

Acting Edition

Rhinoceros

by Eugene Ionesco

Translated by Derek Prouse

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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RHINOCEROS was first produced by the Old Vic Company at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, England on the 5th September 1960. It was directed by John Hale with designs by Jane Graham. The cast was as follows:

THE WAITRESS	Claire Pollock
THE GROCER'S WIFE	Stephanie Cole
THE HOUSEWIFE	Josephine Tewson
BERENGER	Richard Gale
JEAN	Michael Mellinger
THE GROCER	Terence Davies
THE OLD GENTLEMAN	Norman Tyrrell
THE LOGICIAN	Leonard Rossiter
THE CAFÉ PROPRIETOR	Michael Lynch
DAISY	Annette Crosbie
DUDARD	Peter Birrel
BOTARD	Ewan Hooper
MR. PAPILLON	Michael Kilgariff
MRS. BŒUF	Margaret Jones
A FIREMAN	Robin Phillips

CHARACTERS

THE WAITRESS
THE GROCER'S WIFE
THE HOUSEWIFE
BERENGER
JEAN
THE GROCER
THE OLD GENTLEMAN
THE LOGICIAN
THE CAFÉ PROPRIETOR
DAISY
DUDARD
BOTARD
MR. PAPILLON
MRS. BŒUF
A FIREMAN

SETTING

Act I

Scene One: A square in a small French provincial town.

Scene Two: The office of a firm of law publications.

Act II

Jean's room.

Act III

Berenger's room.

TIME

The present.

Act I

Scene One: Midday on a Sunday in summer.

Scene Two: The following morning.

Act II

The afternoon of the same day.

Act III

A few days later.

ACT I

Scene One

(House lights fade.)

(Cue No. 01: Church bells, etc.)

*(SCENE: A square in a small French provincial town. Midday on a Sunday in summer, upstage left center is the **GROCER's** house, ground floor and one storey. On the ground floor there is the shop window with the glass-panelled door left of it. The word "Épicerie" is written in bold letters above the shop window. The two windows on the first floor are the living room of the **GROCER** and his **WIFE**. The upstage window is practical and there is access to it inside the house, upstage center, there is a little street in perspective. Slightly at an angle right is the entrance to the café. There is one storey with a window over the café. In front of the café, over the tables, is a striped awning. A typical French "pissoir" is center. Two dusty trees are upstage right and left. There is an expanse of blue sky, the light is harsh and the buildings have very white walls. Two café tables, each with chairs upstage right and upstage left of them, stand left center and downstage right center. A third table, with a potted plant, stands at the downstage side of the café entrance, and*

two small tables are inside the entrance. A menu board leans against the table right.)

*(AT RISE: The **WAITRESS** is at the table right center, adjusting the cloth. She takes an ashtray from the chair upstage left of the table and puts it on the center of the table. The **GROCER'S WIFE** is at the door of her shop, sweeping the floor. After a moment, the **HOUSEWIFE** enters upstage right, carrying a basket of provisions on one arm and a cat under the other. She is about to go upstage left, sees the **GROCER'S WIFE**, turns downstage, crosses and exits downstage left.)*

GROCER'S WIFE. Oh, that woman gets on my nerves. *(Over her shoulder to her husband in the shop.)* Too stuck-up to buy from us nowadays.

*(The **GROCER'S WIFE** exits to the shop. The **WAITRESS** exits to the café. **BERENGER** enters downstage left. He is unshaven and hatless, is without his tie, and has unkempt hair and creased clothes; everything about him indicates negligence. He seems weary and half-asleep and yawns from time to time. **JEAN** enters upstage right. He is very fastidiously dressed in a brown suit, red tie, stiff collar, and a brown hat. He has a reddish face. His shoes are yellow and well polished. He wears gloves and carries a cane.)*

(Fade sound.)

JEAN. *(Crossing briskly to center.)* Oh, so you managed to get here at last, Berenger.

BERENGER. *(Wandering to left of **JEAN**; looking off left over his left shoulder.)* Morning, Jean.

JEAN. Late as usual, of course.

(He looks at his wrist watch.)

Our appointment was for eleven-thirty. And now it's practically midday.

BERENGER. I'm sorry. Have you been waiting long?

