

Mrs. Dobromilova

A chauvinistic and patriarchal stage play

Paweł Biernacki, Kraków, 2026

The characters' names have been changed at their request to conceal the fact that this is all true

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CHARACTERS:
EXECUTIONER'S WIFE
INQUISITOR
TROUBADOUR

Scene 1

A room in Master Dobromił's house

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE

INQUISITOR

TROUBADOUR

INQUISITOR:

My respects to Mrs. Dobromilova! I've brought a guest. Allow me to introduce... Mr. Piórkowski.

TROUBADOUR:

I am Piórkowski. A troubadour. I am honored to meet you.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Dobromilova. It's a pleasure. Your name is Piórkowski? My husband has mentioned you. Unfortunately, he's busy right now, so if this can wait, I'd prefer not to disturb him. He doesn't like that. And I'd like to have a quick word with the Inquisitor...

TROUBADOUR:

I wouldn't want to cause any inconvenience. I came with the Inquisitor solely for the sake of company. Selflessly, one might say. I won't hide the fact that I'd be happy to chat with Master Dobromił again, of course once he's finished.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

My husband is in the workshop. I can show you the way, Mr. Piórkowski. But it's better not to go in—it's such a mess in there right now...

INQUISITOR:

I strongly advise against it.

(to the Executioner's Wife)

Mr. Piórkowski is an artist. He sings, creates, composes... He's a versatile artist!

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE: *(To the Troubadour)*

And, excuse me, can you slaughter a rooster? I bought one today; it's locked up. In a wicker cage by the entrance.

TROUBADOUR:

I'm afraid I'm not quite qualified and won't be able to help. My domain is the word. Music and the word. In short—singing. My ambition is to express the most tender feelings, to give the listener a poignant experience, to make them feel deep sorrow, to make them reflect on the meaning of life... My song may cause pain, make the listener aware of all the cruelty in the world, all the bottomless despair of life, all the injustice...

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Excuse me for asking such an indiscreet question... Do you make a living from this? From causing pain and making people aware of cruelty?

TROUBADOUR:

Well... it's not so much that I make a living from it as that I'm trying to make a living. Actually, I'm in the process of changing careers right now. I intend to become a playwright. I want to write plays. Does that surprise you, Ms. Dobromiłova?

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

You know, Mr. Piórkowski... It's not my place to judge. What surprises me, really, is that you're so open about all of this. At first, I thought you might be looking for a job. But my husband always says that nothing disqualifies an executioner quite like a tendency toward sadism. As I said, it's your choice and your decision, Mr. Piórkowski. My husband has spoken very highly of you, and yet you so openly admit to sadistic inclinations—and on top of that, you want to write plays...

INQUISITOR:

I think Mr. Piórkowski values inflicting suffering solely in a moral, existential sense... It is the kind of suffering a person needs to feel human. And as for the plays... Forgive me, ma'am, but no work is shameful! Mr. Piórkowski will undoubtedly soon conquer every stage in the entire Kingdom with his works. Well, what's wrong with someone writing plays, if he is nonetheless an honest and decent man?

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Mr. Inquisitor! Since you've brought up this matter, I'd like to make a few comments. I don't think there's any point in trying Mr. Piórkowski's patience any further! (*To the Troubadour*) If you don't mind...

TROUBADOUR:

Not at all! Perhaps I'll take the liberty of going for a walk, or waiting on a bench.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

I'd be grateful, Mr. Piórkowski. Just please don't let the rooster out! And please don't sing to him! He's already looking so glum... And at the market he seemed so full of vigor!

Scene 2

A room in Master Dobromił's house

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE

INQUISITOR

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Mr. Sprawiedlicki! Please be so kind as to take a seat. You seemed to suggest just a moment ago that inflicting moral suffering on someone is entirely justified. Is that correct?

