Translation of Federico García Lorca's *Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín*

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Translation of Federico García Lorca's
Amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín

A Project Report
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Individual Studies: Theatre Arts

by
Jennifer Bennett
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APPROVAL SHEET

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

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Federico García Lorca's short play *El amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* was translated into English with the intent to create a more actor-friendly text than found in previous translations. The introduction discusses the problems encountered in the process of translation and how they were solved.
Introduction to translation of Federico García Lorca's 
El amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín

by Jennifer Bennett

I have been interested in Federico García Lorca's El amor de don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín for several years. I first saw it performed in Spanish by Spanish graduate students at the University of Kansas. Although the performance was exciting, I knew the play deserved trained actors and the opportunity to be heard by those who couldn't speak Spanish. As I pondered and discussed with others the idea of directing the play at Central Washington University for a Thesis project, the idea of creating my own translation evolved. Many translations are too literary, and others are not literal enough. I hope that my translation is "actor-friendly," yet stays true to the poetical intentions of Federico García Lorca in order to create the powerful theatre of the Spanish original.

The play is replete with colorful, image-provoking poetry. Originally intended to rhyme, as hinted at in the Spanish title, it also kindles in the reader a sense of the farcical, puppet-like characters from Lorca's fascination with puppets, as well as rare moments of the grotesque. I define grotesque as that which stems from the pathetic or ridiculous. According to Margarita Ucelay, "el título está anunciando así el extraño matrimonio de lo grotesco con lo poético y tragico."¹ The character of Perlimplín is sympathetic and tragic as compared to his infamous puppet-equal in the Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Mistress Rosita and although both characters find themselves in similar situations, Perlimplín requires a softness not found in the farcical, domineering puppet.² The translation of this play then, as does the Spanish original, requires the attention to the puppet-like, farcical elements, the pathetic and the heartfelt, poetic depiction of a truly tragic character and play.

In my translation, I have attempted to stay true to Lorca's poetic imagery, farcical elements and tragic undertones, although a close version of the original is not my ultimate goal. Gregory Rabassa mentions how

Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges "...told his translator not to write what he said but what he wanted to say." In studying the translation process, I have learned that the original is perfect, it is the translation that is in constant need of improvement. According to Rabassa:

The fact is that there is a kind of continental drift that slowly works on language as words wander away from their original spot in the lexicon and suffer the accretion of subtle new nuances, which result from distortions brought about by time and the events that people it. The choice made by an earlier translator, then, no longer obtains and we must choose again. Through some instinct wrought of genius, the author's original choice of word and idiom seem to endure.

As the times change, so do the needs of the translation's audience. For this reason, I see my translation as variable as the other translations have and will become. My hope is that my new translation is more "actor-friendly" than previous translations while keeping true to what Lorca "...wanted to say." In the appendix, I have included three selections from the authorized translation by Richard L. O'Connell and James L. Graham for comparison to mine.

In my translation it may be difficult differentiating what is academically stiff and what reproduces Lorca's attempt to reveal the ridiculousness of his characters. I define as academically stiff a writing style that is intended to serve as literary reading instead of performance text. There are lines in the play that seem out of place. They jar the reader out of the flow of the text and cause one to read the lines over and over in the attempt to make sense of it. The incongruity is so absurd that it seems to enhance the tragedy rather than destroy it. Through the reading of several translations, I have found better, more interesting translations in those that have embraced

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4 Rabassa, 8.

Lorca's technique. I have chosen to do the same. I have highlighted two examples of this from my script.

Scene iii

MARCOLFA. It scares me to listen to you. How can you do this? Don Perlimplín how can you do this?

PERLIMPLIN. Because Perlimplín has no honor and wants to have fun. Don't you see. Tonight my wife's secret new lover is coming. I can do nothing but sing. Don Perlimplín has no honor. He has no honor!

Scene iii

Marcolfa. I knew it. Now his shroud will be the youthful red cape he used to walk under his own balcony.

Belisa. I never knew he was so complex.

These lines are as incongruous in Spanish as they are in English. Lorca's intention is difficult to observe in translation. One can see that the entire character of Perlimplín is of a ridiculous nature -- his clothing, his unnatural boyish ideas of sex, his need at fifty for a mother, and his language, all create a character that is very out of step with the world. There were times that I wanted to modernize Perlimplín's lines yet saw Lorca's need for his oddities in not only dress and demeanor but language as well. Many times I also felt the need to clarify and alter what I felt must have been stilted writing on Lorca's part when I later found that his intention was to use the ridiculous to alert the audience member to the tragedy. Regarding the script, the lines that create these awkward moments arrive at unexpected instances. For example, Perlimplín sings when asked why he allows his young wife to openly express her infidelity. And at the moment directly after Perlimplín has died, a grieving Belisa ponders Perlimplín's "complex" ("complicado") personality.
Lorca interrupts what the audience believes will be the natural flow of the script and interjects the sad truths of human misunderstanding and confusion. Close observation reveals Lorca's need to operate on more levels than we first see.

