.

(beat)

Is that what you want to hear me say? Is that why you've come? All right, I'll say it: we no longer follow you; we follow--

(pointing down)

Him. And humanity is better off for it!

(beat)

My God, I hate you.

(beat)

And you hate me, don't you?

(beat)

Don't you?

(beat)

Answer me.

(beat)

Answer me!

(beat)

Answer me you insect! Answer me or I'll turn you over to my torturer! I'll have you torn apart by wild horses! I'll have you ground into meal! I'll have you... I'll have y--!

(Again, the INQUISITOR is overcome by a spell of some kind-- he cannot breathe.)

He collapses to the floor, suffocating.

He tries to call for help--but
his voice is too weak to be
heard.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)
(faintly)

Help... Ugo...

(In desperation, the INQUISITOR
turns to the PRISONER.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Help!

(reaching out to him)

Please!

(touches his forehead to the
Prisoner's feet)

Forgive me!

(The PRISONER lays a hand on the
old man's head, and finally the
seizure ends.)

The INQUISITOR gasps for air,
lying on the floor, slowly
recovering.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

(distantly)

What if this were all just a case of mistaken identity?

(chuckles weakly)

What if you were...nobody? Nothing. Less than nothing.

What if you didn't even exist?

(beat)

Would you like to know a little secret?

(no reply)

All right, I'll tell you. I don't believe in...Him.

(beat)

It's true. I don't. What do you think of that?

(no answer)

Huh?

(louder)

Huh?!

(still no answer)

That's the secret. But I'm not the only one. Oh, no. Ha!
None of us believe in Him anymore. None of us in here, I
mean. But I'm the only one who said no to it, no to all the
temptations of the office--the riches, the clothes, the
stately palaces, the food, the wine, the flesh--all the
worldly pleasures. I said no to them all. And why? For
them. I...love...them. People. Humanity. I love them. I
know that sounds...strange. But it's true. So help me God.
I cannot help it.

(beat)

(MORE)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

You see, I too have wandered in the wilderness. I have spent an entire lifetime out there. Like you, I denied the flesh in order to perfect the spirit. But unlike you, my eyes were opened, and I realized the folly of it. Still, I could not cure myself of my love for humanity. Finally, in my old age, I reached the conclusion that I should follow--

(referring to the devil)

"his" advice. That I should accept lying and deception--for humanity's sake--that I should send my brothers and sisters down the River of No Return ignorant of their true destination. Ignorance is bliss, my friend. For the truth is: there is no God, and they are too weak to follow your example. But at least this way they imagine they're happy along the way. They must have something to believe in. So I keep the secret...for them--the poor helpless ones.

(beat)

Is that a sin?

(The PRISONER just looks at the INQUISITOR.)

The old man bows his head and sobs.

The PRISONER crosses to the INQUISITOR, and takes him in his arms.

Stunned, the old man looks up at the PRISONER, helplessly.

Gently, the PRISONER kisses the INQUISITOR on the lips.

Stupefied, the INQUISITOR buries his face in his arms.

Slowly, the old man recovers, rises, and reconstitutes himself.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Go. Get out. And don't ever come back.

(The PRISONER smiles, faintly, rises, and exits.)

Alone, the old man looks into the darkness.

He wonders what he has just experienced.

He looks up at the cross.

Finally, he resigns himself to
returning to the throne.

He sits, miserably.

He looks up at the light beaming
in through the window high
above.)

INQUISITOR (CONT'D)

Don't worry, your secret is safe with me.

(Once again, fire engulfs the
room.

The INQUISITOR looks into the
flames.

Blackout.)

THE END