

Aria Da Capo

BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

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PERSONS

PIERROT. COLUMBINE. COTHURNUS [*masque of tragedy*].
THYRSIS [*shepherd*]. CORYDON [*shepherd*].

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ARIA DA CAPO

A PLAY BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

[SCENE: *A Stage. The curtain rises on a stage set for a Harlequinade, a merry black and white interior. Directly behind the footlights, and running parallel with them, is a long table, covered with a gay black and white cloth, on which is spread a banquet. At the opposite ends of this table, seated on delicate thin-legged chairs with high backs, are Pierrot and Columbine, dressed according to the tradition, excepting that Pierrot is in lilac, and Columbine in pink. They are dining.*]

COLU. Pierrot, a macaroon! I cannot *live* Without a macaroon!

PIER. My only love, You are *so* intense.... It is Tuesday, Columbine?--- I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.

COLU. It is Wednesday, If you must know.... Is this my artichoke, Or yours?

PIER. Ah, Columbine,--as if it mattered! Wednesday.... Will it be Tuesday, then, to-morrow, By any chance?

COLU. To-morrow will be--Pierrot, That isn't funny!

PIER. I thought it rather nice. Well, let us drink some wine and lose our heads And love each other.

COLU. Pierrot, don't you love Me now?

PIER. La, what a woman!--How should I know? Pour me some wine: I'll tell you presently.

COLU. Pierrot, do you know, I think you drink too much.

PIER. Yes, I dare say I do.... Or else too little. It's hard to tell. You see, I am always wanting A little more than what I have,--or else A little less. There's something wrong. My dear, How many fingers have you?

COLU. La, indeed, How should I know?--It always takes me one hand To count the other with. It's too confusing. Why?

PIER. Why?--I am a student, Columbine; And search into all matters.

COLU. La, indeed?-- Count them yourself, then!

PIER. No. Or, rather, nay. 'Tis of no consequence.... I am become A painter, suddenly,--and you impress me-- Ah, yes!--six orange bull's-eyes, four green pin-wheels, And one magenta jelly-roll,--the title As follows: *Woman Taking In Cheese From Fire-Escape*.

COLU. Well, I like that! So that is all I've meant To you!

PIER. Hush! All at once I am become A pianist. I will image you in sound,... On a new scale ... without tonality.... *Vivace senza tempo senza tutto*.... Title: *Uptown Express at Six O'Clock*. Pour me a drink.

COLU. Pierrot, you work too hard. You need a rest. Come on out into the garden, And sing me something sad.

PIER. Don't stand so near me! I am become a socialist. I love Humanity; but I hate people. Columbine, Put on your mittens, child; your hands are cold.

COLU. My hands are *not* cold.

PIER. Oh, I am sure they are. And you must have a shawl to wrap about you, And sit by the fire.

COLU. Why, I'll do no such thing! I'm hot as a spoon in a tea-cup!

PIER. Columbine, I'm a philanthropist. I know I am, Because I feel so restless. Do not scream, Or it will be the worse for you!

COLU. Pierrot, My vinaigrette: I cannot *live* without My vinaigrette!

PIER. My only love, you are *So* fundamental!... How would you like to be An actress, Columbine?--I am become Your manager.

COLU. Why, Pierrot, *I* can't act.

PIER. Can't act! Can't act! La, listen to the woman! What's that to do with the price of furs?--You're blonde, Are you not?--You have no education, have you?-- Can't act! You under-rate yourself, my dear!

COLU. Yes, I suppose I do.

PIER. As for the rest, I'll teach you how to cry, and how to die, And other little tricks; and the house will love you. You'll be a star by five o'clock.... That is, If you will let me pay for your apartment.

COLU. *Let* you?--well, that's a good one! Ha! Ha! Ha! But why?

PIER. But why?--well, as to that, my dear, I cannot say. It's just a matter of form.

COLU. Pierrot, I'm getting tired of caviar And peacocks' livers. Isn't there something else That people eat?--some humble vegetable, That grows in the ground?

PIER. Well, there are mushrooms.

COLU. Mushrooms! That's so! I had forgotten ... mushrooms ... mushrooms.... I cannot *live* with.... How do you like this gown?

PIER. Not much. I'm tired of gowns that have the waist-line About the waist, and the hem around the bottom,-- And women with their breasts in front of them!-- *Zut* and *ehé!* Where does one go from here!

COLU. Here's a persimmon, love. You always liked them.

PIER. I am become a critic; there is nothing I can enjoy.... However, set it aside; I'll eat it between meals.

COLU. Pierrot, do you know, Sometimes I think you're making fun of me.

