

# Rhinoceros (1959) by Eugène Ionesco

# ACT ONE

BERENGER: I don't pretend to be . . .

JEAN: [*interrupting him*] I'm just as good as you are; I think with all due modesty I may say I'm better. The superior man is the man who fulfils his duty.

BERENGER: What duty?

JEAN: His duty . . . His duty as an employee, for example.

BERENGER: Oh yes, his duty as an employee . . .

JEAN: Well, of all things! [*To BERENGER:*] Did you see that?

*[The noise of the rhinoceros and its trumpeting are now far away; the people are still staring after the animal, all except for BERENGER who is still apathetically seated.]*

ALL: [*except BERENGER*] Well, of all things!

BERENGER: [*to JEAN*] It certainly looked as if it was a rhinoceros. It made plenty of dust. [*He takes out a handkerchief and blows his nose.*]

OLD GENTLEMAN: [*to the* HOUSEWIFE] May I help you pick up your things?

HOUSEWIFE: [*to the* OLD GENTLEMAN] Thank you, how very kind! Do put on your hat. Oh, it gave me such a scare!

LOGICIAN: Fear is an irrational thing. It must yield to reason.

JEAN: You're day-dreaming.

BERENGER: But I'm wide awake.

JEAN: Awake or asleep, it's the same thing.

BERENGER: But there is some difference.

JEAN: That's not the point.

BERENGER: But you just said being awake and being asleep were the same thing . . .

JEAN: You didn't understand. There's no difference between dreaming awake and dreaming asleep.

BERENGER: I do dream. Life is a dream.

JEAN: You're certainly dreaming when you say the rhinoceros escaped from the zoo . . .

JEAN: You see what comes of drinking, you can no longer control your movements, you've no strength left in your hands, you're besotted and fagged out. You're digging your own grave, my friend, you're destroying yourself.

BERENGER: I don't like the taste of alcohol much. And yet if I don't drink, I'm done for; it's as if I'm frightened, and so I drink not to be frightened any longer.

JEAN: Frightened of what?

BERENGER: I don't know exactly. It's a sort of anguish difficult to describe. I feel out of place in life, among people, and so I take to drink. That calms me down and relaxes me so I can forget.

JEAN: You try to escape from yourself!

BERENGER: I'm so tired, I've been tired for years. It's exhausting to drag the weight of my own body about . . .

BERENGER: [*continuing*] I'm conscious of my body all the time, as if it were made of lead, or as if I were carrying another man around on my back. I can't seem to get used to myself. I don't even know if I *am* me. Then as soon as I take a drink, the lead slips away and I recognize myself, I become me again.



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JEAN: That's just being fanciful. Look at me, Berenger, I weigh more than you do. And yet I feel light, light as a feather! [*He*

LOGICIAN: [*to the* OLD GENTLEMAN] Here is an example of a syllogism. The cat has four paws. Isidore and Fricot both have four paws. Therefore Isidore and Fricot are cats.

OLD GENTLEMAN: [*to the* LOGICIAN] My dog has got four paws.

LOGICIAN: [*to the* OLD GENTLEMAN] Then it's a cat.

BERENGER: I sometimes wonder if I exist myself.

JEAN: You don't exist, my dear Berenger, because you don't think. Start thinking, then you will.

LOGICIAN: [*to the* OLD GENTLEMAN] Another syllogism. All cats die. Socrates is dead. Therefore Socrates is a cat.

OLD GENTLEMAN: And he's got four paws. That's true. I've got a cat named Socrates.

LOGICIAN: There you are, you see . . .

BERENGER: [*to* JEAN] Solitude seems to oppress me. And so does the company of other people.

JEAN: [*to* BERENGER] You contradict yourself. What oppresses you—solitude, or the company of others? You consider yourself a thinker, yet you're devoid of logic.

OLD GENTLEMAN: [*to the* LOGICIAN] Logic is a very beautiful thing.

LOGICIAN: [*to the* OLD GENTLEMAN] As long as it is not abused.

BERENGER: [*to* JEAN] Life is an abnormal business.

JEAN: On the contrary. Nothing could be more natural, and the proof is that people go on living.

BERENGER: There are more dead people than living. And their numbers are increasing. The living are getting rarer.

JEAN: [*to* BERENGER] Life is a struggle, it's cowardly not to put up a fight!

LOGICIAN: [*to the* OLD GENTLEMAN] Separately or together, it all depends.

BERENGER: [*to* JEAN] What can I do? I've nothing to put up a fight with.

LOGICIAN: [*to the* OLD GENTLEMAN] Because Logic means Justice.

OLD GENTLEMAN: Justice is one more aspect of Logic.

HOUSEWIFE: [*lamenting, and cradling the dead cat in her arms*] My poor little pussy, my poor little cat.

OLD GENTLEMAN: [*to the HOUSEWIFE*] What can you do, dear lady, cats are only mortal.

LOGICIAN: What do you expect, Madame? All cats are mortal! One must accept that.

HOUSEWIFE: [*lamenting*] My little cat, my poor little cat.

JEAN: [*to BERENGER*] I'm not betting with you. If anybody's got two horns, it's you! You Asiatic Mongol!

WAITRESS: Oh!

GROCER'S WIFE: [*from window to her husband*] They're going to have a fight!

GROCER: [*to his WIFE*] Nonsense, it's just a bet!

PROPRIETOR: [*to JEAN and BERENGER*] We don't want any scenes here!

OLD GENTLEMAN: Now look . . . What kind of rhinoceros has one horn on its nose? [*To the GROCER:*] You're a tradesman, you should know.

GROCER'S WIFE: [*to her husband*] Yes, you should know!

BERENGER: [*to JEAN*] I've got no horns. And I never will have.



**GROCER:** The Asiatic rhinoceros has one horn and the African rhinoceros has two. And vice versa.

GROCER: Well, it may be logical . . .

*[At this moment the HOUSEWIFE comes out of the café in deep mourning, and carrying a box; she is followed by DAISY and the WAITRESS as if for a funeral. The cortège moves towards the right exit.]*

. . . it may be logical, but are we going to stand for our cats being run down under our very eyes by one-horned rhinoceroses or two, whether they're Asiatic or African? *[He indicates with a theatrical gesture the cortège which is just leaving.]*

PROPRIETOR: He's absolutely right! We're not standing for our cats being run down by rhinoceroses or anything else!

GROCER: We're not going to stand for it!