Comparing Lorca's popular puppet character Don Cristóbal to Perlimplín has been interesting, especially knowing Perlimplín's relation to the puppet farce. Don Cristóbal is, like Perlimplín, an older man married to a younger woman. Cristóbal is a puppet character that is tyrannical and comically ruthless as compared to the gentle and boyish Perlimplín. Cristóbal explodes near the end of the play and his young wife is reunited with her young lover. The subject of incompatibility in sexual love and marriage is frequent in Lorca's works and one that he explores tragically in the similar but very different fate of Perlimplín. Lorca started writing Perlimplín as an imitation of a rhyming puppet farce, as is Tragicomedy of Don Cristóbal and Mistress Rosita: (A Punch-and-Judy Farce in Six Scenes and a Prologue) yet the farce of Perlimplín "... is treated in a progressively serious way." In Perlimplín there is only one moment where more than two characters are on stage at the same time in order to simulate the easing of the burdens of puppeteers. Both the characters of Belisa and Perlimplín are also "manipulated" like puppets by the domineering figure in their life (the mother and Marcolfa). Lorca's farcical elements teamed with sympathetic characters make the puppet-like characters human and the human characters puppet-like. The farcical elements and sympathetic characters, as does the ridiculous, increase the tragedy of Perlimplín.

I have created puppets to represent the sprites in performance. Through rhyme and archaic language, I have attempted to make them timeless creatures. Although in Spanish the sprite's lines rhyme only a few times, I have chosen to have them speak mostly in rhyme and address one another in

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8 Edwards, 41.
9 Edwards, 45.
archaic formality. This identifies the sprites as literary creatures relating to a long-standing theatre tradition and gives them an inherent power over the audience.

I have learned much through this process. The word-by-word translation with the Spanish/English dictionary and the many different translations I have read and compared have taught me what is substantial and relevant in a translation and what to expect from mine. My need was to keep it true to the original playwright's intent and then to make it as produceable and as "actor-friendly" in the modern theatre as possible.
BELISA. (Turning around.) Oh! You scared me!

PERLIMPLIN. (Lovingly approaching her.) I see that you were talking...all alone

BELISA. (Annoyed) Get out!

PERLIMPLIN. Do you want to go on a walk with me?

BELISA. No.

PERLIMPLIN. Why don't we go to the candy store?

BELISA. I said no!

PERLIMPLIN. Pardon.

A rolled letter attached to a rock lands on the balcony. PERLIMPLIN picks it up.

BELISA. Give it to me!

PERLIMPLIN. Why?

BELISA. Because it's for me!

PERLIMPLIN. (Teasing her.) Who told you?

BELISA. Perlimplín! Don't read it!

PERLIMPLIN. (Pretending to be strong.) What do you say?

BELISA. (Crying.) Give me the letter!!

PERLIMPLIN. (Approaching her...) Dear Belisa. I understand. Take it if it means so much to you. (Belisa grabs the paper and holds it tight to her breast.) I see how you feel. And although it hurts me deeply, I know that you're living in a dream.

BELISA. (Tenderly.) Perlimplín!

PERLIMPLIN. I know that you're always faithful and true to me.
BELISA. (Sweetly.) I've only known my little Perlimplín.

PERLIMPLIN. Because of this, I want to help you as all good husbands should when their wife is virtuous....Look. (He closes the door. There is an air of mystery about him.) I know everything. I realized it immediately. You are young, I am old...what can we do about it? But I understand perfectly. (Pauses...in a low voice.) Has he passed by here today?

BELISA. Twice.

PERLIMPLIN. Did he wave to you?

BELISA. Yes...but as if he didn't care. And it hurt me!

PERLIMPLIN. Don't worry. Fifteen days ago I saw the young man for the first time. I can say with all sincerity that his beauty dazzled me. I've never seen such delicate strength in a man. I don't know why, but I thought of you.

BELISA. I haven't seen his face, but...

PERLIMPLIN. Don't be scared to talk to me about it..., I know that you love him... I love you like a father now..., I'm already far from any foolishness..., that is...

BELISA. He writes me letters.

PERLIMPLIN. I already know.

BELISA. But he doesn't let himself be seen!

PERLIMPLIN. That's strange.

BELISA. It's almost as if...he wants to torture me.

PERLIMPLIN. You're so naive.

BELISA. There's no doubt that he loves me how I wish though.

PERLIMPLIN. (Fascinated.) Does he?
BELISA. The letters from the other men I've received...and I didn't want to answer them because I had my little husband, talked about exotic countries, of dreams and broken hearts...But the letters from him! Look!

PERLIMPLIN. Don't be afraid to tell me.

BELISA. They talk about my..., about my body...

PERLIMPLIN. (Stroking her hair.) About your body!

BELISA. "What would I do with your soul," he tells me. "The soul belongs to the weak, to the crippled heroes and the sick. The most beautiful souls are in those at the edge of death, hanging over white heads and emaciated hands. Belisa, it isn't your soul that I want...only your soft, white trembling body!"

PERLIMPLIN. Who is this beautiful young man?

BELISA. No one knows.

PERLIMPLIN. (Inquisitive.) No one?

BELISA. I've asked all of my friends.

PERLIMPLIN. (Mysterious yet resolute.) And if I told you that I know him?

BELISA. Oh! Do you?

