NON

a one-act play

by

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WHO *(3GN / any race or ethnicity)*
BURLAP A dying political independent.
PUCHIS Candidate for the highest office who mainly favors the status quo.
LÉMEAU Candidate for the highest office who mainly advocates for change.

WHERE
A reception room in another world with some resemblances to our own.

WHEN
The present and yet mired in the past. The day after the election.

**Notes*:
Lémeau is pronounced "LAY-moh," unless mispronounced on purpose.
Puchis mispronounces it as "Lay-MOHHH." Burlap says it as "L'moh."
Puchis is prounounced "PYOO-kis."

(In a rictus of mysterious abdominal pain, BURLAP is waiting in a room with three fine chairs, sitting in the middle one. Apparel is roughspun; hair, tousled; face, sweaty.

From a window, a restless crowd is heard.

On a pedestal sits a fine decorative pillow with two balls — one yellow, one purple. A golden scepter lies beside the pillow. The sight annoys Burlap, and exacerbates their nausea to the point of dry-heaving. Twice.

They need to spit. There is nowhere to spit. So they spit into one of their own pockets.

There's an earthquake. Every second is painful to Burlap.

In the aftermath, the crowd hubbubs and then sounds normal again. Burlap groans onto their feet, limps to the pedestal, picks up the balls and puts their face into the decorative pillow, letting out a muffled scream as PUCHIS rolls in, wearing a powdered wig and purple cravat. Puchis watches with interest.)

PUCHIS

Hello. You must be the non.

BURLAP

I am. You must be the non-non.

PUCHIS

(chuckles)

You peg me, friend. Deeply. Are you feeling up to snuff?

BURLAP

If y'got some.

PUCHIS

I have the finest.

(From a tin, Puchis offers a sprinkle of powdered tobacco leaves.

Burlap puts down the yellow ball, accepts the powder, and inhales it forcefully into their nose. Puchis also snuffs some.)

BURLAP

Appreciation.

PUCHIS

My pleasure.

BURLAP

Good snuff.

PUCHIS

Another pinch?

BURLAP

I'm one-'n'-done.

PUCHIS

Moderation. I respect that. How long have you been a non?

BURLAP

Since I was little.

PUCHIS

I respect that too. From the bowels of my heart. My father's valet was a non.
(another snuff)
And treated like a piss stain by most of our family, but not by me. As you will discover, my lemon-scarfed opponent scuffs at free cognition whilst I —

(LÉMEAU sweeps in with wig and cravat. Theirs is yellow. A word for the hatred between Puchis and Lémeau: elaborate.)

LÉMEAU

Puchis!

PUCHIS

Lémeauuu.

LÉMEAU

By official writ, we must enter together.

PUCHIS

I'm aware.

LÉMEAU

And yet you barged in ahead of me?

PUCHIS

I was going to egress and then regress with you.

LÉMEAU
That would not satisfy the law.

PUCHIS
The law says nought about *when* the entrance has to happen. “Candidates must effect an entrance in symphony.”

LÉMEAU
“Synchrony.” And that clause refers to meeting with “said citizen(s).”
(to Burlap)
Hello.

BURLAP
How do.

PUCHIS
If you consult the text, you’ll find the moment of duplectic entry is not specified.

LÉMEAU
Why are they fondling that orb?

(Burlap sets the purple ball down.)

PUCHIS
It’s not forbidden to play with it.

LÉMEAU
I was not hearing playtime in the foyer. You are poisoning the well.

PUCHIS
Your well’s tainted already; it runneth over with tallow, pus, and fish oil.

LÉMEAU
Anyone would drink fish oil before the clotted blood you’re serving.

PUCHIS
Mmm, lovely to see you, Lémeauuu, I missed you in the Assembly after you lost your election to a Purple. Shall we begin? Let me introduce you —

LÉMEAU
I can only begin if two conditions are met. Number one — What’s your name?

BURLAP
Call me Burlap.

LÉMEAU
Burlap? Is that your first or second name?

BURLAP
My only name. My parents quit filling out the form after that.

LÉMEAU
Ah, well, Burlap will award *me* one point for law and order.

PUCHIS

Pah! Ridiculous.

BURLAP

One to L'meau.

PUCHIS

Hold on now.

LÉMEAU

(to Burlap)

Actually, my friend, with regards, my name is pronounced Lémeau. My challenger pronounces it incorrectly on purpose.

PUCHIS

I never.

LÉMEAU

The name is Lémeau, accent on the E.

PUCHIS

I do accent the E.

LÉMEAU

The first E.

PUCHIS

Fine. LÉ-MEAU.

LÉMEAU

There is one stress, it's on the first syllable. Lé.

PUCHIS

Lé.

LÉMEAU

Meau. Lémeau.

PUCHIS

… I'm saying what you're saying.

(Lémeau strokes their cravat with barely contained irritation)

What's number two?

LÉMEAU

We go out, come back in.

PUCHIS

I suggested that!

LÉMEAU

As a jest; I am in earnest.

(Beat. Puchis walks out. Lémeau follows. Burlap mulls over their miserable lot. Puchis and Lémeau re-enter in synchrony.)

PUCHIS

Happy now?

LÉMEAU

My happiness is peripheral. We are nothing without our institutions.

BURLAP

'Scuse me, are we done? Can I buzz off?

PUCHIS

No, sorry, you must cast your lot. Try to leave now, a fellow with extra-large pectorals will be very upset.

BURLAP

I gave a point to them, you came in together, that settles it.

PUCHIS

Not yet, my friend: "in the event of a tie" —

LÉMEAU

"With citizen(s) failing to cast their lot" —

PUCHIS

"Candidates must persuade said citizen(s) to their side" —

LÉMEAU

"At the place and *time* appointed by the Parties" —

PUCHIS

"In pursuit of three points, awarded at the citizen(s)' dissection" —

LÉMEAU

"*Discretion*."

PUCHIS

Same thing.

LÉMEAU

(to Burlap)

"And upon a triple score, the citizen(s)" — or citizen — "will pass the correspondent orb and scepter to the prizewinner in a public ceremony." Of course, the matter is complicated by the fact of your dubiety.