INQUISITOR:

Ms. Dobromiłowa! Please don't get so worked up. The situation is complicated. I realize that certain personnel decisions in our Chamber of Torture may have raised some doubts on your part. Mr. Dobromił mentioned that you weren't entirely satisfied with the direction of the changes. But, believe me, these changes are the result of extensive consultations. They reflect our commitment to equal treatment! To avoiding any discrimination! Among other things, we're opening the door to a career for you as well!

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Mr. Sprawiedlicki... You're talking to me about a career and opportunities. Do you know that I could have become a clerk's wife? I had offers like that...

INQUISITOR:

Mr. Dobromił, as a true professional through and through, naturally does not bring up topics unrelated to his work... But I am certain that you had—and of course still have—a range of opportunities. That's exactly what we're fighting for! All our efforts will ultimately benefit you as well, dear Mrs. Dobromiłowa We're looking out for your very best interests! Even if our support for movements aimed at emancipation seems controversial to you for various reasons...

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Approval? Or perhaps tacit approval? Controversial? Allow me, Mr. Sprawiedlicki, to remind you of something. For many years, you have actively supported movements calling for the emancipation or liberation of women from the oppression of patriarchy! You take part in demonstrations!

INQUISITOR:

But come now, Mrs. Dobromiłowa! The institution I represent—the Inquisition—is sometimes accused of bias, intolerance, and a propensity for violence. Who else but an Inquisitor—in this case, myself—should attend such a demonstration to express my approval of it? My symbolic support?

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Symbolic support? I saw you with a banner! You were waving it! Shall I quote the slogans you were chanting?

INQUISITOR:

I feel compelled to deny that, Mrs. Dobromiłowa. I don't recall having a banner or waving one. If anything, my presence was an act of solidarity; I was expressing support and fostering an atmosphere of dialogue and equal opportunity...

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Mr. Sprawiedlicki... You sound just like my husband, who has a habit of joking with clients from time to time, saying, "I'm not feeling so great today! I think one of us won't make it through the day!"

INQUISITOR:

I may indeed have held up a banner once or twice. It was probably something about the role of the Inquisition, for example, "The Inquisition supports equality and tolerance!" But that doesn't mean I was waving it around! My presence at that demonstration expressed understanding and support for women's rights. But also a certain reflection. A sense of duty that weighs on the Inquisition, especially toward oppressed and discriminated-against groups. Understanding for the efforts of the Kingdom's authorities. Fear of possible abuses. Of the irresponsible implementation of overly radical changes. Skepticism and caution.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Interesting. I saw something different. Zero reflection! No fear! No trace of skepticism! You were overjoyed, Mr. Sprawiedlicki. You were grinning from ear to ear!

INQUISITOR:

I have a cheerful disposition. Perhaps my satisfaction with the public support for the ideals of equality—and for the ideals of tolerance—shone through on my face. By no means was I expressing blind, unbridled optimism or thoughtless enthusiasm...

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Mr. Sprawiedlicki! I don't mean to be vulgar, but my husband didn't even show that much enthusiasm on our wedding night as you did marching in that demonstration! I saw you clearly! But I didn't see the slightest reflection, the slightest consideration of the consequences! And then I find out that in our Chamber of Torture, they're recruiting apprentices of "both genders," while emphasizing the importance of gender parity. My knees went weak when my old man let that slip! After all, this is a veiled way to hire two female apprentices, because neither my Dobromił nor you, Mr. Sprawiedlicki, exactly resemble a woman!

INQUISITOR:

But a woman can master the art of execution no worse than a man, as evidenced by many highly insightful books written by world-class specialists in this field. Commissioning these works cost us a considerable sum, so we cannot throw that money down the drain by backing out halfway through this investment! A woman has just as much right to develop her skills in her chosen profession as a man! You cannot deny women the right to an education!

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

That's exactly what I can—and I do refuse! If she wants an education, let her get it under someone else's guidance, not my husband's! I have my own rights too, Mr. Sprawiedlicki! After all, you can't teach a young lady like that the executioner's trade. That means you're hiring two young women as apprentices and that my Dobromił is to teach them!

