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The Mission

By Robert Bolt

Your Holiness, the little matter
that brought me here is now settled.
The Indians are once more free to be enslaved
by the Spanish and Portuguese settlers.
I don't think that's hitting
the right note. Begin again.
Your Holiness, I write to you
in this year of our Lord 1758...
...from the southern continent of the
Americas, from the town of Asuncin...
...two weeks' march from
the great mission of San Miguel.
These missions have protected the Indians
from the depredations of the settlers...
... and have earned much resentment
because of it.
The noble souls of these Indians
incline towards music.
Indeed, many a violin played
in the academies of Rome...
... have been made
by their nimble and gifted hands.
It was from these missions the Jesuit
fathers carried the word of God...
... to those Indians still
existing in their natural state...
... and received in return, martyrdom.
The death of this priest
was to form the first link...
... in the chain of which
I now find myself a part.
Continue.
As Your Holiness undoubtedly knows...
...little in this world
unfolds as we predict.
How could the Indians have supposed
that the death of that unsung priest...
... would bring among them a man whose life
was to become intertwined with their own?
Thank you, Father.
It was our territory.
Julien's and mine.
I sent him, Father.
I have to go up there myself.

Can you see him?

No.

With an orchestra, the Jesuits could have subdued the whole continent.

So it was that the Guarani

were brought finally to account...

... to the everlasting mercy of God...

... and to the short-lived mercy of man.

Who are you?

So you're hunting above the falls now, Captain Mendoza?

We're building a mission here.

- We'll make Christians of these people.

- If you have the time.

It's your brother.

- Alonzo, are they healthy?

- Excellent.

Good.

- Are there many above the falls?

- Yes.

- Dangerous?

- Yes.

- Not against powder and shot.

- No.

I've seen Jesuits there.

- Above the falls?

- Yes.

Damn them.

The mission is

to be called San Carlos.

- Don Cabeza.

- Mendoza.

Take them away.

Quickly. Quickly now.

- You should find yourself a good woman.

- I have.

If you had,

you wouldn't look so gloomy.

- Maybe you're right.

- About women, I'm always right.

- How could I forget?

- You forget everything.

- I do, do I?

- You do.
Good.
Hello.
- Good. Now take them off.
- Excellent.
You distract too easily.
On the day the seorita
can't distract my attention...
...I'll become a monk.
- On that day, Felipe...
...half the ladies in this town
will become nuns.
Pure gossip.
Rodrigo is the lady's man.
Rodrigo here is this lady's man.
Felipe?
I love him, Rodrigo.
Since when have you loved Felipe?
Six months.
- Six...?
- I've been trying to tell you.
I have.
Yes, yes, yes, yes.
You have been trying to tell me.
So me you do not love?
Not as I love Felipe.
- Rodrigo, that's the love that I need.
- I see.
And so I have no need?
You need so much.
You deserve so much.
Rodrigo, you won't hurt him, will you?
No, I won't hurt him.
Rodrigo, please.
- You laughed.
- I did not laugh.
Most certainly you laughed.
- At whom are you laughing?
- Don't do this.
Quarrel with me!
Oh, no!
So how goes it at your mission
above the falls?
- Insects and twigs, Father.

- No converts?

A few.

- And many near to it, thank the Lord.

- Thank the Lord, indeed.

- Do you know Rodrigo Mendoza?

- Yes, I know him.

Come with me.

I have a task, and you are
the only one who can do it.

He's been here for six months,
but he won't see anybody.

I think he wants to die.

So...

...you killed your brother.

And it was a duel.

And the law can't touch you.

Is this remorse?

Leave...

...priest.

Maybe you wish I was your executioner.

Perhaps that would be easier.

Leave me alone.

- You know what I am.

- Yes.

You're a mercenary,
you're a slave trader...

...and you killed your brother.

I know.

And you loved him.

Although you chose
a strange way to show it.

Are you laughing at me?

Are you laughing at me?

I'm laughing at you...

...because all I see is laughable.

I see a man running away, a man
hiding from the world. I see a coward.

Go on.

Go on.

So is that it?

Is this how you mean to go on?

- There is nothing else.

- There is life.

- There is no life.

- There is a way out, Mendoza.
For me, there is no redemption.
God gave us the burden of freedom.
You chose your crime.
Do you have the courage to choose
your penance? Do you dare do that?
There is no penance
hard enough for me.

- But do you dare try it?

- Do I dare?

Do you dare to see it fail?

- Father?

- Aye?

How long must he carry
that stupid thing?

God knows, Father John.

- Ralph, here.

- Thank you.

Father?

He's done this penance long enough, and,
well, the other brothers think the same.

But he doesn't think so, John.

Until he does, neither do I.

We're not the members of a democracy,
Father. We're members of an order.

No.

No.

Thank you.

Thank you, Lord, for our food
and all your other blessings. Amen.

Oh, good Lord.

- Did you cook this?