PUCHIS

Their what?

LÉMEAU

Unaffiliation to either party. Which I admire.

PUCHIS

Less than me.

LÉMEAU

Now in truth there's only one sane option, Burlap — any suggestion of equivalence between us? fallacious — but I relate to your avoidance of Purple.

BURLAP

I wouldn't say I'm avoidin' Purple.

PUCHIS

Ha.

BURLAP

Just not walkin' their way.

LÉMEAU

Ha.

BURLAP

It's politics altogether, really.

LÉMEAU

Agreed: I deplore politics.

PUCHIS

I condemn them.

LÉMEAU

I bite my thumb at them.

PUCHIS

I eat my thumb.

LÉMEAU

They've ruined us.

PUCHIS

They've elevated some and ruined others, that's the problem, don't you think?

LÉMEAU

Cynical simplistic rhetoric, that is the Gorgon we fight, not each other, eh?

(The partisans await an answer…)

BURLAP

You despise politickin', eh?

PUCHIS

Infinitely.

LÉMEAU

Infinitely.

(They startle at their sameness and look away from it, stroking their cravats.)

BURLAP
Hm. So… Why live at the center of the swamp then?

PUCHIS
Under my administration, the swamp will be drained.

LÉMEAU
Under my administration, the “swamp” will be tested for “toxic elements” whilst a committee studies the “water flow,” and any “beavers” or “bullfrogs” or “biting flies”—

PUCHIS
We get it.

LÉMEAU
I have a six-part plan.

PUCHIS
I’ve got one: no swamp.

LÉMEAU
Yes, but how will you accomplish that?

PUCHIS
Thusly, Lémeauuu: I gather everyone into my office; to their faces I say, “Stop it. Now. Or else.” And who’s standing behind me? Men. With extra-large pectorals.

LÉMEAU
(to Burlap)
Surely, you’re not persuaded by shows of might. You strike me as a person of brains over brawn.

BURLAP
Not in particular.

LÉMEAU
No preference?

BURLAP
Both have a place.

LÉMEAU
Yes, but brawn should have no place *within* free society, you must agree there.

PUCHIS
There can be no liberty without lustiness.

BURLAP
Don’t care for debatin’ with you.

LÉMEAU
What do you care about, Burlap? Please sit. I want to hear what you care about.

(Lémeau sits, raring to learn.)

BURLAP

Well… that'd take some time.

LÉMEAU

I have nowhere else to be.

PUCHIS

(also sitting)

Neither do I. Please, Burlap, the floor belongs to you. What do you treasure in the inmost hollow of your head? What titivates you? What rises your gorge?

LÉMEAU

Titillates. Not titivates. And you are thinking of something besides gorge.

PUCHIS

I said gorge, I mean gorge.

LÉMEAU

Nobody wants a risen gorge.

PUCHIS

Let's take a poll. How do you like your gorge?

BURLAP

(deadpan)

That's private.

PUCHIS

I respect that.

LÉMEAU

Do you know what a gorge is?

PUCHIS

They have a line here, do not cross it.

(to Burlap)

Tell us only what you wish to divulvage.

BURLAP

… I'm tired. … I'm hungry. Although nauseous. … I'm scared that I might be permanently constipated … And if whatever's happenin' to me is worse than that, well… I worry for what my little ones will do without me.

LÉMEAU

I tire as well, my friend. I too hunger and reject the meal on offer. I had a leg rash recently; it scared the science out of me. Like you, Burlap, I despair for the next generation. But under me, I promise you will sleep better.

PUCHIS

Pah.

LÉMEAU

My first priority is reducing the work day.

PUCHIS
How do you know they're tired of work?!

BURLAP
I'm tired of work.
(their abdomen)
But the big problem —

LÉMEAU
How long are your shifts, ten or twelve hours?

BURLAP
On a good day.

PUCHIS
You're a go-getter.

BURLAP
Don't get much.

LÉMEAU
And that's intolerable. You had no time to cast your lot.

BURLAP
Oh no, I had the time, I was off work yesterday.

LÉMEAU
You were.

BURLAP
All day.

LÉMEAU
Could you not find a polling station? Would they not accept a ballot in absentia?

PUCHIS
Did you lose your papers? Do you have papers?

BURLAP
I could, they would, I did not, and I do.

(Pause.)

LÉMEAU
Well. I confess my discombobulation. My attendants told me you'd failed to cast your lot and I assumed deep, structural reasons.

PUCHIS
I think they abstrained out of distrust — given what the Yellows did last election.

LÉMEAU
Don't.

PUCHIS
There are questions, that's all I'm saying.

LÉMEAU
Asked by you.

PUCHIS
If I ask, it's a question.

LÉMEAU
As a treehouse built by toddlers is still a "house," yes. Are you telling me what you feel, Burlap, is total apathy for the future?

BURLAP
No. I would characterize the feeling as… revulsion… for you. Personally. And you. Not *total* revulsion. It's like… I'm eatin' a baguette, or about to, and I see the bread has two fuzzy spots, and I could pick them off and keep eatin' 'n' yahh —

(Another earthquake. Burlap is yiping, the quake hurting them even more this time. Puchis shelters under the pedestal. Lémeau counts the length of the tremor. The world stops shaking. Outside, the crowd hubbubs. Then reverts to normal.)

PUCHIS
Zounds! How many counts was *that*?

LÉMEAU
Seven. The crisis is escalating.

PUCHIS
"Crisis"? There was an eight-counter in the spring. Seven's an improvement.

LÉMEAU
The average is increasing.

PUCHIS
How can you know that?

LÉMEAU
Arithmetic.

PUCHIS
But what of history, Lémeauuu? The shakes might've lasted much longer before writing or numbering.

(Lémeau has now noticed Burlap.)

LÉMEAU
Shush. The shaking has hurt them.

PUCHIS
What? Please. How? Nothing fell on them.

LÉMEAU
Use your faculties. Friend, it appears your innards have been disharmonized. Would you like—?

BURLAP
Don't even think of touchin' me.