PERLIMPLIN. Wait. (He goes to the balcony.) He's here.

BELISA. (Running to the balcony.) He is?!

PERLIMPLIN. He's coming around the corner.

BELISA. (Breathing hard.) Oh, God!

PERLIMPLIN. Because I'm only an old man, I want to sacrifice myself for you...What I'm about to do has never been done. But I'm already beyond this world and its ridiculous morals. Good-bye.

BELISA. Where are you going?
PERLIMPLIN. Soon you will know everything! Soon!

Curtain.

SCENE III

A garden of cypress and orange trees. As the curtain opens, we discover Perlimplín and Marcolfa in the garden.

MARCOLFA. Is it time yet?

PERLIMPLIN. No. It's not time yet.

MARCOLFA. Well, what have you decided to do, sir?

PERLIMPLIN. Everything that I hadn't done before.

MARCOLFA. (Crying.) And I'm to blame!

PERLIMPLIN. Oh! If you only knew how grateful my heart is to you!

MARCOLFA. Before this happened everything was as it should be. Remember how each morning I would bring you coffee with milk...and grapes.

PERLIMPLIN. Oh, yes! The grapes! The grapes! But to me...it seems as if one hundred years have passed. Before, I never knew the world's magic...I was outside its door! Everything's changed. My love for Belisa has opened treasures that I had always ignored. Don't you see? Now I close my eyes and...I see whatever I want! For example...my mother when the neighborhood fairies would visit...Now, you know there are fairies! Little ones! It's remarkable...they can dance on my little finger!

MARCOLFA. Yes...yes. The fairies, the fairies. But what about the other matter, sir?

PERLIMPLIN. The other matter...oh, yes...(*With satisfaction.*) What did you say to my wife?
MARCOLFA. I'm so terrible at things like this, but I told her what you said, sir,...that the man, the young one, is coming to the garden tonight at ten, wrapped, like always, in his red cape.

PERLIMPLIN. What did she do?

MARCOLFA. Her face burned red...like a geranium, she brought her hands to her heart, and started kissing her beautiful braids.

PERLIMPLIN. (Enthusiastically.) Burned red...like a geranium! What did she say?

MARCOLFA. Nothing... just a sigh. But the way she did it!

PERLIMPLIN. Oh, yes! A sigh like nothing heard before?

MARCOLFA. Her love sits on the edge of madness!

PERLIMPLIN. (Vibrant.) That's right! There's no doubt she loves him. I need her to love this young man more than her own body.

MARCOLFA. It scares me to hear you. How can you do it? Don Perlimplín, how can you do it? How can you encourage in your wife the worst of sins.

PERLIMPLIN. Because Don Perlimplín has no honor and wants to have fun. I already see it! Tonight, my Belisa's secret new lover is coming. I can do nothing but sing! (Sings.)

Don Perlimplín has no honor!
He has no honor!

MARCOLFA. Listen here sir. I'm thinking of leaving your service right now. Servants also feel shame.

PERLIMPLIN. Oh, you're naive, Marcolfa! Tomorrow you will be free as a bird....just wait until tomorrow...now go and do what you have to do...Are you going to do as I ordered?

MARCOLFA. (Exiting. Wiping away her tears.) What choice do I have? What choice?

PERLIMPLIN. Well done. This makes me happy.
A sweet serenade is heard. Perlimplín hides behind some rose bushes.

VOICES. By the bank of the river  
The night is getting wet  
And in the breasts of Belisa  
Flowers die of love.

PERLIMPLÍN. The flowers die of love!

VOICES. The night sings naked  
Upon the bridges of March.  
Belisa washes her body  
With saltwater and ginseng.

PERLIMPLÍN. The flowers die of love!

VOICES. The night of anise and silver  
Shines on the rooftops.  
The silver of streams and mirrors.  
And the scent of your white thighs.

PERLIMPLÍN. The flowers die of love.

Moonlight. Belisa enters the garden splendidly dressed. The moon lights the stage.

BELISA. These sweet voices are but a small piece of this night. My delicious love, my soul, I feel your heat and your weight, .... Oh, the branches are moving!

A man wrapped in a red cape enters the garden and walks about the garden cautiously.

BELISA. Psst...here, here!

The man indicates with his hand that he will return.

BELISA. Oh, yes! Come back my love! Like rootless jasmine, the sky falls around my sweating back...Night! My night of mint and deep glittering blue.
Perlimplín appears.

PERLIMPLIN. (Surprised.) What are you doing here?

BELISA. Walking.

PERLIMPLIN. And nothing else?

BELISA. Such a nice night.

PERLIMPLIN. (Emphatically.) What were you doing here?

BELISA. (Surprised.) But, don't you know?

PERLIMPLIN. I don't know anything.

BELISA. You're the one who sent me the message.

PERLIMPLIN. (Lustfully.) Belisa...are you still waiting for him?

BELISA. More than ever!

PERLIMPLIN. (Strongly.) Why?

BELISA. Because I love him!

PERLIMPLIN. Well, then. He will come.

BELISA. The smell of his body drips through his clothes. I love him! Perlimplín, I love him. I'm another woman!

PERLIMPLIN. This is my triumph.