PIER. My love, by yon black moon, you wrong us both.

COLU. There isn't a sign of a moon, Pierrot.

PIER. Of course not. There never was. "Moon's" just a word to swear by, "Mutton!"--now *there's* a thing you can lay the hands on, And set the tooth in! Listen, Columbine: I always lied about the moon and you. Food is my only lust.

COLU. Well, eat it, then, For heaven's sake, and stop your silly noise! I haven't heard the clock tick for an hour.

PIER. It's ticking all the same. If you were a fly, You would be dead by now. And if I were a parrot, I could be talking for a thousand years!

[*Enters Cothurnus.*]

PIER. Hello, what's this, for God's sake?--What's the matter? Say, whadda you mean?--get off the stage, my friend, And pinch yourself,-you're walking in your sleep!

COTH. I never sleep.

PIER. Well, anyhow, clear out. You don't belong on here. Wait for your own scene! Whadda you think this is,--a dress-rehearsal?

COTH. Sir, I am tired of waiting. I will wait No longer.

PIER. Well, but what are you going to do? The scene is set for me!

COTH. True, sir; yet I Can play the scene.

PIER. Your scene is down for later!

COTH. That, too, is true, sir; but I play it now.

PIER. Oh, very well!--Anyway, I am tired Of black and white. At least, I think I am. [*Exit Columbine.*] Yes, I am sure I am. I know what I'll do!-- I'll go and strum the moon, that's what I'll do.... Unless, perhaps, ... you never can tell ... I may be, You know, tired of the moon. Well, anyway, I'll go find Columbine.... And when I find her, I will address her thus: "*Ehé Pierrette!*"-- There's something in that.

[*Exit Pierrot.*]

COTH. You, Thyrsis! Corydon! Where are you?

THYR. Sir, we are in our dressing-room!

COTH. Come out and do the scene.

CORY. You are mocking us!-- The scene is down for later.

COTH. That is true; But we will play it now. I am the scene.

[*Seats himself on high place in back of stage. Enter Corydon and Thyrsis.*]

CORY. Sir, we were counting on this little hour. We said, "Here is an hour,--in which to think A mighty thought, and sing a trifling song, And look at nothing."--And, behold! the hour, Even as we spoke, was over, and the act begun, Under our feet!

THYR. Sir, we are not in the fancy To play the play. We had thought to play it later.

CORY. Besides, this is the setting for a farce. Our scene requires a wall; we cannot build A wall of tissue-paper!

THYR. We cannot act A tragedy with comic properties!

COTH. Try it and see. I think you'll find you can. One wall is like another. And regarding The matter of your insufficient wood, The important thing is that you speak the lines, And make the gestures. Wherefore I shall remain Throughout, and hold the prompt-book. Are you ready?

CORY.-THYR. [*sorrowfully*]. Sir, we are always ready.

COTH. Play the play!

[*Corydon and Thyrsis move the table and chairs to one side out of the way, and seat themselves in a half-reclining position on the floor, left of the center of the stage, propped up by crepe paper pillows and bolsters, in place of rocks.*]

THYR. How gently in the silence, Corydon, Our sheep go up the bank. They crop a grass That's yellow where the sun is out, and black Where the clouds drag their shadows. Have you noticed How steadily, yet with what a slanting eye They graze?

CORY. As if they thought of other things. What say you, Thyrsis, do they only question Where next to pull?--Or do their far minds draw them Thus vaguely north of west and south of east?

THYR. One cannot say.... The black lamb wears its burdocks As if they were a garland,--have you noticed?-- Purple and white--and drinks the bitten grass As if it were a wine.

CORY. I've noticed that. What say you, Thyrsis, shall we make a song About a lamb that thought himself a shepherd?

THYR. Why, yes!--that is, why,--no. (I have forgotten My line.)

CORY. [*prompting*]. "I know a game worth two of that."

THYR. Oh, yes.... I know a game worth two of that: Let's gather rocks, and build a wall between us; And say that over there belongs to me, And over here to you!

CORY. Why,--very well. And say you may not come upon my side Unless I say you may!

THYR. Nor you on mine! And if you should, 'twould be the worse for you!

[They weave a wall of colored crepe paper ribbons from the center front to the center back of the stage, fastening the ends to Columbine's chair in front and to Pierrot's chair in the back.]

CORY. Now there's a wall a man may see across, But not attempt to scale.

THYR. An excellent wall.

CORY. Come, let us separate, and sit alone A little while, and lay a plot whereby We may outdo each other.

[They seat themselves on opposite sides of the wall.]

PIER. [*off stage*]. Ehé Pierrette!

COLU. [*off stage*]. My name is Columbine! Leave me alone!