INQUISITOR:

Apprentices must be young by their very nature, Mrs. Dobromiłova. Training an apprentice is an investment. The executioner's craft has traditionally been dominated by men, which is the result of

harmful stereotypes and prejudices. It makes no economic sense to hire an apprentice of advanced age. For obvious reasons, we also do not have any female Master Executioners on staff. Therefore, they must be trained by the Master Executioners we do have—such as your esteemed husband, Master Dobromił. The entire Executioner’s Guild has shown understanding and flexibility toward the aspirations of the new female candidates. Yet you seem to be guided by some personal agenda of your own...

EXECUTIONER’S WIFE:

This isn’t my agenda—it’s our agenda, Mr. Sprawiedlicki! Dobromił’s and mine! That’s why I’m his wife—so I know what’s good for him! At first, I didn’t know what was going on. For example, my husband started getting ready for work a bit more carefully. He bought himself a new jacket because he claimed that work clothes are one thing, but he also has to look like a human being when he goes to work. Before, he hardly ever cleaned his shoes—just enough to remove any traces of blood. And now he’s started polishing them with lard, day in and day out! And he needs a freshly laundered shirt every day. He shaves! He combs his hair! He sprays on cologne! At first, silly me, I was happy. I thought maybe he was taking such good care of himself for my sake. But at work, he started staying late more and more often. He’d say there was so much work, that he still had practical sessions with the apprentices. One day, something struck me, so I went to the Chamber of Torture to supposedly bring him lunch. And I saw those apprentices!

INQUISITOR:

But Mrs. Dobromiłowa! You must have misinterpreted some random incident... Mr. Dobromił, being a conscientious and responsible man...

EXECUTIONER’S WIFE: (ironically)

Yes, of course! I misinterpreted it. And employees throughout the Kingdom, far and wide, have a habit of introducing themselves to young apprentices by first and foremost declaring their marital status... “Good morning, I’m married! Master Torturer, it’s a pleasure to meet you!”

INQUISITOR:

I understand your irony, but marital status is essentially a private matter for an employee. It’s for the HR Department’s information. Or, more broadly, the Administration’s. So in this case, for my information. At work, we prioritize complete professionalism. Besides, an employee can change the marital status, after all. So what, are they supposed to declare it to everyone right away?

EXECUTIONER’S WIFE: (ironically)

But of course they can change it. Or they might accidentally say they’re a widower. Or they might even forget they’re married. Who would have the head for such details when you have to train young apprentices in the secrets of the trade...

INQUISITOR:

I’m sure Mr. Dobromił has made it clear to the apprentices entrusted to his care that he intends to fulfill his duty of teaching them the craft as scrupulously as possible—and nothing more.

EXECUTIONER’S WIFE: (ironically)

But why are you limiting yourself so much, Mr. Sprawiedlicki? Just say outright that during those extra hours, when I’m waiting for him at home with supper, he stays late and tells his apprentices exclusively about the art of execution, taking both of them on his lap for greater effect...

(scathingly)

I saw those young ladies! When I brought him his midday meal! They could both be his daughters! If not his granddaughters! And dressed in such a way that it's a shame to look! Cleavage down to the waist! Unbuttoned! Skirts so short that in the old days, you'd have been flogged and banished from the city for wearing such an outfit! Is this how an employee of the renowned Chamber of Torture is supposed to look? And if a client requests spiritual comfort and the priest is met with such a sight, who will comfort the priest, if I may ask?

INQUISITOR:

Young people are different these days, Ms. Dobromilova. They're trying to assert their independence. They're allowing themselves to wear outfits that would once have been considered too provocative, or incompatible with the dignity of the Chamber of Torture. Or with the work ethic of a craftsman. Perhaps I could intervene in this matter, but I'd need some basis for doing so. For example, a complaint from staff or a customer. Those are the legal requirements. If no one complains, there's officially nothing I can do.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

So I shouldn't do something unofficially... Mr. Sprawiedlicki! I know full well that all you men cover for each other. I once specifically asked you why my husband stayed so late yesterday, and you told me he had a presentation for a foreign customer! You forgot that he had the day off!

