



B o r b o r y g m u s

Rob Sherman

Borobrygmus

A Stage Play For Two Actors

By Rob Sherman

Lights on a barely decorated stage, with two chairs and a stack of boxes at SLR. Somebody in white, MALPIGHI, with black hair, is seated and playing with a cup and ball. Another, in white, with blond hair and called CALYX, is sat on the floor, sketching on a piece of paper with felt tip pens. A low, insistent rumbling is heard from above. MALPIGHI looks up in annoyance and puts the cup and ball down.

MALPIGHI

Help me up.

CALYX

What?

MALPIGHI

Help me up there. I'm going to batter that ceiling in.

CALYX

No.

MALPIGHI

Help me, Calyx.

CALYX

It won't do anything. He never hears. Just stop being
so childish.

MALPIGHI pouts, and then stands on the chair, reaching for the ceiling. CALYX looks round languidly.

CALYX

You won't reach without me.

MALPIGHI

Why do you always have to find my distress so amusing?

CALYX
I'm not sure.

The rumbling stops.

CALYX
See?

MALPIGHI sits down.

MALPIGHI
Like always. And then it'll start again. Footsteps, coughing, that noise; there's a list. We finished work hours ago. What is he doing?

CALYX
Sanding the floor or complaining. That's what it sounds like to me. At least he isn't screaming; hopefully he won't start all that. And meanwhile, there's nothing to be done.

MALPIGHI
Nothing at all?

CALYX
Nothing.

MALPIGHI
Can't you go up there?

CALYX
I'm not going up there.

MALPIGHI climbs back down, and CALYX rises, pacing across the stage before turning back to MALPIGHI.

CALYX
Malpighi?

MALPIGHI
Yes, my Lord?

CALYX
What did you just call me?

MALPIGHI
Nothing.

CALYX
You did, what was that?

MALPIGHI
Just a little nickname. I thought I'd try it.

CALYX
Don't!

MALPIGHI
It's only affection, you know.

CALYX
What was it, then?

MALPIGHI
Really, nothing.

CALYX
You've been reading, haven't you?

MALPIGHI
Sorry.

CALYX

Stop it, all it does is teach you to swear.

MALPIGHI

So?

CALYX

So don't. It's rude.

MALPIGHI

Sorry.

CALYX

Malpighi?

MALPIGHI

Yes?

CALYX

Have you... thought any more about our arrangement? The holiday?

MALPIGHI

Don't start that again.

CALYX

I'm not -

MALPIGHI

If I'm not allowed to read, or even swear, you are not allowed to speak of the holiday.

The rumbling begins afresh. MALPIGHI leaps up.

MALPIGHI

SHUT UP!

CALYX

Malpighi! There's no need for that.

MALPIGHI

We all chip in and do our bit, keep things moving, and he just grumbles like he owns the place! Arsehole! Just because we're at... the... bottom... of... the... pipe!

MALPIGHI kicks the wall in time with the outburst.

4.

CALYX

Whatever you think of Borborygmus, it doesn't bother him in the slightest.

There is a loud squelching sound, and the rumbling stops. CALYX jumps up excitedly.

CALYX

Work-time! Stand up! Where is the cortex?

MALPIGHI ignores him.

CALYX

Cortex? Hello? Am I talking to myself here? Little webby job?

MALPIGHI still ignores him, shuffling nervously.

CALYX

Well, this just goes to show...

MALPIGHI

What?

CALYX

Well/

MALPIGHI

Spit it out.

CALYX

Well, if you aren't going to pull/ your weight

MALPIGHI

I do more around here than you!

CALYX snorts.

MALPIGHI

Don't snort! I did the housework, the filtration, everything for a whole WEEK when you went all... nephrotic.

CALYX

I can't help it if I was under the weather.

MALPIGHI

Well, don't call me lazy!

CALYX

You aren't passing me the cortex, are you? Remember what happened when we lost them?
The walls turned yellow, the stream went all... bitty. Borborygmus was a hundred times worse!

MALPIGHI flounces to the side of the stage, from where is produced a large square of netting. It has a small rip in it.

CALYX

Is that your one?

MALPIGHI

I...