- Yes.

Did you put in all the chilies?

I'm afraid I did.

I'm sorry. I was trained
as a mercenary, not as a cook.

- This is true.

- It's dreadful.

- But the bread is good.

- It's not bad.

Father, I want to thank you
for having me here.

You should thank the Guarani.

How?

Read this.

"Though I have all faith
so that I could remove mountains...
... and have not love, I am nothing.
And though I bestow all my goods
to feed the poor...
... and though I give my body
to be burned...
... and have not love,
it profiteth me nothing.
Love suffereth long and is kind.
Love envieth not.
Love vaunteth not itself,
is not puffed up.
When I was a child,
I spake as a child...
... I understood as a child,
I thought as a child.
But when I became a man,
I put away childish things.
But now abideth faith, hope, love...
These three.
But the greatest of these is love. "
They've agreed.
If you're going to become a Jesuit,
you must accept my orders...
...as if they were the orders
of a commander. Can you do that?
Yes, Father.
Let us pray for our brother Rodrigo.
Christ, you led Father Ignatius to
renounce the snares of this world...
...and to put on the livery
of labor and humiliation.
Now we ask your blessing on Rodrigo
as we welcome him into our community.
Teach him to be generous,
to labor and not to count the cost...
...to serve with no reward,
save the doing of your will.
Amen.
Welcome home, brother.
This seeking to create

a paradise on earth...
... how easily it offends.
Your Holiness is offended...
... because it may distract from
that paradise which comes hereafter.
The Spanish and Portuguese kings
are offended...
... because a paradise of the poor
is seldom pleasing to those who rule.
And the settlers here are offended
for the same reason.
So it was this burden I carried
to South America:
To satisfy the Portuguese wish
to enlarge their empire...
... to satisfy the Spanish desire that
this would do them no harm...
... to satisfy Your Holiness...
... that these monarchs would threaten
no more the power of the church...
... and to ensure for you all...
... that the Jesuits here could no longer
deny you these satisfactions.
I've spent half my life
waiting for Rome.
Stop playing with that.
- What time is it?
- Calm down.
Ten to.
Let me see how the children are doing.
Good.
Twenty-four.
Thirty-nine.
Over there, please.
- Those are Guarani?
- Yes, Your Eminence.
- Extraordinary.
- What?
Very difficult to tell
what they're thinking.
- Have you found this, Seor Hontar?
- I have.
I had that reaction when I first came,
Your Eminence.

Pretty creature.
She'll fetch a lot of money in Lisbon.
Yes. Well, perhaps
she doesn't want to go to Lisbon.
Perhaps not.
Well, Your Eminence,
as to the missions...
We expect no political difference between
the Papacy and Spain and Portugal?
Why should there be?
Between ourselves, Your Eminence,
the Jesuits are too powerful here.
Indeed?
- Well, if you'll excuse me, gentlemen...
- Your Eminence.
By the way, gentlemen...
...I myself was a Jesuit once.
So I had arrived in South America, my
head replete with the matters of Europe.
But I soon began to understand,
for the first time...
... what a strange world
I had been sent to judge.
Don Cabeza, how can you possibly
refer to this child as an animal?
A parrot can be taught to sing,
Your Eminence.
Yes, but how does one teach it
to sing as melodiously as this?
Your Eminence.
This is a child of the jungle,
an animal with a human voice.
If it were human,
an animal would cringe at its vices.
These creatures
are lethal and lecherous.
They have to be subdued by the sword
and brought to labor by the whip.
What they say is sheer nonsense.
Father Gabriel, of the mission of
San Carlos, from which the boy comes.
And that is where?
That is here.
Above the falls, in Spanish territory.

No, that is territory which used to be Spanish. Now it's Portuguese.

- That is for His Eminence to decide.

- No, that is a state matter.

It was decided by the Treaty of Madrid and concluded by Spain and Portugal.

But surely the missions will remain under church protection?

That is what His Eminence is here to decide, Father Gabriel.

Continue, Father.

Your Eminence, below the falls, the jungle, if it has to be divided...

...may be divided between

the Spanish and Portuguese.

But above the falls, it still belongs to God and the Guarani.

There's no one else there.

And they are not naturally animals.

- They're naturally spiritual.

- Spiritual?

- They kill their own young.

- That is true. May I answer that?

Every man and woman is allowed one child. If a third is born, it is killed.

But this is not some animal rite.

Its a necessity for survival.

They can only run

with one child apiece.

And what do they run from?

They run from us.

- That is, they run from slavery.

- Rubbish.

- It is well-known...

- Rubbish. Your Eminence?

Your Eminence?

Rubbish. Rubbish.

Silence.

In the territories covered by Spain, there is no slavery.

That institution is permitted in the territories of our neighbors...

...the Portuguese, and is, to my mind, much misunderstood.