JEAN. (*Removing his gloves.*) No, I've only just arrived myself, as you saw.

BERENGER. In that case I don't feel so bad, if you've only just...

JEAN. (*Crossing to the table right center.*) It's different with me.

(He flicks the dust from the chair upstage right of the table with his gloves and sits.)

I don't like waiting; I've no time to waste. And as you're never on time, I come late on purpose – at a time when I presume you'll be there.

(He taps the chair upstage left of the table with his cane for BERENGER to sit.)

BERENGER. (*Crossing to the table right center.*) You're right – quite right, but...

JEAN. Now don't try to pretend you're ever on time.

BERENGER. (*Sitting upstage left of the table right center.*) No, of course not – I wouldn't say that.

JEAN. There you are, you see!

BERENGER. What are you drinking?

JEAN. You mean to say you've got a thirst even at this time in the morning?

BERENGER. It's so hot and dry.

JEAN. The more you drink the thirstier you get – popular science tells us that...

BERENGER (*Scratching his stomach.*) It would be less dry, and we'd be less thirsty, if they'd invent us some scientific clouds in the sky.

JEAN. (*Studying BERENGER closely.*) That wouldn't help you any. You're not thirsty for water, Berenger.

BERENGER. I don't understand what you mean.

JEAN. You know perfectly well what I mean. I'm talking about your parched throat. That's a territory that can't get enough.

(He laughs loudly.)

BERENGER. To compare my throat to a piece of land seems –

JEAN. *(Interrupting.)* You're in a bad way, my friend.

BERENGER. In a bad way? You think so?

JEAN. I'm not blind, you know. You're dropping with fatigue. You've gone without your sleep again, you yawn all the time, you're dead tired...

BERENGER. My head feels a bit thick.

JEAN. You reek of alcohol.

BERENGER. I have got a bit of a hangover, it's true.

JEAN. It's the same every Sunday morning – not to mention the other days of the week.

BERENGER. Oh, no, it's less frequent during the week, because of the office.

JEAN. And what's happened to your tie? Lost it during your orgy, I suppose.

BERENGER. *(Putting his hand to his neck.)* You're right. That's funny. Whatever could I have done with it?

JEAN. *(Taking a tie from his pocket.)* Here, put this one on.

(He hands the tie to BERENGER.)

BERENGER. Oh, thank you, that is kind.

(He fiddles with the tie.)

JEAN. Your hair's all over the place.

(BERENGER runs his fingers through his hair.

JEAN takes a pocket comb and mirror from his pocket.)

Here – here's a comb.

BERENGER. *(Taking the comb.)* Thank you.

(He vaguely combs his hair.)

JEAN. You haven't even shaved. Just take a look at yourself.

(He hands the mirror to BERENGER.)

BERENGER. *(He looks at himself in the mirror, then puts out his tongue and examines it.)* My tongue's all coated.

(He returns the comb to JEAN.)

JEAN. I'm not surprised.

(He pockets the comb.)

You're heading for cirrhosis, my friend.

(BERENGER, still looking in the mirror, holds out the tie which JEAN takes.)

BERENGER. *(Worried.)* Do you think so?

JEAN. *(Taking the mirror from BERENGER.)* Keep the tie, I've got plenty more.

(He returns the tie to BERENGER, looks admiringly at himself in the mirror, then puts it in his pocket.)

(BERENGER puts the tie around his neck, fiddles with it, but does not succeed in fixing it.)

BERENGER. *(After a pause; admiringly.)* You always look so immaculate.

JEAN. *(Continuing his inspection of BERENGER.)* Your clothes are all crumpled, they're a disgrace. Your shirt is downright filthy, and your shoes...

(He rises, stands above the table and leans over it. BERENGER tries to hide his feet under the table.)

Your shoes haven't been touched. What a mess you're in. And look at your shoulders...

BERENGER. *(Facing front and putting his hands to his shoulders.)* What's the matter with my shoulders?

JEAN. Turn round. Come on, turn round.

(BERENGER turns his back on JEAN.)

You've been leaning against some wall.

(BERENGER holds his hand out docilely to JEAN.)

JEAN. No, I haven't got a brush with me; it would make my pockets bulge.

