

RHINOCEROS
ACT ONE
(excerpt)
by Eugene Ionesco

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Translated by Derek Prouse

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 [*to Jean*]: I've barely got the strength to go on living. Maybe I don't even want to.

OLD GENTLEMAN [*to the Logician, after deep reflection*]: So then logically speaking, my dog must be a cat?

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: Logically, yes. But the contrary is also true.

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: The dead don't exist, there's no getting away from that! Ah! Ah ...! [*He gives a huge laugh.*] Yet you're oppressed by them, too? How can you be oppressed by something that doesn't exist?

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.

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: Fundamentally you're just a bluffer. And a liar. You say that life doesn't interest you. And yet there's somebody who does.

BERENGER: Who?

JEAN: Your little friend from the office who just went past. You're very fond of her!

OLD GENTLEMAN [*to the Logician*]: So Socrates was a cat, was he?

LOGICIAN: Logic has just revealed the fact to us.

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: You didn't want her to see you in your present state. [*BERENGER makes a gesture.*] That proves you're not indifferent to everything. But how can you expect Daisy to be attracted to a drunkard?

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: Let's get back to our cats.

OLD GENTLEMAN [to *the Logician*]: I'm all ears.

BERENGER [to *Jean*]: In any case, I think she's already got her eye on someone.

JEAN: Oh, who?

BERENGER: Dudard. An office colleague, qualified in law, with a big future in the firm - and in Daisy's affections. I can't hope to compete with him.

LOGICIAN [to *the old Gentleman*]: The cat Isidore has four paws.

OLD GENTLEMAN: How do you know?

LOGICIAN: It's stated in the hypothesis.

BERENGER [to *Jean*]: The Chief thinks a lot of him. Whereas I've no future, I've no qualifications. I don't stand a chance.

OLD GENTLEMAN [to *the Logician*]: Ah! In the hypothesis.

JEAN [to *Berenger*]: So you're giving up, just like that...?

BERENGER: What else can I do?

LOGICIAN [to *the Old Gentleman*]: Fricot also has four paws. So how many paws have Fricot and Isidore?

OLD GENTLEMAN: Separately or together?

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 [do? I've nothing to put up a fight with.

JEAN: Then find yourself some weapons, my friend.

OLD GENTLEMAN [to *the Logician* after painful reflection]: Eight, eight paws.

LOGICIAN: Logic involves mental arithmetic, you see.

OLD GENTLEMAN: It certainly has many aspects!

BERENGER [to *Jean*]: Where can I find the weapons?

LOGICIAN [to *the Old Gentleman*]: There are no limits to logic.

JEAN: Within yourself Through your own will.

BERENGER: What weapons?

LOGICIAN [to *the Old Gentleman*]: I'm going to show you

JEAN [to *Berenger*]: The weapons of patience and culture, the weapons of the mind.
[BERENGER *yawns.*] Turn yourself into a keen and brilliant intellect. Get yourself up to the mark!

BERENGER: How do I get myself up to the mark?

LOGICIAN [to *the Old Gentleman*]: If I take two paws away from these cats - how many does each have left?

OLD GENTLEMAN: That's not so easy.

BERENGER [to *Jean*]: That's not so easy.

LOGICIAN [to *the Old Gentleman*]: On the contrary, it's simple.

OLD GENTLEMAN [to *the Logician*]: It may be simple for you, but not for me.

BERENGER [to *Jean*]: It may be simple for you, but not for me.

LOG I CIA N [to *the Old Gentleman*]: Come on, exercise your mind. Concentrate!

JEAN [to *Berenger*]: Come on, exercise your will. Concentrate I

OLD GENTLEMAN [to *the Logician*]: I don't see how.

BERENGER [to *Jean*]: I really don't see how.

LOGICIAN [to *the Old Gentleman*]: You have to be told every-thing.

JEAN [to *Berenger*]: You have to be told everything.

LOGICIAN [to *the Old Gentleman*]: Take a sheet of paper and calculate. If you take six paws

from the two cats, how many paws are left to each cat?

OLD GENTLEMAN: Just a moment ... [He calculates on a sheet of paper which he takes from his pocket.]