BELISA. What triumph?

PERLIMPLIN. The triumph of my imagination.

BELISA. It's true that you helped me love him.

PERLIMPLIN. As now I'll help you cry for him.

BELISA. (Amazed.) Perlimplín, what are you saying?
The clock strikes ten. A nightingale sings.

PERLIMPLIN. It's time!

BELISA. He'll be here very soon.

PERLIMPLIN. Jumping my garden walls.

BELISA. Wrapped in his red cape.

PERLIMPLIN. (Drawing his dagger.) Red like his blood.

BELISA. (Clutching him.) What are you going to do?

PERLIMPLIN. (Holding her.) Belisa, do you love him?

BELISA. (Strongly.) Yes!

PERLIMPLIN. Since you love him so much, I couldn't bear to have him leave you. To make him completely yours, I think it's best to plunge this knife into his young heart? Would you like that?

BELISA. Oh God, Perlimplín!

PERLIMPLIN. When he's dead, you can caress him forever in your bed, always beautiful, always perfect...free of the fear that he will ever leave you. He will love you as the dead love, and my heart will be free from the dark nightmare of your beautiful body...(Holding her.) Your body!...That I could never really know!! (Looking around the garden.) Look, he's coming!....Let go, Belisa. Let go! (Runs off.)

BELISA. (Desperate.) Marcolfa, bring me the sword from the dining room, so that I can slit my husband's throat. (Loudly ...)

Don Perlimplín, you villain!
If you kill him, I'll kill you!

Through the branches appears a man wrapped in an ample and luxurious red cape. He is hurt and faltering.

BELISA. My love! Who stabbed you in the chest? (The man hides his face in the cape. The cape should be immense and cover him completely. She holds him tight.) Who opened your veins to fill my
garden with blood? My love! Can you show me your face...only for a second?! Oh! Who killed you? Who?

PERLIMPLIN. (Uncovers his face.) Your husband just killed me with this emerald dagger. (He shows her the sword in his chest.)

BELISA. (Horrified.) Perlimplín!

PERLIMPLIN. He ran into the forest; you'll never see him again! He killed me because he knew that I loved you more than anyone...And as he stabbed me, he screamed, "Belisa now has a soul!" Help me... (He lies down on the bench.)

BELISA. But what is this? And are you really hurt?

PERLIMPLIN. I have killed Perlimplín...Oh, Don Perlimplín! Dirty old man, weak puppet! You couldn't enjoy Belisa's body,... the body of Belisa was for young thighs and burning lips,...And I loved only your body. Your body!...but he has killed me...with this dagger of green fire.

BELISA. What have you done?

PERLIMPLIN. (Dying.) Do you understand? I am the soul and you are the body... please let me, at last, die as the body you loved so much.

Belisa, half-naked, moves to hold him.

BELISA. Yes..., but where's the young man? Why did you fool me?

PERLIMPLIN. The young man? (Closes his eyes.)

A magical light appears. Marcolfa enters.

MARCOLFA. Madame!

BELISA. (Crying.) Don Perlimplín has died!

MARCOLFA. I knew it! Now his shroud will be the red cape he used to walk under his own balcony.

BELISA. (Crying.) I never knew he was so complex.
MARCOLFA. Now that you know... it's too late. I'm going to make him a crown of flowers the color of the sun.

Belisa is horrified; in another world.

BELISA. Perlimplín, what is this you've done, Perlimplín?

MARCOLFA. Belisa, you are already another woman. You are dressed in the glorious blood of my master.

BELISA. But, who was this man? Who was he?

MARCOLFA. The beautiful youth...whose face you never saw.

BELISA. Yes, yes, Marcolfa, I love him, I love him with all of my body and soul. But where is the young man in the red cape?....My God. Where is he?

MARCOLFA. Don Perlimplín, sleep in peace...Do you hear her? Don Perlimplín..., do you hear her?

Bells ring.

The End
Works Consulted


*Collins Spanish Dictionary*.


Appendix

Selections from Richard L. O'Connell and James L. Graham's authorized translation of El amor de don Perlimplín and Belisa in his garden.

Scene iii (see pg. 22 - 24 in my translation)

Perlimplín. Belisa, do you love him?

Belisa. Yes!

Perlimplín. Well, since you love him so much, I don't want him ever to leave you. And in order that he should be completely yours, it has come to me that the best thing would be to stick this dagger in his gallant heart. Would you like that?

Belisa. For God's sake, Perlimplín!

Perlimplín. Then, dead, you will be able to caress him in your bed - so handsome and well-groomed - without the fear that he should cease to love you. He will love you with the infinite love of the dead, and I will be free of this dark little nightmare of your magnificent body. (Embracing her.) Your body...that I will never possess! (Looking into the garden.) Look where he comes. Let go, Belisa. Let go! (He exits running.)

Belisa. (Desperately) : Marcolfa! Bring me the sword from the dining room; I'm going to run my husband's throat through. (Calling...)

Don Perlimplín
Evil Husband!
If you kill him,
I'll kill you!

(A man wrapped in a large red cape appears among the branches. He is wounded and stumbling.)