LÉMEAU
(hands up)
I will not, without consent. But I wish to inform you I am Board-certified in Bloodletting. If you like —

BURLAP
Back away!

LÉMEAU
Understood.

BURLAP
Farther.

LÉMEAU
As you wish.

BURLAP
Farther.

LÉMEAU
I live to serve.

BURLAP
… A bit farther.
(Lémeau complies, putting themself as far away as the room allows)
Now. Did you forget what I said forty-five ticks back? What am I revolted by?

LÉMEAU
Baguettes.

BURLAP
I love baguettes. I *hate* mold — especially the Yellow and Purple varieties.

PUCHIS
But mostly Yellow.

BURLAP
I am a non! I am non-Yellow, I am non-Purple. By choice, I am a non. I am neither non by mishap nor neglect. I didn't just now discover the existence of your theme parties. I've read your pamphlets. I've seen your picket signs everywhere, I've seen you on the stump, for all the world lookin' like slices of ham on wet whole wheat, a powdery rime on the crust, weevils crawlin' out, the lettuce turned to slime. You both sicken me.

(Brief pause.)

PUCHIS

I respect what you're saying.

LÉMEAU

I think you must be mistaken about my positions or have some misconception.

BURLAP

We can check.

LÉMEAU

Yes, please.

BURLAP

The economy.

LÉMEAU

Must be strong.

BURLAP

The national debt.

LÉMEAU

A boogeyman.

BURLAP

Military spending.

LÉMEAU

Must be curbed.

BURLAP

The wars aboard.

LÉMEAU

I stand by allies.

BURLAP

Patents on drugs.

LÉMEAU

Must be looser.

BURLAP

Copyright law.

LÉMEAU

Key to innovation.

BURLAP

I'm not mistaken.

(Lémeau broods.)

PUCHIS
I demand to be equally probed.

BURLAP
No need.

PUCHIS
If you're a non, you should hear us out equally.

BURLAP
Am I required to?

LÉMEAU
Not by statute.

BURLAP
(to Puchis)
If I don't have to…

PUCHIS
I shall be refuttling!

BURLAP
To what? Are you sayin' the economy should not be strong?

PUCHIS
No, it shouldn't; it should be the strongest. And will be under Puchis.

BURLAP
Will you cut back the army?

PUCHIS
I'm sextoopling the army. Every factory will say, "Army." We may have to ration.

BURLAP
Do you stand with allies?

PUCHIS
Which ones?

BURLAP
Your pick.

PUCHIS
Not the ones I'm thinking of.

LÉMEAU
Who?

PUCHIS
The hat people.

LÉMEAU
Everyone wears hats.

PUCHIS

Not like theirs.

LÉMEAU

What like theirs?

PUCHIS

I don't know what they call their stupid hats.

BURLAP

Thank you, that's enough.

PUCHIS

Do I get a point?

BURLAP

Sure.

PUCHIS

Ha! We are neck and neck!

LÉMEAU

(to Burlap)

How can you confer a point on that claptrap?

BURLAP

I may regret it.

LÉMEAU

What is your rationale?

BURLAP

Gettin' out of here.

LÉMEAU

Your decision cannot be rushed. You decide the fate of a nation, Burlap.

BURLAP

Oh! You mean if I vote Purple —

LÉMEAU

Disaster.

BURLAP

Contrarily, if I vote for Yellow —

PUCHIS

The end of civilization.

BURLAP

That is a weighty decision.

LÉMEAU

The choice is not between tragedies! It is dawn versus darkest night.

PUCHIS

We agree.

LÉMEAU

In form, not substance.

PUCHIS

The latter's impossible. Your ideas have no substance.

LÉMEAU

(to Burlap)

The Yellow platform runs eighty-one pages. The Purples took our platform and drew a bunch of "X's" through it. That is what they call planning.

PUCHIS

Lémeauuu, our friend does not deserve your spleen. They have business. I move that we proceed to private interviews. As the percipient of the last point, *I* should get the first interview.

LÉMEAU

The law says nothing of interviews.

PUCHIS

It doesn't prohibit them.

LÉMEAU

No, but *I* should go first, precisely *because* the last point was given to you.

PUCHIS

Very well. So mote it be.

(Brief pause.)

LÉMEAU

No counterargument?

PUCHIS

No, go before me.

LÉMEAU

Why do you want me to?

PUCHIS

I don't. I'm aching to go first. I'm also a generous person. Five minutes?

LÉMEAU

Five minutes.

PUCHIS

Burlap, would you like me fetch you anything? Water? Wine? A pillow for your lower back?

BURLAP

A pillow would be alright.

PUCHIS

I live to serve.

(With a stroke of their cravat, Puchis shows themself to the door. Unseen by Burlap, Puchis holds up the index fingers of both hands, indicating the single points had by both parties. Puchis smashes their hands together, making one hand change from one point to two points. Purple's points. Puchis leaves. Lémeau is momentarily piqued by the one-uppery. Burlap presses on their abdomen, feeling for sore spots, and finding one in the lower right.)

LÉMEAU

So.

BURLAP

So.

LÉMEAU

What do you do for work?

BURLAP

I'm a dung-shoveler.

LÉMEAU

Ohh. And what does that entail?

(Burlap stares)

Right. But how long have you… redistributed manure?

BURLAP

Since eight or nine.

LÉMEAU

Tragic.

(they touch Burlap)

Tragic. Any schooling?

BURLAP

Some here and there.

LÉMEAU

Can you read?

BURLAP

What do you reckon?

LÉMEAU

(heart bleeding)

Ah, Burlap. The educative policies of Purple —

BURLAP
You think because I work with dung I don't know my letters?!

LÉMEAU
No, emphatically, I was not calling you illiterate.

BURLAP
You weren't?

LÉMEAU
No. No. I beg pardon if I lent the impression —

BURLAP
'S alright, sensitive topic.
(performance of shame)
I can read my own name but that's about it.

LÉMEAU
(taken in)
Really.

BURLAP
Yeah, there are days on the streets — the dung-laden byways of the poor man's quarter — I get lost because of those all-word signs.

LÉMEAU
I've long said our signage ought to be replaced with a team of travel guides.

