

The Quincy and Antoinette Kraczclic Variety Show

by John Hadden

Debussy piano music, empty stage. QUINCY, in tails, and ANTOINETTE, in something elegant, bring out a tall stool, an egg timer, a toy top and the phone book. He signals to the booth as they exit. Music fades and benign pre-set lights cross-fade to a sharp spotlight. Quincy enters, bows and puts on a dark maroon fez.

QUINCY

Good evening. My name is Quincy Kraczclic. I'm a Foreign Service Officer on leave from Tashkent, obviously – on leave, that is – where I hold the post of Ambassador. I know, I know, you're all wondering what the hell is going on over there just now, but I have to say that's not why I'm here today. I'm not supposed to talk about all that. I don't really know anything about it anyway. So many things can compromise the mission; you let something slip and without even knowing it, you've just killed somebody who has kids and plays bassoon in the state orchestra. *(he laughs, then blanches slightly)* Woops... But life goes on. There are other things that are more... I don't know, more... delightful. *(Looks offstage for his wife)* This town, for instance. The shops! The restaurants! Delightful. Oh, damn... I was going to do this right at the beginning, dammit.

Quincy takes out an egg timer from his pocket, turns it to ten minutes.

They've told us to limit our act to ten minutes. So we'll be up here, and by the way, *(looking offstage again)* I'd like to thank the committee for bending the... for giving us this chance...

ANTOINETTE: *(appearing on the side with a balalaika)*
Quincy!

QUINCY

... and the community at large, this chance, as guests of the community, I mean, on behalf of the... *(he wanders off to speak with her)*

ANTOINETTE *(barely audible)*
I don't know, Quincy, I'm beginning to think...

QUINCY

Nonsense, my love, they're very receptive. You'll see, it'll turn out perfectly. Just imagine you're at a reception. All right, darling? Ça va?

Quincy returns.

QUINCY (*cont'd*)

And now! It is my privilege (*cues booth for music, with just an eyebrow*) to invite you to spend the next... eight... minutes or so, with me and my fantastic wife... Antoinette – (*cues again, less subtly*) and the fruits of our little hobby...

Music comes on, a little loud: "Twilight In Turkey," by Raymond Scott.

This is the premiere of... (*to the booth*) No, that's the next one. Never mind.

He makes 'cut' gestures to his throat. Music finally turns off.

So... So I would like to present my lovely assistant... Antoinette! ...who has consented to... who has, excuse me... (*pause*) Antoinette?

Now we hear "Minuet In Jazz" from the speakers.

Nettie? Sweetheart?

Quincy goes offstage to look for her, and returns to cut the music with a curt gesture.

NETTIE!

He goes out again, and reappears with the balalaika.

Hmm... So... we had a variety of things on the menu, but... she does a really stunning act with the phonebook, you can't imagine... Nothing is... nothing is... arbitrary: here is an art song I wrote quite recently.

Sings abstractly with the balalaika:

A long time
Is passing.
I wait in our old hotel,
Endlessly waiting,
I pray that you will appear
Can it be
That you will never
Sing me Spanish lullabies
Again?

He accelerates, now in a Cossack rhythm:

Tell me white lies,
Show me your eyes,
Make me alive,
Feed me your thighs... Aiaiaiaaaaiiyah!!

Pause. He holds up his hand as if to stem the applause.

There's more... There's a kind of dance that goes here.

He checks again for Antoinette, looks at the timer.

So it's a whole new world out there. How's everybody dealing with it? As you probably know by the blurb in the paper yesterday – they never get it right – I was for many years a philanderer... *philanthropist*. I was always interested in foreign affairs, so naturally I made donations to... to foreign affairs... uh, committees and so on. And I got to know some of the key players, and on a whim I took the Foreign Service exam, and bingo, Uzbekistan! Most ambassadors buy their postings, everyone knows that, right? But I took the exam as well. We were hoping for Paris, but since my name is Kraczclic¹, they thought I'd be good in Eastern Europe. Anyway, we'd only been there for a day. We were jet-lagged of course, sleeping in, when the Embassy rang us on the emergency phone, and wouldn't you know it, they were evacuating all of Eastern Europe and the Near East. Embassy personnel, that is. So we got the rest of the news; place was in an uproar, lotta drone activity in Kandahar, Islamabad, Tehran. Bunker busters. Made in the USA. Can't say we don't make an impression, hmm? Hahaha. We don't get the same coverage over here, have you noticed? I asked Antoinette how close was the nearest detonation point. "How can you be in the Foreign Service and be so stupid about foreign countries?" She was a little hysterical, but she has that accent, you know, it sounds so good no matter what she's saying. I was a little disoriented, I'd just woken up. I mean, at first I didn't even realize that I was *married*, for God's sake, that happens to the best of us sometimes, come on, admit it, and then I had to think really hard to remember... her name.

I was damned annoyed, I mean talk about timing, We'd just arrived there, for Chrissake, moved all our stuff and everything, I mean, why did they send us there if they knew they were going to drop a bomb? The next day! I'm not criticizing, of course, so as I became more fully awake it started to fall into place. Antoinette tossed me my Kevlar tux. She was shouting at the Embassy on the phone – they said not to worry, a car was on its way, not to go anywhere, and so on. But now, this! Who knows... We are all actors on a stage.

¹ "Kraczclic" can be pronounced with slight variations; here it might be "Krotchlick."

He spins a toy top and watches it wind down and topple away.

Balls, I don't know how I got started on all that. It'll be out soon anyway. I mean none of it's strictly classified or anything... Antoinette must have gone back to Canyon Ranch.² She has a nervous disorder. Pity... They'll probably have the wagon waiting for us both, hahaha.

So I guess we won't see her act, (*eyes the phonebook wistfully*) which is really terrific, let me tell you, but it looks like my timer is making its way... its way (*sings*) 'across the Universe; Images of paper cups...' What the hell *is* that? (*Pause*) Oh, of course, 'nothing's gonna change my world, nothing's gonna change my world (*picks up balalaika, tries a few chords with the words*), nothing's gonna change my world, nothing's gonna change my...'

I'm thinking of writing an article about it: "The Shortest Posting in the History of the United States Department of State," ha, ha, ha. The title would be longer than the posting, haha.

So. We've got a nice line-up – I'm looking forward to the rest of the acts, I don't know about you... Thanks for your patience... and if you have any questions, I'll be in the lobby. You will 'nose me...' on the way to the lobby... Hamlet. Talking to the slain Polonius... Listen, just forget I said anything about the bassoon player, OK? On the other hand, never mind, he's dead by now – actually, just forget the whole thing, OK?

And now, in closing, like the TV show says, "Ad Astra! To the stars!"

Quincy salutes, in a vaguely Sieg Heil manner. Lights out. Music up: "War Dance For Wooden Indians."



² Substitute your town's heavily guarded resort spa.