INQUISITOR:

Strictly speaking, what you have done, Mrs. Dobromilova, is unethical. You have resorted to provocation against the Inquisitor. Provocation as a tactic is permitted only in exceptional cases. And of course, ordinary subjects may not use it unless they obtain permission from the appropriate official of the Kingdom. Furthermore, you may not use the information obtained in this manner, as it is illegal. No court, including the Inquisition, has the right to use knowledge acquired in this way.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

What do you say...? Whose permission should I have obtained, then, to carry out such an operation against you?

INQUISITOR:

Mine, or possibly my superior's. But in the case of the Inquisition, one must first obtain an audience with that superior. And that must take place outside the Kingdom's borders. As an autonomous institution, we are not subject to any official within the Kingdom.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Yes, I know. And permission for that audience is granted on the basis of a recommendation, which must be requested from you, isn't that right, Mr. Sprawiedlicki? Do you know what I feel like doing right now?

INQUISITOR:

I hope... I mean, I assume you're referring to the rooster?

Scene 3

A room in Master Dobromił's house

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE

INQUISITOR

TROUBADOUR

TROUBADOUR:

Excuse me, are you two done yet?

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Of course. Please come in, Mr. Piórkowski. We were just talking with the Inquisitor about equality. I've heard a thing or two and had a few questions on the subject. Equality is a very beautiful idea, don't you think? The Inquisitor is a supporter of any changes that meet society's expectations.

TROUBADOUR:

Well, you could say it's a matter of perspective. I recall hearing just recently the story of a certain Mayoress who revised her views on this matter in an incredibly radical way!

INQUISITOR:

Have you heard that story, Mr. Piórkowski? It was quite the talk of the town, unfortunately.

TROUBADOUR:

Why "unfortunately"?

INQUISITOR:

Whenever someone changes their mind, it leaves a somewhat unpleasant impression. It simply follows from this fact that humans are fallible. Either he was wrong before changing his mind, or he was wrong after changing his mind—that much is clear. And this concerned a public figure. Such a reflection on human fallibility, especially when needlessly publicized, undermines trust in institutions related to the justice system. It undermines authority. And once authority is undermined, it is lost forever, for there is nothing to prop it up. There is only one institution that is infallible. And that is, of course, the Inquisition, which I have the honor of representing.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

And I was beginning to think you were referring to feminine intuition, Mr. Inquisitor, which I, in turn, have the honor of representing. I know this story too, because it involved a colleague of my husband's. I heard it from my husband himself.

TROUBADOUR:

From my point of view, that's a brilliant plot twist! A fascinating dramatic structure! Well, you tell me: The Mayoress devoted her entire career to the fight for equality, for the introduction of gender parity in the Kingdom's administration, and for women's right to pursue education in a wide variety of professions. And then, suddenly, such a radical change!

INQUISITOR:

There was no radical change, Mr. Piórkowski. You're unnecessarily looking for a sensation—I won't speculate on your reasons. This case requires the right approach and a certain legal intuition, as it's easy to succumb to the temptation of making a hasty judgment. The Mayoress you mention always remained true to her ideals—that is, until the end of her career. As long as she served as Mayoress, she

never wavered in the fight against discrimination against women and persistently pursued a program of equality and tolerance. And that's all there is to say about it!

TROUBADOUR:

Of course, I understand that. As I am an artist, the struggle for ideals is very close to my heart. And yet, subsequent events have cast a certain ambivalence over the figure of the Mayoress. I don't look at things as a lawyer, Mr. Inquisitor, but as a playwright—or rather, a future playwright. After all, she was charged with breach of trust!