THYR. [*coming up to the wall*]. Corydon, after all, and in spite of the fact I started it myself, I do not like this So very much. What is the sense of saying I do not want you on my side the wall? It is a silly game. I'd much prefer Making the little song you spoke of making, About the lamb, you know, that thought himself A shepherd!--what do you say?

[Pause.]

CORY. [*at wall*]. (I have forgotten The line)

COTH. [*prompting*]. "How do I know this isn't a trick"

CORY. Oh, yes.... How do I know this isn't a trick To get upon my land?

THYR. Oh, Corydon, You *know* it's not a trick. I do not like The game, that's all. Come over here, or let me Come over there.

CORY. It is a clever trick To get upon my land.

[*Seats himself as before.*]

THYR. Oh, very well! [*Seats himself as before*] [*To himself.*] I think I never knew a sillier game.

CORY. [*coming to wall*]. Oh, Thyrsis, just a minute!--all the water Is on your side the wall, and the sheep are thirsty. I hadn't thought of that.

THYR. Oh, hadn't you?

CORY. Why, what do you mean?

THYR. What do I mean?--I mean That I can play a game as well as you can. And if the pool is on my side, it's on My side, that's all.

CORY. You mean you'd let the sheep Go thirsty?

THYR. Well, they're not my sheep. My sheep Have water enough.

CORY. *Your* sheep! You are mad, to call them. Yours--mine--they are all one flock! Thyrsis, you can't mean To keep the water from them, just because They happened to be grazing over here Instead of over there, when we set the wall up?

THYR. Oh, can't I?--wait and see!--and if you try To lead them over here, you'll wish you hadn't!

CORY. I wonder how it happens all the water *Is* on your side.... I'll say you had an eye out For lots of little things, my innocent friend, When I said, "Let us make a song," and you said, "I know a game worth two of that!"

COLU. [*off stage*].

D'you know, I think you must be getting old, Or fat, or something,-- stupid, anyway!-- Can't you put on some other kind of collar?

THYR. You know as well as I do, Corydon, I never thought of anything of the kind. *Don't* you?

CORY. I *do* not.

THYR. Don't you?

CORY. Oh, I suppose so. Thyrsis, let's drop this,--what do you say?-- it's only A game, you know ... we seem to be forgetting It's only a game ... a pretty serious game It's getting to be, when one of us is willing To let the sheep go thirsty, for the sake of it.

THYR. I know it, Corydon.

[*They reach out their arms to each other across the wall.*]

COTH. [*prompting*]. "But how do I know?"

THYR. Oh, yes.... But how do I know this isn't a trick To water your sheep, and get the laugh on me?

CORY. You can't know, that's the difficult thing about it, Of course,-- you can't be sure. You have to take My word for it. And I know just how you feel. But one of us has to take a risk, or else, Why don't you see?--the game goes on forever-- It's terrible, when you stop to think of it.... Oh, Thyrsis, now for the first time I feel This wall is actually a wall, a thing Come up between us, shutting me away From you.... I do not know you any more!

THYR. No, don't say that! Oh, Corydon, I'm willing To drop it all, if you will! Come on over And water your sheep! It is an ugly game. I hate it from the first.... How did it start?

CORY. I do not know.... I do not know.... I think I am afraid of you!-- you are a stranger! I never set eyes on you before! "Come over And water my sheep," indeed!--They'll be more thirsty Then they are now, before I bring them over Into your land, and have you mixing them up With yours, and calling them yours, and trying to keep them!

[Enter Columbine.]

COLU. *[to Cothurnus]*. Glummy, I want my hat.

THYR. Take it, and go.

COLU. Take it and go, indeed! Is it my hat, Or isn't it? Is this my scene, or not? Take it and go! Really, you know, you two Are awfully funny!

[Exit Columbine.]

THYR. Corydon, my friend, I'm going to leave you now, and whittle me A pipe, or sing a song, or go to sleep. When you have come to your senses, let me know.

[Goes back to where he has been sitting, lies down and sleeps.]

[Corydon, in going back to where he has been sitting, stumbles over bowl, of colored confetti and colored paper ribbons.]

CORY. Why, what is this?--Red stones--and purple stones-- And stones stuck full of gold!--The ground is full Of gold and colored stones!... I'm glad the wall Was up before I found them!--Otherwise, I should have had to share them. As it is, They all belong to me.... Unless--

[He goes to wall and digs up and down the length of it, to see if there are jewels on the other side.]

None here-- None here--none here--They all belong to me!