BURLAP
Have you?

LÉMEAU
I've said it. If a person got lost, they'd only have to waggle a hand and someone trots over.

BURLAP
Sounds expensive.

LÉMEAU
It would pay for itself: we cut the budget elsewhere.

BURLAP
Well that would be somethin'. But let me ask *you*, L'meau.

LÉMEAU
(correcting the pronunciation)
Lémeau.

BURLAP
(overdoing it)
Lé-meau. A little question for you, *Lé*-meau.

LÉMEAU
Not *so* much stress on the first syllable. It's pronounced like "layman" or "drayman" or a flower's "stamen."

BURLAP
Is there a "N" sound in your name? Have I been missin' it? "Lémeaunnn"?

LÉMEAU
No. I was using those words as examples for the first part, the "é" part.

BURLAP
Oh, like, "stayma," "drayma," "layma"?

LÉMEAU
Exactly.

BURLAP
Got it. The question is: Why do you take money from merchants?

LÉMEAU
Merchants? Which merchants?

BURLAP
Pick a merchant. Any merchant.

LÉMEAU
Well… Let me preface my answer: my opponent also accepts donations from merchants.

BURLAP
I know that.

LÉMEAU
Of necessity, I also accept them.

BURLAP
Purple takes them, ergo Yellow takes them.

LÉMEAU
The problem is essentially Purple and their war upon reason. Me? I would refashion the system, as would many of my colleagues.

BURLAP
Tell me more.

LÉMEAU
The system is hostage to Purple. But if we can conquer Purple — tonight, you and I — tussle them to their knees, grab them by the hair and pull, the world will be a kinder place.

BURLAP
And then you'd stop takin' from the merchants?

LÉMEAU

I personally have never taken a copper. The merchants donate to Yellow and Yellow pays for my campaign.

BURLAP

So you'd still take their money.

LÉMEAU

Only until the Purples are gone.

BURLAP

Half the population's Purple.

LÉMEAU

I can change that, in four years. I have an eight-part plan, two parts per year.

BURLAP

What's part one?

LÉMEAU

Education. The Purples will never see it coming. We start in the school room. Our children must have the mental wherewithal to reject bad ideas. When I say "bad" ideas, do I mean Purple ideas? Well, I can defuse that rhetorical bomb right now: Not necessarily. Bad ideas can be Purple or Yellow. Yellow has had its own share of public boners. Of course, Puchis and the others will interpret my plan as anti-Purple. What then? Simple. I deny having any social agenda. Because I have no social agenda. I only care about good and bad ideas.

BURLAP

And beating Purple.

LÉMEAU

Yes, but only insofar as they reek of bad ideas.

BURLAP

The score is still one-one.

LÉMEAU

I can explain the other parts.

BURLAP

You can summarize. I got a stomach ache already, I don't need a headache. Part one's Education, what's part two? One-word answers.

LÉMEAU

I need three words.

BURLAP

You can have two.

LÉMEAU

Public service announcements.

BURLAP
Part three.

LÉMEAU
We study the effect of those announcements.

BURLAP
Part four.

LÉMEAU
Find intelligent life in the oceans.

BURLAP
Come again?

LÉMEAU
I would establish a Subaquatic Corps. We search the coastlines and then swim out from the reefs.

BURLAP
To find mermaids?!

LÉMEAU
What we find is irrelevant. The search will unite us. Purple and Yellow will become… colors. And by gum the natural sciences will burst into productivity!

BURLAP
I subtract your first point.

LÉMEAU
Ah, you cannot subtract a point once given.

BURLAP
Then I withhold your next one.

LÉMEAU
Burlap, please, I know the Subaquatic program may strike you as extravagant.

BURLAP
My children had no breakfast today.

LÉMEAU
Part five is Breakfast for Kids.

BURLAP
No, it isn't.

LÉMEAU
Now it is.

BURLAP
How do you feed my kids and find a talkin' lobster?!

LÉMEAU
Nobody wants a talking lobster. We want the *idea* of a talking lobster.

BURLAP
I don't.

LÉMEAU
According to polls, most do.

BURLAP
I don't believe it.

LÉMEAU
My surveys are methodical.

BURLAP
I want to see your annual budget.

LÉMEAU
I don't have a copy with me, but I can say — with some reservation — we may need to scrap the travel guides.

BURLAP
And therein doom the illiterate?

LÉMEAU
Alas, there are trade-offs in politics. My first priority is feeding your toddlers.

BURLAP
I thought that was reducin' the work day.

LÉMEAU
Those are my co-first priorities. I have a co-focus on family: work/food, food/work. We cannot have a country without calories coming in or going out.

BURLAP
Well said. What about taxes?

LÉMEAU
I will raise them. Not yours.

BURLAP
The merchants'?

LÉMEAU
Positively, they pay too little.

BURLAP
Swear on your first love.

LÉMEAU
They passed away.

BURLAP

Swear on their corpse.

LÉMEAU

I would with ferocity so swear — but we should free ourselves from the forest of policy, if only for two ticks. You need to understand one difference between me and Candidate Puchis: unlike me, Puchis is a person of oaths. A boneyard of promises juts and molders behind them. Me? I bequeath inspiration. A leader cannot conjure up the future, that is hubris, the arrogance of office that I avoid. And yet, the captain can make a dream more likely by stirring others into a fizz of eagerness. From eagerness comes free, autonomous, distributed action that could never be duplicated from the top down. Only together, but working within our unique independent milieux, can we deprick the status quo and slap away the would-be despots. I believe we can slap the system, Burlap, in the roughest possible manner, and I will never stop believing.

(Puchis struts into the room, clapping, preventing an outburst from Burlap. Puchis has a pillow under their arm. It's purple.)

PUCHIS

Huzzah! Huzzah, Lémeauuu. I've no idea what you were saying, but I recognized your inspirational tone from the hall. It never ceases to goosebumperate me. Or give me reflux. My turn.

LÉMEAU

Was that five minutes?

PUCHIS

I was counting, were you not counting?

LÉMEAU

How can I conduct an interview and count?