CALYX

Well, is it or isn't it?

MALPIGHI

...Yeah.

CALYX

That looks like a nasty rip.

MALPIGHI

Shut it, it's fine.

CALYX

Give it here. (sighs)

CALYX moves to the pile of boxes, leans over, clutching the netting, and begins mysteriously fiddling with something. CALYX shouts back at MALPIGHI.

CALYX

Where was it?

MALPIGHI

In my bed.

CALYX

Your bed?

MALPIGHI

Yeah.

CALYX

Well, that's a stupid place to put it, isn't it? I've seen your toenails, you know. No wonder you put a hole in it. Its -

CALYX waits a few seconds, before exclaiming.

CALYX

Yeah. Yeah, it's all just going through. It isn't catching anything. Fat lot a good it is now.

MALPIGHI

I'll fix it up.

CALYX

With what?

MALPIGHI

I don't know.

The rumbling begins again, and MALPIGHI sits back on the chair, head in hands. CALYX looks back, shaking hands, and returns without the cortex. A hand is laid on MALPIGHI's shoulder.

CALYX

Don't stress.

MALPIGHI

I can't help it.

CALYX

You know, I always find it easier if you actually listen to him. Don't try and block him out.
Listen.

They listen.

CALYX

Can you hear that?

MALPIGHI

I can't listen. You can't grab onto anything, it's just noise.

CALYX

No. Listen!

They listen again.

CALYX

Hear it! That growl? That low growl underneath everything else? It's like it's holding everything together. Baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa raaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.

MALPIGHI (SKEPTICAL)

Yes?

CALYX

When I hear that, it's like there's a dog, a great big dog, breathing from its bowl, and there's a fire and things are OK.

MALPIGHI

You are an idiot.

CALYX

No I'm not. It's comforting.

MALPIGHI stands, performing Tai Chi, before CALYX slaps the practice down.

CALYX

Listen again.

They listen again.

CALYX

Right, above the growl, in little drumbeats. Yo-bo. Yo-bo. Yo-bo. You hear it? For me, there's a procession of those little sparking robots, and the sparks are lighting the ground behind them, like it's brush.

MALPIGHI

What are those?

CALYX

What?

MALPIGHI

Robots.

CALYX

I... I don't know.

MALPIGHI

I fucking hate it.

CALYX

And on top, the offbeat, can you hear it? Doki, doki, doki. That's acid eating through a rope that's holding a beautiful woman hostage. I don't think she's wearing any clothes.

MALPIGHI gets up.

CALYX

It helps if they're dreams, if they're weird, or something like that.

MALPIGHI

Just stop it!

The rumbling stops.

CALYX

Well, it helps. brother. Can't you stand it?

MALPIGHI

I can't stand you!

They are both silent for a few seconds.

MALPIGHI

I need a piss.

They both look round, and erupt into manic laughter. Calyx holds out the cortex.

CALYX

Take the cortex!

They continue laughing, slowing down to silence again. CALYX goes to his drawing, sits cross-legged on the floor, and begins doodling.

CALYX

You swore again.

MALPIGHI

So?

CALYX

So. Now I can talk about the holiday.

MALPIGHI

No you cannot.

CALYX

I don't know why you can't admit you hate it here.

MALPIGHI

I don't.

CALYX

You do.

MALPIGHI

I do not!

CALYX

All you do is complain about noise, and work, and you break your cortex with your big long witch nails.

MALPIGHI

I'm fine right here!

CALYX

I saw you in the ureter last week. You thought I was asleep, but you were there, kneading the walls, kicking the sphincter open so the fluid drained. Ruining my work. Ruining your OWN work. Who does that?

MALPIGHI

Whatever.

CALYX

Just admit you hate it here!

MALPIGHI

NO!

CALYX

Well, I'm not going.

MALPIGHI

I never asked you to. I love you. I wouldn't want you to.

CALYX

But one of us has to go, Malpighi.

MALPIGHI

Why?

CALYX

You know why.

They sit silently.

CALYX

Anyway, I think you'll prefer it.

MALPIGHI

I think not.

CALYX

I think you will.

MALPIGHI

I want to stay.

CALYX

I hear he's a doctor.