INQUISITOR:

Of course. I know this case very well. A lack of trust disqualifies a public official. It prevents them from properly fulfilling their duties. But these two things must be distinguished from one another. The Mayoress has lost public trust, and this has made it impossible for her to continue serving as Mayoress. This merely serves as proof of the integrity of the justice system in our Kingdom. But that doesn't disqualify her platform! It doesn't discredit her ideals! In particular, it in no way diminishes the ideals of emancipation, equality, and the right of women to pursue an education in any profession of their choosing! If I were to prove that you, Mr. Piórkowski, had committed a crime deserving severe punishment, would I thereby prove that your ideals are worthless? Or would I thereby call into question your competence as a Troubadour? Of course not! These are two different matters, and far-reaching simplifications should be avoided. The Kingdom has lost its trust in the Mayoress, but it still believes in equality!

TRUBADOUR:

As far as I recall, the charge brought against her was “loss of trust by neighboring kingdoms.” That actually means it wasn't our Kingdom that lost trust in Mayoress, but the neighboring kingdoms!

INQUISITOR:

Mr. Piórkowski, sometimes you fail to see the simplest things, and other times you split hairs. Well, how was our Kingdom supposed to place its trust in the Mayoress if the neighboring Kingdoms had lost their trust in her? How is it even possible to hold public office in our Kingdom without the trust of the neighboring Kingdoms? After all, that makes any cooperation impossible. Since no one trusts the Mayoress, we, too, must seriously consider whether to continue supporting her. This is a matter of life and death, because a person holding such an important position could act to the detriment of neighboring kingdoms, and our Kingdom must do something about it! Even I, as a supporter of the emancipation movement, have had the opportunity to work with the Mayoress. To offer her my support... Don't I have a right to my own opinions just because I'm an Inquisitor? I lost trust in her when everyone else did, because after all, I have to take public opinion into account. I can't just be some kind of egotist. And yet, I'll admit, I felt genuinely sad on a human level when I watched her execution...

TRUBADOUR:

I didn't have the pleasure of seeing it, but I heard her execution was a success. I mean, a success artistically speaking—apparently there was a standing ovation. Flowers were thrown onto the scaffold. People even shouted “once again!” which, as I imagine, wasn't really an option...

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

As a spectacle, it was apparently very successful indeed. But my husband told me that there were supposedly some technical shortcomings—obvious to a specialist, but unnoticed by the crowd. The Mayoress had a special respect for local craftsmanship, especially that of executioners. The

Executioners' Guild often got involved in supporting demonstrations for the movement backed by the Mayoress. I was even once asked to take part in a demonstration because, as a woman, I had no formal connection to the Executioners' Guild, so I could take on the role of an independent supporter of the emancipation movement. But something made me refuse. Even back then, this whole emancipation thing seemed suspicious to me.

INQUISITOR:

That's because Ms. Dobromilova is looking at it through the lens of a narrow interest group.

TROUBADOUR:

Allow me to point out, Mr. Inquisitor, that in reality, almost everyone views the world through the lens of a narrow group of interests. Those who are willing to sacrifice themselves, who wish to serve Humanity with their genius, with their Art—such people are practically nonexistent. I suspect I am the only one. Do you know what a burden that is? To be the sole, irreplaceable, and brilliant artist, to suffer for millions, and at the same time to feel the bitterness of being underappreciated. A mission to save the world in my heart, and barely two thalers in my purse.

INQUISITOR:

Perhaps you're simply too wasteful with money. I meant it in a different sense, Mr. Piórkowski. I, for example, support women's emancipation because I consider the idea to be right, just, and thoroughly desirable. Not because I expect to gain anything from it personally. I support women's right to pursue an education in any profession, even though I am not a woman myself. You can't focus solely on yourself. That would be selfish. You have to look at the bigger picture.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

The Inquisitor knows his business, and I know mine. Well, tell me, should I be the one carrying the banner that says "Girls to the Axes!"? I'm not complaining—I'm managing somehow—but a young girl should be the one carrying it. The message would be more credible that way.