PUCHIS

Well you can trust the integrity of my count.
(to Burlap)
Pillow for you?

BURLAP

Much obliged.

PUCHIS

Am I up or down?

LÉMEAU

We are still tied.

PUCHIS

Pity. I do like being the underdog. Would you please un-jaundice the room…?

LÉMEAU

But of course. The sun must set and squint of twilight come.

PUCHIS
And thereby give relief from frenzied tongue.

LÉMEAU
“Tongue” for “come,” Puchis? Your rhyme disappoints me.

PUCHIS
You are not the judge, Lémeauuu.
(to Burlap)
What do you make of my marriage of “tongue” to “come”?

BURLAP
A classical pairin’, I say. God ’n’ man, bread ’n’ wine, tongue ’n’ come. I present you with half a point for your rhyme.

PUCHIS
Ha!

LÉMEAU
We are not enrolled in a contest of rhetoric! Though were we, I would win.
(to Burlap)
Elsemore, the law says nothing about half points.

PUCHIS
They are not forbidden.

LÉMEAU
“In pursuit of three points.”

PUCHIS
One can approach three by many paths: one plus one plus one; one plus half plus half plus one; half plus half plus half plus half plus one. Or quarter plus —

LÉMEAU
We do not require the iteration. I will not accept fractional points — and certainly not in return for a bad example of assonance.

PUCHIS
Of what?

BURLAP
If you unaccept my acceptance of Puchis’s assonance, you make me an ass.

LÉMEAU
No one has named you an ass.

BURLAP
You have not named me ass, yet you ask me to ascertain assonance accordin’ to your advantage. Any man or wo-man who would accept an ask as you’re askin’ ought to be task-taken for assness.

PUCHIS
(to Burlap)
You should get my half point.

LÉMEAU
You cannot give *them* a point.

PUCHIS
Half point. I'm one, you're one, they're half.

LÉMEAU
No construal of the law allows them a victory.

BURLAP
(aside)
Truer words were never spoken.

PUCHIS
I was being ironical, Lémeauuu. I assumed from your knowledge of ass-nance you understood ironacy. I'm one and one half and you are a single cream tear. Ta-ta.

(Puchis uses their cravat to wave goodbye to Lémeau.)

LÉMEAU
(to Burlap)
I will never, ever, renounce our common hope.
(to Puchis)
Five minutes on the dot.

(Lémeau swishes out.)

PUCHIS
Hope is all they have to offer, you know. Me?

(Another earthquake comes, lasting only five seconds, but it's stronger and louder than before. Burlap dives under the pedestal and shrieks and sobs from the pain. This time around, Puchis hops around, having no hiding place, and when it ends, act as if they were doing some sort of jig. Outside, exactly as before, the crowd hubbubs and then sounds normal again.)

PUCHIS (CONT'D)
I think that was a fiver. I like a good fiver. Stronger than usual, though, eh?

BURLAP
(sarcasm from the floor)
How can we say what stronger is?

PUCHIS
Too right. The strength of natural events is prestigiously subjective. You *do* hold these short-lived shakes are natural, yes?

BURLAP
By definition, anything that happens in nature is natural.

PUCHIS
(chuckles)
Very true. Very true. I'm going to steal that for the stump.
(snuffs)
Random question: Do you have any friends or family who work with pickaxes?

BURLAP
Pickaxes? Sure, most of my family's in the mines. Why do you ask?

PUCHIS
You may not be aware, but Yellow has begun to circulate a theory of some relationship between picking at the bedrock and these earth shakes.

BURLAP
That's a stretch.

PUCHIS
That's what I say. The merchants are digging very deep down and the shakes are happening up here.

BURLAP
Different places.

PUCHIS
And if digging for metals were causing them, you'd expect the shakes to occur in the same rhythm as the digging.

BURLAP
Like what? Like, clang — ?

PUCHIS
Shiver.

BURLAP
Clang.

PUCHIS
Shiver.

BURLAP
Clang.

PUCHIS
Shiver.

BURLAP
Sounds logical.

PUCHIS
That's what I say — but Lémeauuu and the other wet noodles want to stop digging altogether. Leave the good stuff in the ground. If they have their way, your friends and family will be in the bread line.

BURLAP
Oh they are in the bread line. A life of diggin' doesn't buy you much.

(Burlap tries to hoist themself off the floor, but cannot manage it because of the pain.)

PUCHIS
Individually, perhaps. Collectively, it buys everything. Have you ever… copulated on the sheer awful number of metal thingamajigs? Chandeliers; pen boxes; fireplace grates; hanging lanterns; bridles; weather vanes; candelabra. Jails. Chastity belts. Your family is pulling the cart of modernity into the smelter. To cast your lot for Lémeauuu could mean the cart slipping backward into the black, foul-smelling air until one day there is no air. Let me tell you a secret.

BURLAP
Please do.

PUCHIS
It may shock you, but — Would you like your pillow?

BURLAP
Yes, I would. I think I have a hemorrhoid comin'.

(Puchis tosses the throw pillow to Burlap.)

PUCHIS
"Fiber!" My grandparents used to shout that in our faces, never satisfied until we'd eaten a pound of raspberries. Our fingers stained reddish blue. They had fresh fruit flown to our estate by dirigible.

(Burlap heaves themself onto the pillow.)

BURLAP
Never ate a raspberry.

PUCHIS
No? They taste like little plums but with seeds.

BURLAP
Never ate a plum.

PUCHIS
A plum is like a peach, but smoother and tarter.

BURLAP
Alright, I can imagine a raspberry now. I stole a peach when I was a nipper.

PUCHIS

(put off)

You stole. Were you convicted?

BURLAP

Oh yes, and beaten.

PUCHIS

Were you sorry?

BURLAP

I said I was.

PUCHIS

That's all that matters. I can trust you with my secret if you said you were sorry. One must pretend to honor the social contract at the very least. When we stop pretending…

BURLAP

It's like headless chickens.

PUCHIS

Spot on. So, the secret, Burlap.

(leaning in, low)

There is a government inside our government.

BURLAP

I heard about that.

PUCHIS

You have? What, specifically?