Belisa. (Embracing him.) : Who opened your veins so that you could fill my garden with blood? Love, let me look at your face for an instant. Oh! Who had killed you...who?

Perlimplín. (Uncovering himself.) : Your husband had killed me with this emerald dagger. (He shows the dagger stuck in his chest.)

Belisa. (Frightened) : Perlimplín!

Perlimplín. He ran away through the fields and you will never see him again. He killed me because he knew that I loved you as no one else...While he wounded me, he shouted: "Belisa has a soul now!" Come near. (He has stretched out on the bench.)

Belisa. Why is this? And are you truly wounded.

Perlimplín. Perlimplín killed me...Ah, Don Perlimplín! Youngish old man, manikin without strength, you couldn't enjoy the body of Belisa...the body of Belisa was for younger muscles and warm lips...I, on the other hand, loved your body only...your body! But he has killed me...with this glowing branch of precious stones.
Scene i / See pg. 10 - 11 in my translation

First Sprite: And how goes it with you in this tiny darkness, little friend?
Second Sprite: Neither well, nor badly, little friend.
First Sprite: Here we are.
Second Sprite: And how do you like it? It's always nice to cover other people's failings...
First Sprite: And then let the audience take care of uncovering them.
Second Sprite: (Looking at the curtain.): Don't leave even a crack.
First Sprite: For the cracks today are darkness tomorrow.
(They laugh.)
Second Sprite: When things are quite evident...
First Sprite: Man figures that he has no need to investigate them...
Second Sprite: And he goes to dark things to discover in them secrets he already knew.
First Sprite: But that's what we're here for. We Sprites!
Second Sprite: Did you know Perlimplfn?
First Sprite: Since he was a child.
Second Sprite: And Belisa?
First Sprite: Well. Her room exhaled such intense perfume that I once fell asleep and awoke between her cat's paws.
(They laugh.)
Second Sprite: This affair was...
First Sprite: Ever so clear!
Second Sprite: All the world imagined it.
First Sprite: And the gossip must have turned them to more mysterious things.
Second Sprite: That's why our efficient and most sociable screen should not be opened yet.
First Sprite: No, don't let them find out.
Prologue (See pg. 3 in my translation)

Voice of Belisa. (Within Singing.)

Love, love.
Enclosed within my thighs,
the sun swims like a fish.
Warm water in the rushes,
love.
Morning cock, the night is going!
Don't let it vanish, no!
The Love of Don Perlimplín with Belisa in his Garden
by Federico García Lorca
(Translation by Jennifer Bennett)

An Erotic Play in Three Scenes and a Prologue
(1931)

Characters

Don Perlimplín
Belisa
Marcolfa
Belisa's Mother
Sprite #1
Sprite #2

Prologue

The house of Don Perlimplín. Green walls, with chairs and furniture painted black. At the back of the room, there is a balcony through which we can see Belisa's balcony. A sonata plays. Perlimplín wears a green dress coat and a white wig full of curls. The servant Marcolfa wears the typical striped uniform.

PERLIMPLIN. Yes?

MARCOLFA. Yes.

PERLIMPLIN. But, why 'yes'?

MARCOLFA. Well, just because 'yes.'

PERLIMPLIN. And what if I told you 'no'?

MARCOLFA. (Sourly.) No?

PERLIMPLIN. No.

MARCOLFA. Tell me, dear sir, your grounds for this 'no.'

PERLIMPLIN. You tell me, you persistent servant, your grounds for this 'yes.'
Pause.

MARCOLFA. Twenty and twenty are forty...

PERLIMPLIN. Carry on.

MARCOLFA. And ten, fifty.

PERLIMPLIN. Go on...

MARCOLFA. Well, at fifty you're no longer a little boy.

PERLIMPLIN. Clearly.

MARCOLFA. And I could die at any moment.

PERLIMPLIN. Gracious!

MARCOLFA. (Crying) Well what would become of you, all alone in this world?

PERLIMPLIN. What would?

MARCOLFA. That's why you have to get married.

PERLIMPLIN. (Distracted) Yes?

MARCOLFA. (Energetically) Yes.

PERLIMPLIN. (Anguished) But .... Marcolfa. Why 'yes'? When I was a boy, a woman strangled her husband. He was a cobbler. I never forgot it. I always planned not to get married! My books are all I need. What good would it possibly do me?

MARCOLFA. Marriage has great charms, sir. It's not what it seems to be. It's full of secrets. Secrets a servant shouldn't speak of...you see...

PERLIMPLIN. See what?

MARCOLFA. I'm blushing.
(Pause. A piano is heard.)

A VOICE. Love, love.
Through my closed thighs,
Swims the sun, like a fish.
The warm water slides through the reeds, love.
Rooster, the night is ending!
Don't let it end.
Oh, don't end it!

MARCOLFA. You'll see what I mean, sir.

PERLIMPLIN. (Scratches head) She sings well.

MARCOLFA. This is the woman for you, sir: the fair Belisa.

PERLIMPLIN. Belisa...but wouldn't it be better...

MARCOLFA. No. Now, come here. (Points toward the balcony.) Say Belisa.

PERLIMPLIN. Belisa...

MARCOLFA. Louder.