[*Sits.*]

THYR. [*awakening*]. How curious! I thought the little black lamb
Came up and licked my hair! I saw the wool About its neck as plain as
anything! It must have been a dream. The little black lamb Is on the
other side of the wall, I'm sure.

[*Goes to wall and looks over. Corydon is seated on the ground,
tossing the confetti up into the air and catching it.*]

Hello, what's that you've got there, Corydon?

CORY. Jewels.

THYR. Jewels?--And where did you ever get them?

CORY. Oh, over here.

THYR. You mean to say you found them, By digging around in the
ground for them?

CORY. [*unpleasantly*]. No, Thyrsis. By digging down for water for
my sheep.

THYR. Corydon, come to the wall a minute, will you? I want to talk
to you.

CORY. I haven't time. I'm making me a necklace of red stones.

THYR. I'll give you all the water that you want, For one of those red
stones,--if it's a good one.

CORY. Water?--what for?--what do I want of water?

THYR. Why, for your sheep.

CORY. My sheep?--I'm not a shepherd!

THYR. Your sheep are dying of thirst.

CORY. Man, haven't I told you I can't be bothered with a few untidy Brown sheep all full of burdocks?--I'm a merchant, That's what I am!--And I set my mind to it, I dare say I could be an emperor! [*To himself.*] Wouldn't I be a fool to spend my time Watching a flock of sheep go up a hill, When I have these to play with--when I have these To think about?--I can't make up my mind Whether to buy a city, and have a thousand Beautiful girls to bathe me, and be happy Until I die, or build a bridge, and name it The Bridge of Corydon,--and be remembered After I'm dead.

THYR. Corydon, come to the wall, Won't you?--I want to tell you something.

CORY. Hush! Be off! Be off! Go finish your nap, I tell you!

THYR. Corydon, listen: If you don't want your sheep, Give them to me.

CORY. Be off. Go finish your nap. A red one--and a blue one--and a red one-- And a purple one--give you my sheep, did you say?-- Come, come! What do you take me for, a fool? I've a lot of thinking to do,-- and while I'm thinking, The sheep might just as well be over here As over there.... A blue one--and a red one--

THYR. But they will die!

CORY. And a green one--and a couple Of white ones, for a change.

THYR. Maybe I have Some jewels on my side.

CORY. And another green one-- Maybe, but I don't think so. You see, this rock Isn't so very wide. It stops before It gets to the wall. It seems to go quite deep, However.

THYR. [*with hatred*]. I see.

COLU. [*off stage*]. Look, Pierrot, there's the moon!

PIER. [*off stage*]. Nonsense!

THYR. I see.

COLU. [*off stage*]. Sing me an old song, Pierrot,-- Something I can remember.

PIER. [*off stage*]. Columbine, Your mind is made of crumbs,--like an escallop Of oysters,--first a layer of crumbs, and then An oystery taste, and then a layer of crumbs.

THYR. I find no jewels ... but I wonder what The root of this black weed would do to a man If he should taste it.... I have seen a sheep die, With half the stalk still drooling from its mouth. 'Twould be a speedy remedy, I should think, For a festered pride and a feverish ambition. It has a curious root. I think I'll hack it In little pieces.... First I'll get me a drink; And then I'll hack that root in little pieces As small as dust, and see what the color is Inside. [*Goes to bowl on floor.*] The pool is very clear. I see A shepherd standing on the brink, with a red cloak About him, and a black weed in his hand.... 'Tis I. [*Kneels and drinks.*]

CORY. [*Coming to wall*]. Hello, what are you doing, Thyrsis?

THYR. Digging for gold.

CORY. I'll give you all the gold You want, if you'll give me a bowl of water. If you don't want too much, that is to say.

THYR. Ho, so you've changed your mind?--It's different, Isn't it, when you want a drink yourself?

CORY. Of course it is.

THYR. Well, let me see ... a bowl Of water,--come back in an hour, Corydon. I'm busy now.

CORY. Oh, Thyrsis, give me a bowl Of water!--and I'll find the bowl with jewels, And bring it back!

THYR. Be off, I'm busy now.

[He catches sight of the weed, picks it up and looks at it, unseen by Corydon.]

Wait!--Pick me out the finest stones you have.... I'll bring you a drink of water presently.

CORY. *[goes back and sits down, with the jewels before him].*

A bowl of jewels is a lot of jewels.

THYR. *[chopping up the weed].* I wonder if it has a bitter taste?

CORY. There's sure to be a stone or two among them I have grown fond of, pouring them from one hand into the other.

THYR. I hope it doesn't taste too bitter, just at first.

CORY. A bowl of jewels is far too many jewels to give away.... And not get back again.

THYR. I don't believe he'll notice. He's thirsty. He'll gulp it down and never notice.