BURLAP

(low)

The Yellows lie in wait, like tigers.

PUCHIS

Pah, not tigers — like mongooses — mongeese — jungle frogs — bumblebees.

BURLAP

Less dangerous than I thought.

PUCHIS

No, very dangerous: very, very dangerous. Not tiger-dangerous, their lot are nothing like tigers, they are cowards, but in their way are worse than tigers.

BURLAP

I see.

PUCHIS

Few people know this. I'm surprised you know it.

BURLAP

Nothin' surprises me about our society.

(Gives a knowing look to the audience.)

PUCHIS

You say that, but the truth, my friend, will twist your insides.

(a stab of abdominal pain in Burlap)

There. That was no coincidence. Your body can tell the truth better than your psychocracy. The Yellows believe everything can be broken into bits and analyzed on sterile shining countertops. What they never pause to ask themselves is, "*Can* we see anything from outside ourselves?" In part, yes, we can set aside our prejudices, but there is no view from nowhere. We must see from somewhere. Science is not free from human values. Is the parachute free of value? The steam engine that replaces the sail? The guillotine? The Yellows want you to believe they can remake society from some odorless starting point, but what they call clear water is old stinking urine. And they do like urine, have you heard about that? At their private soirées, they pay people to…

(Puchis mimes opening their trousers, pulling out a penis, and then "ssses.")

BURLAP

I don't follow.

PUCHIS

Rhymes with "winkle."

BURLAP

Ah, thanks for the hint.

PUCHIS

They bathe in other people's wee. Collect it, in vats. From children. For some grand experiment in dark magic I dare not mention. Colleagues of mine have been disappeared for disclosing less.

BURLAP

Right, I heard about…

PUCHIS

Pritchard? Allegedly cut themself shaving? Developed an "infection"?

BURLAP

Right, and the other one…

PUCHIS

Pipkin. The doctors said it was small pox — but I saw the size of those poxes.

BURLAP

Pretty big?

PUCHIS

Enormous.

BURLAP

Fishy, that.

PUCHIS

I have drawings.

(From their coat, Puchis takes a piece of folded parchment: the evidence.)

BURLAP

Are they ink?

PUCHIS

Of course, ink. Would I bother you with lesser media? Have a goosander.

(Puchis shows Burlap the big pock drawing, watching the door.)

BURLAP

That is a big pock. Unless… How far away were you?

PUCHIS

I was sitting right next to them.

BURLAP

Right, but… without a body part for reference…

PUCHIS

I drew just as I saw.

BURLAP

Was it arm's-length?

PUCHIS

I was adjacent to the footboard.

BURLAP

You said you were right there.

PUCHIS

I was right by their feet.

BURLAP

Was it a foot pock?

PUCHIS

Chin.

(Puchis snatches back the parchment.)

BURLAP

A chin pock? They must have had a big chin. Was the chin totally eclipsed?

LÉMEAU

(offstage)

TEN SECONDS REMAINING.

PUCHIS
(low)
I can say no more.

BURLAP
(low)
Can I see another drawin'?

PUCHIS
After the ceremony, yes. Please vote for me. I alone can save us.

(Outside, Lémeau counts down.)

BURLAP
But I have so many questions. Is L'meau one of the wee-wee people?

PUCHIS
Shh!

(Lémeau comes in, not suspicious till they find Puchis and Burlap both smiling big.)

LÉMEAU
Hello, again.

PUCHIS
Hello.

BURLAP
Hello.

(Brief pause.)

LÉMEAU
Have I lost?

PUCHIS
Not yet, but I believe my gorge is about to… get bigger.

BURLAP
'Fraid not. I give one and one half points to L'meau.

PUCHIS
What?! Treachery. I showed you the drawing.

LÉMEAU
What drawing?

BURLAP
They have a pock drawing.

LÉMEAU
What kind of pock?

BURLAP

It's ambiguous.

LÉMEAU

So I'm two plus one half?

BURLAP

Sadly, yes.

PUCHIS

I protest! The non is rigged against me.

BURLAP

Rigged? How?

PUCHIS

I told you incredible things and you were not moved.

BURLAP

Try credible things. The truth is, I like you a little more, Puchis, but Lémeau's less crazy.

PUCHIS

(to Lémeau)

You paid them to say that. No one would ever say that unless they were paid or under hypnosis. You have done Purple dirty.

LÉMEAU

You met them in secret before I got here. You ingratiated yourself with pillows.

PUCHIS

And for what? Being liked "a little more"?

LÉMEAU

You still have a chance. Not a very good one, but you could outstrip me.

PUCHIS

(to Burlap)

Could I?

BURLAP

I'm not committed either way.

PUCHIS

Which way do you lean?

BURLAP

I'll cast my lot for whichever party can get me off the floor without hurting me.

(Lémeau and Puchis snap their eyes on one another, stroking their cravats. Burlap deep-breathes, intestine about to burst.)

LÉMEAU
Shall we flip a coin, me heads, you tails?

PUCHIS
I will never be tails if you're heads.

LÉMEAU
I can't be tails, I have a whopping lead.

PUCHIS
Only technically: they said "not committed."

LÉMEAU
Yes, but the odds favor me.

PUCHIS
Then why flip a coin?

LÉMEAU
Your odds in a *flip* are fifty-fifty.

PUCHIS
You said the odds favor you.

LÉMEAU
Overall, yes, because of my lead, but in a coin flip, the odds are fifty-fifty.

PUCHIS
That makes no sense.

LÉMEAU
My lead does not affect a flip.

PUCHIS
That is mathematically unpossible, you pad of butter!

(Puchis stomps. The tremor hurts Burlap.)

LÉMEAU
(demonstrates)
A coin has two sides. I flip a coin, I catch it, I turn it over on my hand, and under my hand it's heads or tails.

PUCHIS
Which is it?

LÉMEAU
(looks at the coin)
Heads.

PUCHIS
I knew it!

LÉMEAU

It only happened to be heads!

(Lémeau stomps. The tremor hurts Burlap.)

PUCHIS

Do it again.