(BERENGER, still docile, flicks his shoulders to get rid of the white dust. JEAN crosses above BERENGER and stands below the table left center.)

Heavens! Where did you get all that from?

BERENGER. I don't remember.

JEAN. It's a positive disgrace! I feel ashamed to be your friend.

BERENGER. You're very hard on me.

JEAN. I've every reason to be.

BERENGER. Listen, Jean. There are so few distractions in this town – I get so bored. I'm not made for the work I'm doing – every day at the office, eight hours a day – and only three weeks' holiday a year. When Saturday night comes round I feel exhausted and so – you know how it is – just to relax...

JEAN. My dear man, everybody has to work. I spend eight hours a day in the office the same as everyone else. And I only get three weeks off a year, but even so you don't catch me...

(He mimes a splendid golf stroke with his cane.)

Willpower, my good man!

BERENGER. But everybody hasn't got as much willpower as you have. I can't get used to it. I just can't get used to life.

JEAN. Everybody has to get used to it.

(He moves to left of BERENGER.)

Or do you consider yourself some superior being?

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

JEAN. *(Interrupting.)* I'm just as good as you are; I think with all due modesty I may say I'm better.

(He emphasizes by tapping.)

The superior man is the man who fulfills his duty.

BERENGER. What duty?

JEAN. His duty – his duty as an employee, for example.

(He moves above the table right center.)

BERENGER. *(Fixing his tie.)* Oh, yes, his duty as an employee.

(He gives a loud belch.)

JEAN. Where did your debauch take place last night?

(He sits right of the table right center.)

If you can remember.

BERENGER. We were celebrating Auguste's birthday, our friend Auguste –

JEAN. Our friend Auguste? Nobody invited me to our friend Auguste's birthday.

(Cue No. 02: Rhino charge.)

(At this moment a noise is heard, far off, but swiftly approaching, of a beast panting in its headlong course, and of a long trumpeting.)

BERENGER. I couldn't refuse. It wouldn't have been nice.

JEAN. Did I go there?

BERENGER. Well, perhaps it was because you weren't invited.

(The WAITRESS enters from the café and stands above the table right center between JEAN and BERENGER.)

WAITRESS. Good morning, gentlemen. Can I get you something to drink?

(The noise becomes very loud.)

JEAN. *(To BERENGER; almost shouting to make himself heard above the noise of which he has not become conscious.)* True, I was not invited. That honour was denied me. But in any case, I can assure you, that even if I had been invited, I would not have gone, because –

(The noise becomes intense.)

JEAN. What's going on?

(The noise of a powerful, heavy animal, galloping at great speed, and panting, is heard very close.)

Whatever is it?

WAITRESS. Whatever is it?

(BERENGER, still listless and without appearing to hear anything at all, replies tranquilly to JEAN about the invitation; his lips move but one does not hear what he says. The following episode must be played very fast, each repeating in swift succession, "Oh, a rhinoceros." JEAN bounds to his feet, knocking his chair over as he does so, looks off left and points, whilst BERENGER, still a little dopey, remains seated.)

JEAN. Oh, a rhinoceros!

(The noise made by the animal dies away swiftly and one can already hear the following words. The GROCER'S WIFE enters from the shop, leaving the door open, moves left center and looks offstage left.)

WAITRESS. *(Looking offstage left.)* Oh, a rhinoceros!

GROCER'S WIFE. Oh, a rhinoceros! *(She calls into the shop.)*

Quick, come and look; it's a rhinoceros!

(They are all looking off left, after the animal.)

JEAN. *(Crossing down left and looking off.)* It's rushing straight ahead, brushing up against the shop windows.

(The GROCER enters from the shop and looks off left.)

WAITRESS. *(Putting her hands on her hips.)* Well!

GROCER. Oh, a rhinoceros!

HOUSEWIFE. *(Offstage left.)* Oh!

*(The **LOGICIAN** enters quickly up right and crosses to left of the **WAITRESS**. He has a little grey moustache and an eyeglass and is wearing a straw hat.)*

LOGICIAN. *(Looking offstage left.)* A rhinoceros going full-tilt on the opposite pavement.

(Sound loud.)