TROUBADOUR:

But come on, Mrs. Dobromiłowa! You look just like a young girl!

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Mr. Piórkowski... I'm no young girl. But you sure know how to sweet-talk a woman... Those artists.

TROUBADOUR:

I'll be damned! If I didn't know that Mrs. Dobromiłowa was Mrs. Dobromiłowa, I don't know what else I'd say...

INQUISITOR:

I'm not saying this to you, Mrs. Dobromiłowa, nor to Mr. Piórkowski, but I'm just making a philosophical observation: when artists compliment the food, they're really thinking of the lady of the house, and when they compliment the lady of the house, they're really thinking of the food...

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

You sure know how to get under a person's skin, Mr. Inquisitor. But so do I. My old man used to say that, since the Mayoress was known for her fight for emancipation, the Chamber of Torture—which was responsible for her execution—sent three apprentice executioners to behead her, girls who

had begun their training in the executioner's craft perhaps as little as a month earlier. They were given a single axe—a dull one, at that—so they could sharpen it themselves just before the execution.

TROUBADOUR:

Apparently, it took them a while to behead her between the three of them. But they got a round of applause anyway. Afterward, the circle of the now-former and decapitated Mayoress threatened to cut something off themselves—namely, funding for this Chamber of Torture. The threats they made! They said they'd stop booking advertisements delivered by heralds at events organized by this very Chamber of Torture. But its owner reportedly stated that he had to adhere to the quotas—which, incidentally, Mayoress herself had pushed through—as part of the fight against discrimination against women. And he quietly threatened them that if they kept picking on him, he'd release documents showing that the Mayoress had offered him financial benefits in exchange for having a man to execute her...

INQUISITOR:

But Mr. Piórkowski! You are repeating rumors—taken out of context and deliberately distorted, no less... It is clear that your sole intention is to stir up unrest and discredit the Kingdom's authorities. After her conviction, Mayoress lost her position as Mayoress and became a private citizen. She had every right to change her mind, and since she was no longer a government official, she had every right to act according to whatever criteria she chose! In her own interest, as she understood it! Perhaps she simply felt like it! And you are clearly trying to create the impression that the Kingdom's authorities change their minds depending on the situation. I warn you that if it ever occurs to you to turn this into, say, a play, we'll meet in the Chamber of Torture, Mr. Piórkowski!

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Calm down, Mr. Inquisitor... Who would want to see a play like that in the theater... What sane person would even pay for a ticket to watch something like that! It's not even fit for the circus! It never even crossed Mr. Piórkowski's mind—am I right, Mr. Piórkowski?

TROUBADOUR:

Well, strictly speaking, I wouldn't want to take such a radical stance, Ms. Dobromiřova! But since the Inquisitor would see in this a certain sarcasm, or even criticism of the Kingdom's authorities, I have to take it seriously. We artists are independent. City Hall is independent. The city enjoys independence. Many institutions, including educational and religious ones, enjoy a high degree of independence. The judiciary is independent. Commerce is completely privatized, and therefore independent. It follows from all this that, as you yourself understand, Ms. Dobromiřova, we are all, in a certain way, dependent on one another. But if we were to try... Under a pseudonym...

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

Come on, Mr. Piórkowski! Would you gentlemen do us the honor of staying for dinner?

INQUISITOR:

I'm afraid I'll have to excuse myself! I kiss Mrs. Dobromiřova's hands! I must run. Duties! Please give my regards to your esteemed husband.

TROUBADOUR:

And as for me, to tell the truth, as an artist, I'd be delighted! But as for the rooster... I'm not very skilled with an axe, and as a complete amateur in this matter, I'm afraid I won't be able to be of any help to Mrs. Dobromiřova.

EXECUTIONER'S WIFE:

I'll take care of it myself. Please make yourself at home, Mr. Piórkowski. My husband will be back shortly. Goodbye, Mr. Inquisitor!