PERLIMPLIN. Belisa!!

The balcony of the neighbor's house opens and Belisa appears resplendent in her beauty. She is half-naked.

BELISA. Who's there?

MARCOLFA. (Hiding behind the curtain of the balcony.) Answer her.

PERLIMPLIN. (Trembling.) It's ... me!

BELISA. Yes?

PERLIMPLIN. Yes.

BELISA. But...why yes?

PERLIMPLIN. Well, because yes.
BELISA. And if I said no?

PERLIMPLIN. I would be sorry..., because...we have decided that I want to get married.

BELISA. (Laughing.) And to whom?

PERLIMPLIN. To you.

BELISA. (Serious.) But...(loudly) Mom! Mom! Mommy!

MARCOLFA. This is going well.

Belisa's mother enters with a great Eighteenth century wig full of birds, ribbons and glass beads.

BELISA. Don Perlimplín wants to marry me. What should I do?

MOTHER. Very good afternoon, my charming little neighbor. I always told my daughter that you have the grace and manners of that great woman that was your mother...what a shame I never knew her.

PERLIMPLIN. Thank you!

MARCOLFA. (Furious, behind the curtain.) I have decided that we...

PERLIMPLIN. We have decided that we...

MOTHER. Are going to get married. Is that so?

PERLIMPLIN. Yes, it is.

BELISA. But mom...What about me?

MOTHER. You agree, naturally. Don Perlimplín is a charming husband.

PERLIMPLIN. I hope to be one, madam.

MARCOLFA. (Speaking to Perlimplín.) It's almost over.
PERLIMPLIN. You think so? (They speak.)

MOTHER (To Belisa.) Don Perlimplín has a lot of land; on this land there are many geese and sheep. The sheep go to the market. At the market, you sell the sheep for money. The money makes you beautiful... and with beauty... every man will want you.

PERLIMPLIN. Well then....?

MOTHER. She's thrilled! Belisa, go inside...there are certain things a girl should not hear.

BELISA. Good-bye. (She exits.)

MOTHER. She's a white lily! Did you see her face? (Lowering her voice.) Well, if only you could see what's underneath... like sugar! But I don't need to discuss these things with a man as modern and competent as yourself.

PERLIMPLIN. You think so?

MOTHER. Oh, yes! I wasn't being sarcastic!

PERLIMPLIN. I don't know how to express our gratitude.

MOTHER. "Our" gratitude?.... Oh, what a doll! The gratitude of you... and your heart together! I understand... I understand, although it's been twenty years since I've dealt with a man.

MARCOLFA. (To Perlimplín.) The wedding!

PERLIMPLIN. The wedding...

MOTHER. Whenever you wish. Although... (Takes out a handkerchief and begins to cry.)... to all mothers... good-bye. (She leaves.)

MARCOLFA. Finally!

PERLIMPLIN. Oh, Marcolfa! What world are you pushing me into?

MARCOLFA. The world of marriage.
PERLIMPLIN. Suddenly I'm so thirsty....Well, why don't you bring me some water? *(Marcolfa leans in to whisper in Perlimplin’s ear.)* Who could believe it?

_Piano music is heard. The lights dim. Belisa enters through the curtain of her balcony almost nude, singing._

BELISA. Love, love.
    Through my closed thighs,
    Swims the sun, like a fish.

MARCOLFA. What a pretty little thing.

PERLIMPLIN. Like sugar...shimmering white skin. Do you think she'll strangle me?

MARCOLFA. Scare her good and she'll submit.

BELISA. Rooster, the night is ending!
    Don't let it end.
    Oh, don't end it! Love...

PERLIMPLIN. What is she saying, Marcolfa? What is she saying? *(Marcolfa laughs.*) And what's happening to me? What is it?

_A piano sonata is heard. A flock of black paper birds fly by._

Curtain/Scene Change

SCENE I

_Perlimplín's bedroom. In the center of the room is a large canopy feather bed. There are six doors to the room. The first on the right serves as the entrance and exit for Perlimplín. It is the wedding night. Marcolfa, with a candelabra in her hand, is in the first door on the left._

MARCOLFA. Good night.

VOICE OF BELISA. *(Inside)* Good-bye, Marcolfa.

_Perlimplín enters in a magnificent nightgown._

MARCOLFA. Enjoy your wedding night, sir.
PERLIMPLIN. Good-bye, Marcolfa. (Marcolfa exits. Perlimplín walks in the direction of Belisa's door and looks in.) Belisa, with so much lace, you are like a wave. It frightens me, as the sea frightened me as a child. Since you came from the church, my house has been full of secret whispers, and the water boils by itself in the glasses. Oh, Perlimplín! Where are you Perlimplín? (He tiptoes out..)

Belisa appears in a grand nightgown full of lace. She has on an immense veil cascading down to the floor. Her hair is down and her arms are bare.

BELISA. The maid perfumed the room with thyme and not with the mint I asked for. (Goes to the bed.) She didn't make the bed with Marcolfa's fine linen sheets either...(At this moment the room is filled with dream-like guitar music played softly. Belisa hugs her hands to her chest.) Oh! Whoever looks for me with longing will find me! My thirst will never die. It's like the endless thirst of the stone animals that spit the water in the fountains. (She listens to the music.) Oh, what music! My, God! What music! Like the hot feathers of swans! Is it me or the music?