*(The **HOUSEWIFE** runs on left, carrying her basket and cat.)*

(Sound fading slowly.)

*(The **OLD GENTLEMAN** runs on down left. He is elegantly dressed, with white spats, a soft hat and an ivory-handled cane. The **HOUSEWIFE**, as she runs left center, bumps into the **OLD GENTLEMAN** and drops her basket. The contents scatter over the ground, but she does not drop her cat. The **OLD GENTLEMAN** bumps from the **HOUSEWIFE** into the **GROCER** and his **WIFE**. Cries of "oh" and "ah" and the sounds of people running are heard offstage left.)*

HOUSEWIFE. Ah! Oh!

(She sits right of the table left center and strokes the cat.)

*(The **CAFÉ PROPRIETOR** enters from the café and moves to right of the **WAITRESS**. **BERENGER** remains apathetically seated.)*

PROPRIETOR. What's going on?

OLD GENTLEMAN. *(To the **GROCER** and his **WIFE**.)* Excuse me, please.

GROCER'S WIFE. *(Jostled and jostling her **HUSBAND**; to the **OLD GENTLEMAN**.)* Watch out with that stick!

GROCER. Look where you're going, can't you!

PROPRIETOR. What's going on?

WAITRESS. *(To the **PROPRIETOR**.)* A rhinoceros!

PROPRIETOR. You're seeing things.

(He looks offstage left.)

Well, I'll be...!

HOUSEWIFE. Ah!

(She soothes the cat.)

There, they frightened the poor pussy.

(Sound out.)

(The noises fade.)

PROPRIETOR. Well, of all things.

(He picks up the fallen chair and puts it right of the table right center.)

JEAN. Well, of all things!

HOUSEWIFE. Well, of all things!

GROCER, GROCER'S WIFE & OLD GENTLEMAN. Well, of all things!

JEAN. Well, of all things! *(To BERENGER.)* Did you see that?

ALL. *(Except BERENGER; together.)* Well, of all things.

(JEAN exits down left.)

BERENGER. It certainly looked as if it was a rhinoceros. It made plenty of dust.

(He takes out his handkerchief and blows his nose.)

HOUSEWIFE. Well, of all things! Gave me such a scare.

GROCER. *(With a step towards the HOUSEWIFE.)* Your basket – and all your things.

(The OLD GENTLEMAN moves above the table left center and gallantly raises his hat to the HOUSEWIFE. The GROCER'S WIFE crosses to right of the GROCER.)

PROPRIETOR. Really, these days, you never know...

WAITRESS. Fancy that!

OLD GENTLEMAN. (*To the HOUSEWIFE.*) May I help you pick up your things?

HOUSEWIFE. Thank you, how very kind.

(*The OLD GENTLEMAN leers at the HOUSEWIFE.*)

Do put on your hat. Oh, it gave me such a scare.

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

WAITRESS. It's already out of sight.

OLD GENTLEMAN. (*To the HOUSEWIFE and indicating the LOGICIAN.*) My friend is a logician.

(*He moves below the table left center and during the following speeches, collects the scattered goods and puts them in the basket.*)

(*JEAN enters downstage left the HOUSEWIFE rises.*)

JEAN. (*Speaking across to BERENGER.*) Well, what did you think of that?

WAITRESS. Those animals can certainly travel.

HOUSEWIFE. (*Shaking hands with the LOGICIAN.*) Very happy to meet you.

GROCER'S WIFE. (*To the GROCER.*) That'll teach her to buy her things from somebody else.

JEAN. (*To the PROPRIETOR and the WAITRESS.*) What did you think of that?

HOUSEWIFE. (*To the LOGICIAN.*) I still didn't let my cat go.

PROPRIETOR. (*Shrugging.*) You don't often see that.

HOUSEWIFE. (*Holding out the cat to the LOGICIAN.*) Would you hold him a moment?

WAITRESS. (*To JEAN.*) First time I've seen that!

(*The LOGICIAN removes his straw hat and takes the cat in it.*)

LOGICIAN. It's not spiteful, is it?

PROPRIETOR. (*To JEAN.*) Went past like a rocket.

HOUSEWIFE. (*To the LOGICIAN.*) He wouldn't hurt a fly.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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