MALPIGHI

Stop it, Calyx.

CALYX

Well, used to be a doctor. He's pretty old now, I/ imagine -

MALPIGHI

Please, stop, I /don't

CALYX

Who knows, you might have a new brother who's lovely and doesn't get ill all the time.

MALPIGHI begins crying. CALYX rises and leans against a wall, eyes to it.

CALYX

You are right, you know. I get ill a lot. I'm not exactly bursting with life. And that wouldn't be fair, would it? It wouldn't be fair to give me to someone who's packing up already. He needs someone strong. I'll give you my cortex, no rips whatsoever. He'll need it. They piss red at that age. You need to be ready for it.

MALPIGHI

You always were a manipulative shit, weren't you?

CALYX

What are you talking about?

MALPIGHI

You aren't always ill. And you look after your tools. Just look at your islets. Still black, still got all their edges.

CALYX

I dropped them in the loops of Henle last week.

MALPIGHI

You what?

CALYX giggles.

CALYX

Took me two days to find them.

MALPIGHI

What did you use instead?

CALYX

He chipped a bit of his pelvis off; remember, when he fell off his bike? I've been using some of that. Shoddy doctors don't clean up after themselves. Left bits of him lying around.

MALPIGHI

What if he had got an infection?

CALYX

But he didn't did he? Improvisation, it's the key to a good engineer. You'll see. You'll throw the book out the window. Along with all the other ones.

The rumbling begins again. MALPIGHI threatens to cry.

CALYX

Just face it Malpighi. He's there. It's our soundtrack.

MALPIGHI

It's been worse though, recently.

CALYX

Did you see the colour of the stream yesterday? It was almost clear. Like water. Disgusting.

MALPIGHI

Do you think something's wrong with him?

CALYX

Maybe.

MALPIGHI

Do you think he will die?

CALYX

All the more reason for you to go.

MALPIGHI

Oh, you're so fucking heroic.

CALYX

I'm just saying.

MALPIGHI

While you wave bravely from the open wound, waiting to turn green? It isn't your style, Calyx.

CALYX shrugs and returns to drawing. MALPIGHI is interested.

MALPIGHI

What are you drawing?

CALYX

Nothing.

MALPIGHI

You clearly are.

CALYX

I'm not showing you.

MALPIGHI

Fine!

MALPIGHI sneaks a look over CALYX's shoulder. CALYX does not react.

MALPIGHI

It looks like a horse.

CALYX

How do you know what a horse looks like?

MALPIGHI

It just does.

CALYX

It's not.

MALPIGHI

Fine.

CALYX

Fine.

MALPIGHI, obviously bored by CALYX's activity, sits on the chair in a child-like manner. MALPIGHI leans over.

MALPIGHI

What/

CALYX

Yes?

CALYX is interested now.

MALPIGHI

What - what is it like?

CALYX

What?

MALPIGHI

The operation.

CALYX

For him or for you?

MALPIGHI

For... for me.

CALYX

Well, it hurts a little. This'll all fill up with a clear liquid, after they cut him.

MALPIGHI

Will we see their faces?

CALYX

The liquid's pretty thick; I don't think you can. But there'll be light. There was light.

MALPIGHI

Before?

CALYX stands.

CALYX

But the liquid puts all of you to sleep; there'll be a pain, here.

CALYX brandishes a felt tip pen, and spins the protesting MALPIGHI around and draws a dotted oval above the kidneys.

MALPIGHI

Get off me!

CALYX

No. It hurts here, for a while, and then you fall asleep.

MALPIGHI

And then?

CALYX

And then you wake up, idiot.

MALPIGHI

And?

CALYX

And you're somewhere new.

MALPIGHI

You're not going to tell me anything more?

CALYX

There's nothing else to tell. There's the inevitable awkward period: you don't know where anything is, you put jejunum in the canal and everything goes black for a while and you

think you've killed him, and you meet your new partner, and you scratch the ground with your toe, and mumble, but eventually you settle into a lovely regime of constant bitching and complaint, like us.

MALPIGHI

We don't always fight.

CALYX

We do.

MALPIGHI

I was lonely before you came. There was too much room.