CORY. There ought to be some way to get them back again.... I could give him a necklace, and snatch it back, after I'd drunk the water, I suppose ... why, as for that, of course, a *necklace*....

[He puts two or three of the colored tapes together and tries their strength by pulling them, after which he puts them around his neck and pulls them, gently, nodding to himself. He gets up and goes to the wall, with the colored tapes in his hands.]

Thyrsis in the meantime has poured the powdered root--black confetti--into the pot which contains the flower and filled it up with wine from the punch-bowl on the floor. He comes to the wall at the same time, holding the bowl of poison.]

THYR. Come and get your bowl of water, Corydon.

CORY. Ah, very good!--and for such a gift as that I'll give you more than a bowl of unset stones. I'll give you three long necklaces, my friend. Come closer. Here they are.

[Puts the ribbons about Thyrsis' neck.]

THYR. *[putting bowl to Corydon's mouth]*. I'll hold the bowl Until you've drunk it all.

CORY. Then hold it steady. For every drop you spill I'll have a stone back Out of this chain.

THYR. I shall not spill a drop.

[Corydon drinks, meanwhile beginning to strangle Thyrsis.]

THYR. Don't pull the string so tight.

CORY. You're spilling the water.

THYR. You've had enough--you've had enough--stop pulling The string so tight!

CORY. Why, that's not tight at all.... How's this?

THYR. *[drops bowl]*. You're strangling me! Oh, Corydon! It's only a game!--and you are strangling me!

CORY. It's only a game, is it?--Yet I believe You've poisoned me in earnest!

[Writhes and pulls the strings tighter, winding them about Thyrsis' neck.]

THYR. Corydon! *[Dies.]*

CORY. You've poisoned me in earnest.... I feel so cold.... So cold ... this is a very silly game.... Why do we play it?--let's not play this game A minute more ... let's make a little song About a lamb.... I'm

coming over the wall, No matter what you say,--I want to be near you....

[Groping his way, with arms wide before him, he strides through the frail papers of the wall without knowing it, and continues seeking for the wall straight across the stage.]

Where is the wall?

[Gropes his way back, and stands very near Thyrsis without knowing it; he speaks slowly.]

There isn't any wall, I think.

[Takes a step forward, his foot touches Thyrsis' body, and he falls down beside him.]

Thyrsis, where is your cloak?--just give me A little bit of your cloak!...

[Draws corner of Thyrsis' cloak over his shoulders, falls across Thyrsis' body, and dies.]

Cothurnus closes the prompt-book with a bang, arises matter-of-factly, comes down stage, and places the table over the two bodies, drawing down the cover so that they are hidden from any actors on the stage, but visible to the audience, pushing in their feet and hands with his boot. He then turns his back to the audience, and claps his hands twice.]

COTH. Strike the scene!

[Exit Cothurnus. Enter Pierrot and Columbine.]

PIER. Don't puff so, Columbine!

COLU. Lord, what a mess This set is in! If there's one thing I hate Above everything else,--even more than getting my feet wet-- It's clutter!--He might at least have left the scene The way he found it.... don't you say so, Pierrot?

[*She picks up punch bowl. They arrange chairs as before at ends of table.*]

PIER. Well, I don't know. I think it rather diverting The way it is.
[*Yawns, picks up confetti bowl.*] Shall we begin?

COLU. [*screams*]. My God! What's that there under the table?

PIER. It is the bodies Of the two shepherds from the other play.

COLU. [*slowly*]. How curious to strangle him like that, With colored paper ribbons!

PIER. Yes, and yet I dare say he is just as dead. [*Pause. Calls Cothurnus.*] Come drag these bodies out of here! We can't Sit down and eat with two dead bodies lying Under the table!... The audience wouldn't stand for it!

COTH. [*off stage*]. What makes you think so?--Pull down the tablecloth On the other play, and hide them from the house, And play the farce. The audience will forget.

PIER. That's so. Give me a hand there, Columbine.

[*Pierrot and Columbine pull down the table cover in such a way that the two bodies are hidden from the house, then merrily set their bowls back on the table, draw up their chairs, and begin the play exactly as before, speaking even more rapidly and artificially.*]

COLU. Pierrot, a macaroon,--I cannot *live* Without a macaroon!

PIER. My only love, You are *so* intense!... Is it Tuesday, Columbine?-- I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.

[*Curtains begin to close slowly.*]

COLU. It is Wednesday, If you must know.... Is this my artichoke, Or yours?

PIER. Ah, Columbine, as if it mattered! Wednesday.... Will it be Tuesday, then to-morrow, By any chance?

[*Curtain.*]