JEAN: This is what you must do: dress yourself properly, shave every day, put on a clean shirt.

BERENGER: The laundry's so expensive

JEAN: Cut down on your drinking. This is the way to come out: wear a hat, a tie like this, a well-cut suit, shoes well polished. [*As he mentions the various items of clothing he points self-contentedly to his own hat, tie, and shoes.*]

OLD GENTLEMAN [*to the Logician*]: There are several possible solutions.

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: Tell me.

BERENGER [*to Jean*]: Then what do I do? Tell me

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: I'm listening.

BERENGER [*to Jean*]: I'm listening.

JEAN: You're a timid creature, but not without talent

BERENGER: I've got talent, me?

JEAN: So use it. Put yourself in the picture. Keep abreast of the cultural and literary events of the times.

OLD GENTLEMAN [*to the Logician*]: One possibility is: one cat could have four paws and the other two.

BERENGER [*to Jean*]: I get so little spare time!

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: You're not without talent You just needed to exercise it.

JEAN: Take advantage of what free time you *do* have. Don't just let yourself drift.

OLD GENTLEMAN: I've never had the time. I was an official you know.

LOGICIAN: One can always find time to learn.

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: One can always find time.

BERENGER [*to Jean*]: It's too late now.

OLD GENTLEMAN [*to the Logician*]: It's a bit late in the day for me.

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: It's never too late.

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: It's never too late.

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: You work eight hours a day, like me and everybody else, but not on Sundays, nor in the evening, nor for three weeks in the summer. That's quite sufficient, with a little method.

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: Well, what about the other solutions? Use a little method, a little method!

[The OLD GENTLEMAN starts to calculate anew.]

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: Look, instead of drinking and feeling sick, isn't it better to be fresh and eager, even at work? And you can spend your free time constructively.

BERENGER: How do you mean?

JEAN: By visiting museums, reading literary periodicals, going to lectures. That'll solve your troubles, it will develop your mind. In four weeks you'll be a cultured man.

BERENGER: You're right.

OLD GENTLEMAN [*to the Logician*]: There could be one cat with five paws...

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: You see, you even think so yourself!

OLD GENTLEMAN [*to the Logician*]: And one cat with one paw. But would they still be cats, then?

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman*]: Why not?

JEAN *[to Berenger]*: Instead of squandering all your spare money on drink, isn't it better to buy a ticket for an interesting play? Do you know anything about the avant-garde theatre there's so much talk about? Have you seen Ionesco's plays?

BERENGER *[to Jean]*: Unfortunately, no. I've only heard people talk about them.

OLD GENTLEMAN *[to the Logician]*: By taking two of the eight paws away from the two cats

JEAN *[to Berenger]*: There's one playing now. Take advantage of it.

OLD GENTLEMAN *[to the Logician]*: ... we could have one cat with six paws

BERENGER: It would be an excellent initiation into the artistic life of our times.

OLD GENTLEMAN *[to the Logician]*: We could have one cat with no paws at all.

BERENGER: You're right, perfectly right. I'm going to put myself into the picture, like you said.

LOGICIAN *[to the Old Gentleman]*: In that case, one cat would be specially privileged.

BERENGER *[to Jean]*: I will, I promise you.

JEAN: You promise yourself, that's the main thing.

OLD GENTLEMAN: And one under-privileged cat deprived of all paws.

BERENGER: I make myself a solemn promise, I'll keep my word to myself

LOGICIAN: That would be unjust, and therefore not logical.

BERENGER: Instead of drinking, I'll develop my mind. I feel better already. My head already feels clearer.

JEAN: You see!

OLD GENTLEMAN *[to the Logician]*: Not logical?

BERENGER: This afternoon I'll go to the museum. And I'll book two seats for the theatre this evening. Will you come with me?

LOGICIAN *[to the Old Gentleman]*: Because Logic means Justice.

JEAN *[to Berenger]*: You must persevere. Keep up your good resolutions.

OLD GENTLEMAN *[to the Logician]*: I get it. Justice

BERENGER *[to Jean]*: I promise you, and I promise myself. Will you come to the museum with me this afternoon?