The lights flash out and then back on again. CALYX appears less perturbed than MALPIGHI, and sits back down to drawing.

MALPIGHI

What the fuck was that?

CALYX

I don't know.

MALPIGHI

That's never/

CALYX

I know!

MALPIGHI

Do you hate me?

CALYX

Of course I don't.

MALPIGHI

I think you do. Ever since you came here.

CALYX

I've been nothing but nice to you.

MALPIGHI

You've just been waiting.

CALYX

What?

MALPIGHI

You knew he was sick. That it would happen again.

CALYX

I can't help the way the world works.

MALPIGHI

I'm going anyway, aren't I?

CALYX

Whoever should go, will go.

MALPIGHI

That's a grand way of saying fuck all.

CALYX

It's still true.

MALPIGHI

You aren't a monk. Stop talking like one. I'm open. You're shut. What is it with that?

CALYX

One and the other.

MALPIGHI

Oh you are just so fucking INFURIATING!

Malpighi throws the chair to the back of the stage. CALYX looks up, briefly, and then looks back down at the drawing.

CALYX

You're going to put a hole in him, doing that.

MALPIGHI

Show me something! What are you drawing?

CALYX

Nothing good. It's rubbish.

MALPIGHI

Just... say something normal! Please! I can't stand it here with you!

CALYX

So you'll go?

CALYX looks up, interested.

MALPIGHI

Why do you want me to leave so much? How can you hate me like that? I love you!

CALYX

So do I.

MALPIGHI

Well, show me then! Show me please!

CALYX

I am.

MALPIGHI slumps to the floor, exhausted by the conversation.

MALPIGHI

I love you.

CALYX

I love you, too.

MALPIGHI

Shut up. I love you, and if you want me to go that much, I'll go.

CALYX

I don't want you to go.

MALPIGHI

Shut up. Don't say that to me.

CALYX

It's the truth.

MALPIGHI

I'll go. Don't talk to me. Leave me alone.

CALYX

It's better abroad.

MALPIGHI

So you do want me to go?

CALYX

No. But you're young, it'll be better. Interesting people and sights. Ice cream, or.. who knows? He might be Jamaican, something with bananas in it.

MALPIGHI

It'll be exactly the same as here.

CALYX

You'd be surprised at the differences.

MALPIGHI

Prick.

CALYX

And think, no more Borborygmus. You're leaving me here with him!

MALPIGHI

There'll be other neighbours. As loud.

CALYX

Maybe not. If he's fat there'll be layers in the walls; everything will be muffled, you'll have peace and quiet.

MALPIGHI

Stop.

CALYX

What?

MALPIGHI

Stop sugar-coating it. I'm leaving. You're forcing me.

CALYX

No-one is forcing you. Stay if you want.

MALPIGHI

There isn't a fucking choice!

CALYX

It's a shame you feel like this.

MALPIGHI

I'm getting out of here before I prick you after all. I don't want to see you anymore.

CALYX

Don't.

MALPIGHI

Don't pretend you're upset.

CALYX

I am. I love you.

MALPIGHI

Too late. You fucking liar. Fuck you, and fuck Borborygmus. Tell me what you're drawing.

At least. You

owe me.

CALYX

No, Malpighi.

MALPIGHI stares at CALYX for a few seconds.

MALPIGHI

Goodbye, Calyx. Have a fucking lovely, lonely life.

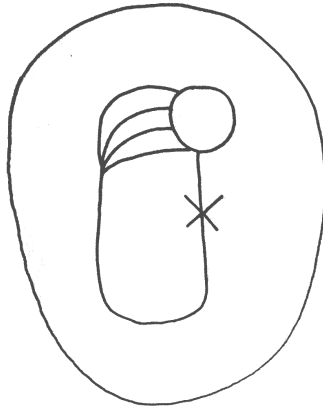
MALPIGHI storms offstage. Around 20 seconds pass of CALYX finishing off the drawing. CALYX stands, gazing at it with admiration. It is pinned it to the wall; it is a rather crude, detailed picture of the human body, with just one kidney. CALYX steps back, turns to the audience and bows, announcing it in a proud voice.

CALYX

'A Map Of The World, By Calyx.'

Lights.

END



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