She throws a red cape over her shoulders and walks about the room. The music stops and five whistles are heard.

BELISA. There are five!

Perlimplín appears.

PERLIMPLIN. Am I bothering you?

BELISA. How could you bother me?

PERLIMPLIN. Are you...sleepy?

BELISA. (Ironically.) Sleepy?

PERLIMPLIN. (Rubbing and blowing on hands.) The night's become little chilly.

Pause.

BELISA. (Seductively.) Perlimplín.
PERLIMPLIN. (Trembling.) What do you want?

BELISA. It's a sweet name, "Perlimplín."

PERLIMPLIN. Yours is sweeter, Belisa.

BELISA. (Laughing.) Oh, thank you!

*Short Pause.*

PERLIMPLIN. I want to tell you something.

BELISA. What is it?

PERLIMPLIN. I've realized it a little late...but....

BELISA. Tell me.

PERLIMPLIN. Belisa..., I love you.

BELISA. Oh, my little gentleman!...., that's your duty!

PERLIMPLIN. Yes?

BELISA. Yes.

PERLIMPLIN. But, why "yes?"

BELISA. (Sweetly.) Well, because "yes."

PERLIMPLIN. No.

BELISA. Perlimplín!

PERLIMPLIN. No, Belisa; before we were married, I didn't love you.

BELISA. What are you saying?

PERLIMPLIN. I married you...I don't know why...but not for love. I couldn't imagine your body until I peeked through the keyhole as you were being dressed for the wedding. It was then when I felt my love. Then! Like the sting of a dagger in my throat.
BELISA.  *(Intrigued.)*  But what about the other women?

PERLIMPLIN.  What other women?

BELISA.  The ones you knew before me.

PERLIMPLIN.  But, are there other women?

BELISA.  *(Rising.)*  You amaze me.

PERLIMPLIN.  I'm the first to be amazed.  *(Pause.  There are five whistles heard.)*  What's that?

BELISA.  The clock.

PERLIMPLIN.  Is it five?

BELISA.  Bedtime.

PERLIMPLIN.  May I have your permission to take off my jacket?

BELISA.  Of course,  *(Yawning.)*  my little husband.  And turn out the lights if you please.

PERLIMPLIN.  *(Turning out the light; in a soft voice.)*  Belisa.

BELISA.  *(In a loud voice.)*  What, my little boy?

PERLIMPLIN.  *(In a soft voice.)*  I have turned out the light.

BELISA.  *(Teasingly.)*  I can see that.

PERLIMPLIN.  *(In a much softer voice.)*  Belisa...

BELISA.  *(In a loud voice.)*  What, dear?

PERLIMPLIN.  I adore you!

Five much louder whistles are heard.  Two sprites enter from opposite sides of the stage.  They run in with a gray curtain.  The theatre remains in a dream-like half-light  
A sweet, dreamy flute is heard.  The sprites should be two children.
SPRITE #1. How does thee like the darkness?

SPRITE #2. Neither much nor little, my friend.

SPRITE #1. Well, here we are again.

SPRITE #2. What does thee think? Is it always prettier to hide the misdemeanors of others?

SPRITE #1. It makes it harder for the audience to uncover them.

SPRITE #2. Because if they are not covered with care...

SPRITE #1. No-one would ever discover them.

SPRITE #2. And without this covering and uncovering...

SPRITE #1. Why would these poor people stare?

SPRITE #2. (Looking at the curtain.) Don't thee leave a single crack.

SPRITE #1. The cracks tomorrow will be black.

They laugh...

SPRITE #2. When things aren't askew...

SPRITE #1. Man thinks there's no need to review...

SPRITE #2. So he ventures into the dark to discover secrets he already knew.

SPRITE #1. For this reason we are here. The sprites!

SPRITE #2. Did thee know Perlimplín?

SPRITE #1. Since he was a wee thing.

SPRITE #2. And Belisa, does thee know her like that?
SPRITE #1. Very well. Her bedroom smells so heavenly from perfume that it once put me to sleep... and I awoke between the paws of her cat!

*They laugh.*

SPRITE #2. And this matter here was...?

SPRITE #1. Very clear!

SPRITE #2. The audience has been imagining it.

SPRITE #1. Gossip crawling up out of the pit..

SPRITE #2. For this reason, we won't uncover the screen.

SPRITE #1. No, none shall see the scene.

SPRITE #2. The soul of Perlimplín, little and frightened like a newborn duckling, is growing and blooming as we speak.

*They laugh.*

SPRITE #1. The audience is trying to peek.

SPRITE #2. And with reason. Shall off we sneak?

SPRITE #1. Let's go. I already feel the sweet breeze of morning around my head.

SPRITE #2. Five cold camellias of dawn are opening around the walls of the bed.

SPRITE #1. Five balconies are looking over the city.

*They rise and put on their blue capes.*

SPRITE #2. What a pity! Don Perlimplín, have we been helpful or harmful?