(Lémeau huffs, then flips, catches, turns over, and looks:)

LÉMEAU

Heads again.

PUCHIS

Rigged! The whole kit and kaboodle is rigged!
(out the window)
Citizens! The Yellows are liars and cheats, mucus, bad porridge, and earwax!

BURLAP

Not good.

(A hubbub below as Lémeau pulls Puchis away from the window. The crowd does not return to sounding normal, as before.)

LÉMEAU

What are you doing, you spoiled grape? The contest is not even done.

PUCHIS

Not done, but already stolen.

LÉMEAU

Nothing has been stolen. You can have the first try.

PUCHIS

I refuse anything you offer, you insectile fluid.

BURLAP

Suppose you both try at the same time.

(The partisans turn their eyes to Burlap.)

PUCHIS

Meaning what? I take one arm, they take the other, with one-one odds?

BURLAP

Better than one-one. In consideration of your deficit, I can lift my right arm a little higher than my left.

PUCHIS

I accept these terms.

BURLAP

L'meau? Objections?

LÉMEAU

(thinks)

As the object is lifting them without injury, I have no objections.

PUCHIS

(to Burlap)

Hold up, is your right arm worse than your left?

BURLAP

It's not my arms giving me the grief. I ate too much of somethin'. Or too little. Or perhaps a proper amount in the improper manner. If I could get home and have a lie-down, everything will be back to normal, surely.

(The partisans flank the non, preparing by rubbing hands, rolling shoulders, touching toes, etc.)

LÉMEAU

If Puchis wins, nothing will be normal.

PUCHIS

Correct. Things will be exceptional.

LÉMEAU

For everyone except the poor ones you imprison.

PUCHIS

For everyone who deserves it, you elitist booger.

LÉMEAU

How am I elitist for thinking of everyone?

PUCHIS

See the dictionary.

BURLAP

Just get me off the floor, you fops!

(Chastised, the partisans stop stretching.)

LÉMEAU

No more delays. On three?

PUCHIS

If we can each count once.

LÉMEAU

We have to have an even number for that.

PUCHIS

On five, then.

LÉMEAU

Agreed. Five.

PUCHIS

Four.

LÉMEAU

Three.

PUCHIS

Two.

LÉMEAU

One!

PUCHIS

One!

(The partisans tug on Burlap and, at the sudden movement, Burlap wails. The partisans drop Burlap.)

PUCHIS

Which of us hurt you less?

BURLAP

I'm… not… totally sure.

PUCHIS

I call for an outside observer.

LÉMEAU

I call for repeat experiments.

PUCHIS

Agreed. Two out of three?

LÉMEAU

That should do it.

BURLAP

Oh dear.

(The partisans try to lift Burlap, Burlap wails. They try a second time, lifting for longer: longer wailing. They try again, pulling Burlap to a standing position. No wailing this time, but Burlap's face is red and squished up.)

PUCHIS

What's going on?

LÉMEAU

I think they're happy.

PUCHIS
(to Burlap)
Who made you happier?

LÉMEAU
Give them time to mull it over — in perfect silence.

(In a thoughtful pose, Burlap lets out a long wheezing exhale in lieu of wailing, and then experiments with putting weight on one leg or the other, testing the limits of their new agony. The partisans interpret this alternate literal leaning as left/right political leaning. Then, with Burlap balanced on both feet:)

BURLAP
I think standing was a mistake. Put me back, please.

LÉMEAU
Happy to.

PUCHIS
Jointly. We must do it jointly.

BURLAP
I don't care which of you puts me on the ground, I want the ground! My entrails are like a blacksmith's bellows.

PUCHIS
(demonstrates)
Before they push down on the handle or after?

BURLAP
Before!

PUCHIS
Ah. What you need is a root 'n' toot.
(this embarrasses Lémeau)
Lémeauuu would judge you, but I respect a public tooter. Go on. No shame.

BURLAP
(limps around)
I can't.

PUCHIS
Course you can.

BURLAP
I cannot. I have literally become incapable of toots. I been tryin' for hours.

PUCHIS
Would you like a squeeze?

BURLAP

Nnn.

(Lémeau shudders at the mention of squeezing.)

PUCHIS

I've been professionally squeezed before, I know the modus operbrandy.

LÉMEAU

(recovering)

I apprenticed under a Master Squeezer.

PUCHIS

Pah. According to my oppo research, you quit two days into your training. You never squeezed anyone.

LÉMEAU

I practiced on the dummy.

PUCHIS

Look at you, Lémeauuu: you would swoon before helping a person by squeezing their middles.

BURLAP

Don't fiddle with my middles.

LÉMEAU

(to Puchis)

I am better qualified for pressurizing them.

PUCHIS

Then why's your face a whitefish bisque? What happened on your second day of training?

LÉMEAU

That is not relevant.

PUCHIS

Did you burst someone?

(Lémeau inhales for an explanation.)

BURLAP

You did!

LÉMEAU

They could've burst without my intervention.

(Burlap limps-runs for the door, but Puchis intervenes.)

PUCHIS
Points first. Give me points. Grant me the orb and scepter and I will save you from those deadly, weak hands.

LÉMEAU
Nobody died because of me. A torso split open, I sewed it up, the patient lived. Another eight days. They died of fever, not me. You can check the certificate.

PUCHIS
Doctors can write whatever they want on those certificates. I once had an au pair who went to the hospital with a cold. After they died? “Pneumonia.” Points.

BURLAP
I’m not electing either of you.

LÉMEAU
(in squeezing position)
The ship needs a captain.

BURLAP
(away from Lémeau)
I’ve been on ships, captains don’t do very much. Anyone can turn a wheel.

LÉMEAU
But someone has to. Please use you head.

PUCHIS
Use the part of your body that feels good to you. Statistically, the head is less likely to be right, but I respect however you disclaim this pervert.

BURLAP
Shut it, both of you. I’m giving all remaining points to the *other* candidate.

LÉMEAU
Other?

PUCHIS
Other? Who’s the other?

BURLAP
The Orange candidate.

(Pause.)

LÉMEAU
I’m sorry, I must’ve misheard you. Did you say “the or/and candidate”?