JEAN *[to Berenger]*: I have to take a rest this afternoon; it's in my programme for the day.

OLD GENTLEMAN: Justice is one more aspect of Logic.

BERENGER *[to Jean]*: But you will come with me to the theatre this evening?

JEAN: No, not this evening.

LOGICIAN *[to the Old Gentleman]*: Your mind is getting clearer!

JEAN *[to Berenger]*: I sincerely hope you'll keep up your good resolutions. But this evening I have to meet some friends for a drink.

BERENGER: For a drink?

OLD GENTLEMAN *[to the Logician]*: What's more, a cat with no paws at all

JEAN *[to Berenger]*: I've promised to go. I always keep my word.

OLD GENTLEMAN *[to the Logician]*: ... wouldn't be able to run fast enough to catch mice.

BERENGER *[to Jean]*: Ah, now it's you that's setting me a bad example! You're going out drinking.

LOGICIAN *[to the Old Gentleman]*: You're already making progress in logic.

[A sound of rapid galloping is heard approaching again, trumpeting and the sound of rhinoceros hooves and pantings; this time the sound comes from the opposite direction approaching from back-stage to front, in the left wings.]

JEAN *[furiously to Berenger]*: It's not a habit with me, you know. It's not the same as with you. With you ... you're ... it's not the same thing at all

BERENGER: Why isn't it the same thing?

JEAN [*shouting over the noise coming from the cafe'*]: I'm no drunkard, not me!

LOGICIAN [*shouting to the Old Gentleman*]: Even with no paws a cat must catch mice. That's in its nature.

BERENGER [*shouting very loudly*]: I didn't mean you were a drunkard. But why would it make me one any more than you, in a case like that?

OLD GENTLEMAN [*shouting to the Logician*]: What's in the cat's nature?

JEAN [*to Berenger*]: Because there's moderation in all things. I'm a moderate person, not like you!

LOGICIAN [*to the Old Gentleman, cupping his hands to his ears*]: What did you say?
[*Deafening sounds drown the words of the four characters. I*

BERENGER [*to Jean, cupping his hands to his ear;*]: What about me, what? What did you say?

JEAN [*roaring*]: I said that

OLD GENTLEMAN [*roaring*]: I said that

JEAN [*suddenly aware of the noises which are now very near*]: Whatever's happening?

LOGICIAN: What is going on?

JEAN [*rises, knocking his chair over as he does so; looks towards left wings where the noises of the passing rhinoceros are coming from*]: Oh, a rhinoceros!

LOGICIAN [*rising, knocking over his chair*]: Oh, a rhinoceros!

OLD GENTLEMAN [*doing the same*]: Oh, a rhinoceros!

BERENGER [*still seated, but this time, taking more notice*]: Rhinoceros! In the opposite direction!

WAITRESS [*emerging with a tray and glasses*]: What is it? Oh, a rhinoceros! [*She drops the tray, breaking the glasses.*]

PROPRIETOR [*Coming out of the cafe'*]: What's going on?

WAITRESS [*to the Proprietor*]: A rhinoceros!

LOGICIAN: A rhinoceros, going full-tilt on the opposite pavement!

GROCER [*Coming out of his shop*]: Oh, a rhinoceros!

JEAN; Oh, a rhinoceros!

GROCER'S WIFE [*sticking her head through the upstairs window of shop*]: Oh, a rhinoceros!

PROPRIETOR: It's no reason to break the glasses.

JEAN: It's rushing straight ahead, brushing up against the shop windows.

DAISY [*entering left*]: Oh, a rhinoceros!

BERENGER [*noticing Daisy*]: Oh, Daisy!

[*noise of people fleeing, the same 'Ohs' and 'Ahs' as before*]

WAITRESS: Well of all things!

PROPRIETOR [*to the waitress*]: You'll be charged up for those!

BERENGER *tries to make himself scarce, not to be seen by Daisy. The OLD GENTLEMAN, the LOGICIAN, the GROCER, and iris WIFE move to centre-stage and say together*

ALL: Well, of all things!

JEAN and BERENGER: Well, of all things!

[*A piteous mewing is heard, then an equally piteous cry of a woman.*]

ALL: Oh!