SPRITE #1. Helpful. It would not be fair to put before the audience the misfortunes of a man so true.
SPRITE #2. It's also true, my little friend, that it's much different to say, "I saw it" than "I heard someone say it."

SPRITE #1. Tomorrow everyone will know.

SPRITE #2. It's what we wanted to show.

SPRITE #1. The world thrives on gossip.

SPRITE #2. Shhhh...

*Flutes begin to play.*

SPRITE #1. Shhh...

SPRITE #2. Shall we go into the dark?

SPRITE #1. Let us go, my little lark.

SPRITE #2. Now?

SPRITE #1. Now.

_They leave with the curtain._ We see Perlimplín in the bed fully dressed. He has a large set of horns on his head. Belisa is lying beside him half-naked. The five balconies are open, the light of dawn streams in through them.

PERLIMPLIN. *(Desperate.)* Belisa! Belisa! Talk to me!

BELISA. *(Pretending to wake up.)* Perlimplínny, what do you want?

PERLIMPLIN. Tell me now!

BELISA. What do you want me to tell you? I fell asleep before you did.

*Perlimplín gets out of bed. He is still wearing his jacket.*

PERLIMPLIN. Why are the balconies open?

BELISA. Because...last night the wind blew like never before.
PERLIMPLIN. Why do all five balconies have ladders down to the ground?

BELISA. Because...that's the custom in my mother's country.

PERLIMPLIN. And whose five hats are those? The ones I see under the balconies?

BELISA. *(Jumping out of bed.)* They belong to the drunks that come and go, Perlimpliny! My love!

*Perlimplín looks at her; fascinated and with love.*

PERLIMPLIN. Belisa! Belisa! And why not? You explained it all very well. I believe you! Why would it be any other way?

BELISA. *(Sweetly.)* I'm not a little liar.

PERLIMPLIN. And each minute I love you more!

BELISA. That's how I like it.

PERLIMPLIN. For the first time in my life I am happy! *(He pulls her close and hugs her. But after a moment, he pulls her away sharply.)* Belisa. Who's been kissing you? Don't lie, I know it!

BELISA. *(Tying back her hair.)* I already know that you know it. You're so silly! *(In a soft voice.)* You! You've been kissing me!

PERLIMPLIN. Yes! I've been kissing you...but...if you had been kissed by anyone else...if someone kissed you...Do you love me?

BELISA. *(Lifting her naked arm to him.)* Yes, my little Perlimplíny.

PERLIMPLIN. Well, then what difference does it make! *(He pulls her in to his breast.)* Are you Belisa?

BELISA. *(Sweetly and in a low voice.)* Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

PERLIMPLIN. It's like I'm in a dream.

BELISA. Look, Perlimplín, close the balcony doors before everyone gets up.
PERLIMPLIN. Why? We've slept enough. Let's watch the morning come...Don't you like it?

BELISA. Yes, but...(She sits on the bed.)

PERLIMPLIN. I've never seen the sun rise...(BELISA, exhausted, falls into the pillows.) It's a miracle that...My God...touches me! And you don't like it? (He kneels beside her bed.)
Belisa, are you asleep?

BELISA. (Dreamily.) Yes.

Perlimplín, tiptoeing about, covers Belisa in a red blanket. An intense and golden light comes through the balcony doors. A flock of paper birds fly by, bringing in the sound of morning bells. Perlimplín sits on the end of the bed.

Perlimplín.
Love, love
that is wounded.
Wounded from fleeing love;
wounded,
by this deathly love.
Let everyone know it was just the nightingale.
This knife with four blades,
shatters throats and causes forgetfulness.
Take my hand, love,
because I am wounded,
wounded from fleeing love,
Wounded!
by this deathly love.

Curtain.

Scene II

The dining room of Perlimplín. The perspectives are deliciously wrong. Dinner is painted on the table, like a primitive meal.

PERLIMPLIN. You'll do as I tell you.

MARCOLFA. (Crying.) I will, sir.
PERLIMPLIN. Marcolfa, why do you keep crying?

MARCOLFA. You know why, sir! The night of your wedding five men climbed through your balconies. Five! From the five races of the earth. The European, with his beard; the Indian, the African, the Asian and the North American! All without you finding out.

PERLIMPLIN. It doesn't matter in the least.

MARCOLFA. And believe it or not, yesterday I saw her with another one.

PERLIMPLIN. (Intrigued.) Really?

MARCOLFA. And she didn't try to hide from me.

PERLIMPLIN. But I'm so happy, Marcolfa.

MARCOLFA. I'm astonished, sir.

PERLIMPLIN. You have no idea how happy I am. I've learned many things, and above all I can imagine them doing them.

MARCOLFA. My dear sir, you love her too much.

PERLIMPLIN. So much less than she deserves.

MARCOLFA. She's coming.

PERLIMPLIN. Get out!

MARCOLFA leaves and PERLIMPLIN hides behind the corner.

BELISA enters.

BELISA. I didn't see him again! All the way down the boulevard, they all followed me...except him. He should have dark skin and his kisses must be perfumed with the sting of saffron and cloves. Sometimes he walks under my balcony slowly rocking his hand in a way that makes my breasts shudder.

PERLIMPLIN. Ahem!