PUCHIS
“The ornery candidate.” They said “the ornery candidate.” Which is me.

BURLAP
Orange!

PUCHIS
Is that a foreign word?

BURLAP
The other candidate in this year's race, on the Orange ticket.

PUCHIS
Ohh, them. I forgot about them, what was their name?

LÉMEAU
(rhymes with "hunger")
Trunger?

BURLAP
(pronouncing it "trun-JAIR")
Trunger!

LÉMEAU
Right. Well, I'm afraid that's not allowed. Their itty-bitty party did not garner enough lots to be here tonight.

BURLAP
It's my lot, my points to divvy up, I want Orange.

PUCHIS
I thought you were a non. Why a sudden sweetness for Oranggge? What plot is this, Lémeauuu?

BURLAP
It's my plot.

PUCHIS
It's a bad one, because at this late puncture it's a Yellow ball or a Purple ball.

LÉMEAU
Orb.

PUCHIS
Orb. Those are you choices. But choose me.

LÉMEAU
Me. We can change it all later, but not this time.

PUCHIS
We can take it all back.

BURLAP
(teary)
Three points to Orange.

LÉMEAU
I love your independent spirit, I do, but the word out of your mouth must be Yellow or Purple.

(Puchis has unknotted their cravat and waves it like a flag. Lémeau copies. It's a blend of politics and religious revival:)

PUCHIS

Purple.

LÉMEAU

Yellow.

PUCHIS

Sugar plums.

LÉMEAU

Split peas, so nutritious.

PUCHIS

Amethyst on your finger.

LÉMEAU

A gold coin for every family.

PUCHIS

The best part of the rainbow.

LÉMEAU

The signature of spring.

PUCHIS

Choose.

LÉMEAU

Wisely.

PUCHIS

Greatness.

LÉMEAU

Progress.

PUCHIS

Eternal glory!

LÉMEAU

Our only shot at surviving the next Ice Age!

PUCHIS

Save the children!

LÉMEAU

People of all sizes!

(Microbeat.)

BURLAP
On second thought, I want to be squeezed.

PUCHIS
At your service.

LÉMEAU
Wait, no no no —

PUCHIS
Give 'em what they want.

(Puchis hugs Burlap around the middle and lifts them into the air with a Herculean yolp. Burlap screams as their appendix bursts. Lémeau half-covers their eyes. A coil of intestines spills out of Burlap's shirt.)

LÉMEAU
Oh my Lord!

PUCHIS
Bow before me!

LÉMEAU
Put the non down!

PUCHIS
They like it, it's natural! Let it out, citizen!

LÉMEAU
It's out! It's all out! It's on the floor!

PUCHIS
(sees/drops Burlaps)
Oh ye gods, what are those!

(Lémeau shrieks in accusation at Puchis as Burlap falls on their viscera. Puchis illogically shrieks in accusation at Lémeau. The partisans emote in turns, instinctively retying and stroking their cravats as they take heaving breaths. Burlap lies still. Finally, the partisans calm…)

LÉMEAU
What have you done, Puchis?

PUCHIS
Are we sure they were the only non-voter?

LÉMEAU
Yes, we are sure — as I am sure this person should have been squozen by a professional.

PUCHIS
Pah, it would have happened anyway, there is precedent, and I barely touched them.

LÉMEAU
You murdered this poor non!

PUCHIS
With consent.

LÉMEAU
You cannot murder —

BURLAP
(eyes opening)
I'm not dead… for the record.

LÉMEAU
(kneeling)
Oh Burlap.

PUCHIS
(kneeling)
Oh Burlap.

LÉMEAU
I thought you were gone.

PUCHIS
I thought you were gathering your strength.

LÉMEAU
I can sew you shut.

PUCHIS
I can hold your hand.

BURLAP
Neither, please.

LÉMEAU
Burlap, I have to try. What about your little ones?

BURLAP
They're not that little. Same age as me… when I lost my mum and dad. And brother. And most my cousins. Don't try 'n' save me. I just… want to say… a few words for posterity. Uninterrupted… by the bitter winds of factionalism.

LÉMEAU
Say as many words as you want.

PUCHIS
Say infinity — plus one.

(Staring from one partisan to the next, Burlap rasps, readies for a speech, then:)

BURLAP
You know what? Already said it. Screw you both. I won't even let you murder me!

(Burlap throws a rope of intestines around their throat and chokes themselves. Lémeau and Puchis try to stop it—)

LÉMEAU
No!

PUCHIS
No!

(—but unsuccessfully. Burlap quickly dies. Silence. Puchis stands in irritation. Lémeau closes the corpse's eyes.)

PUCHIS
Gah. I was so close to another one plus half.

LÉMEAU
Puchis, a citizen has died.

PUCHIS
A citizen who liked me better — they said it.

LÉMEAU
Politics is more than charisma.

PUCHIS
So you say. The proof will be in the pudding.

LÉMEAU
It will.

PUCHIS
Yes, it will, Lémeauuu.

(they stare)

What do we do now?

LÉMEAU
(standing, intent)
The law is very clear what should happen in this case.

PUCHIS
Is it?

LÉMEAU
Naturally, the Yellows wrote it.

(plainly, Puchis fears that Lémeau will call for their arrest, but—)

We must have a new election.

(There's an earthquake. It lasts only three seconds. The partisans tense, then relax.

The crowd outside really hubbubs and then… sounds normal, like in the opening.)

PUCHIS
What do you mean by “new”? From the beginning?

LÉMEAU
Oh, no, from the middle — of course the beginning. You rotten eggplant.

(Lémeau leaves. Puchis goes after them, snuffing some tobacco.)

PUCHIS
Better an eggplant than a shriveled up gourd!

LÉMEAU
(off)
“GOURD”? I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO SAY “GORGE”!

PUCHIS
(off)
BOTH APPLY.

LÉMEAU
(farther off)
NO THEY DON’T, SEE THE DICTIONARY.

PUCHIS
(farther off)
YOU HAVE YOUR DICTIONARY, I HAVE MINE.

(Lights out. Music. END OF PLAY.)