But here, in Spanish territory...
...we run our plantation in accordance
with the laws of Spain...
...and the precepts of the church.
That is a lie.
That is a lie!
I cannot and will not
accept a challenge from a monk.
- His cloth protects him.
- My cloth protects you.
In the name of the king,
I demand an apology!
I want an apology now!
Damn you, I won't stand for this!
Your Eminence, we've just seen
a good example of Jesuit contempt...
...for the authority of the state.
Member of your community,
Father Gabriel?
Yes.
Come.
- That was perfect.
- What?
A flash of Jesuit temper was just
what we needed him to see.
- What do you mean?
- Be patient, will you?
All we need is a little patience.
He knows what to do.
- You will apologize to Don Cabeza.
- What he said was a lie.
Silence. You will apologize. Go now.
- What was he before he joined you?
- A mercenary and a slave trader.
- Will he apologize?
- Yes, he will.
You should know that the Spanish
do have slaves here.
They buy them from the Portuguese,
amongst others.
- And Don Cabeza connives at this?
- Yes.
Profits by it too.
Don Cabeza wants the mission territories

to be taken over by the Portuguese. Why?
Because the missions are the
only sanctuary left for the Guarani.
Without the shelter we provide
under Spanish law...
...the Indians have no protection
against slavery.
They come to us of their own free will.
- Truly?
- Ask them. Ask the Guarani.
Nine-tenths of what they earn goes back
into the community, into their lives.
Father Gabriel, what do you think
is at issue here?
- The work of God is at issue.
- No, what is at issue...
...is the very existence of the
Jesuit order, both here and in Europe.
And I assure you that
the courts of Europe are a jungle...
...in comparison with which
your jungle here is a tidy garden.
But is that to stand in our way?
Thank you.
- But why must I apologize? Why?
- Because I order it.
- It was a lie.
- Nevertheless, I order it.
Don Cabeza hates Jesuits and Indians.
He and the Portuguese are ruthless.
- Can't you see that?
- Of course.
- Then why must I apologize?
- What better excuse can we give them...
...but that one of our order, albeit a
novice, publicly insults one of them?
Now, you will apologize.
Or are you no longer a Jesuit?
By order of holy obedience,
without reservation...
...I ask Don Cabeza to pardon
my presumption and my insolence.
Well, I accept.
Why not?

But as I said before, I cannot accept
a challenge from a priest.
True, which makes my insolence
all the more insolent...
...and your pardon twice as gracious.
Your Eminence, I ask your pardon too.
I ask the pardon of this assembly.
I ask for the pardon of my brothers.
And I ask for your pardon...
...for insulting His Excellency.
- Thank you, that will do.
Well, that was most gratifying,
Your Eminence.
Do you think you could tell us about
your attitude to the transference...
...of the missions' territories?
- Precisely.
I have kept these matters in the front
of my mind ever since I came here.
But I do not think
I should make a final decision...
...until I have seen these mission
territories with my own eyes.
There are numerous missions
that I should inspect.
But I have decided that
I shall begin with the oldest...
... the great mission of San Miguel.
Your Holiness, a surgeon,
to save the body...
... must often hack off a limb.
But, in truth, nothing had prepared me
for the beauty and the power...
... of the limb that I
had come here to sever.
- Very impressive.
- Perhaps I'm missing something.
I can't see any difference
between this plantation and my own.
That is the difference.
This plantation is theirs.
This is another difference.
A runaway slave. Bought by
a Spanish settler from a slave trader.

I see. Is that lawful?
Supply and demand is the law of trade.
- And the law of souls?
- What's a few cuts on the back...
...compared with what you offer them?
Torments of hell? Imprisoned souls?
Think of that, Your Eminence.
Father Ibaye, shall we continue?
What was your income last year?
Last year, 120,000 escudos.
And how was it distributed?
It is shared among them equally.
This is a community.
Yes, there is a French radical group
that teaches that doctrine.
Your Eminence, it was the doctrine
of the early Christians.
Well, I am inexpressibly impressed
by your achievement, Father.
- And will that save us?
- I hope it may, Father.
The court of Portugal is atheistic,
but you and I are Christian Catholics.
- And you serve a Christian king.
- Come, I also serve a Catholic king.
You serve the Marquis of Pombal,
who is hostile to the church...
...and rules your king.
I suggest we advise your king to postpone
the transfer of the mission territories...
...until Portugal guarantees
their survival.
And I suggest we do this
in the hope of heaven...
...through the intercession
of our merciful Redeemer.
In my opinion, the work of the
missions is the work of the devil.
They teach contempt for lawful profit,
and they disobey the king's authority.
The paramount vow of a Jesuit
is a vow of obedience.
Then let them obey.
Tell them, Your Eminence.

Am I disturbing you?
I fear I have bad tidings
from the Marquis of Pombal.
Between ourselves, I should like
to express my personal regret.
He is determined to destroy
the power of the church.
And your Christian community
is commercially competitive.
Yes. Its very prosperous.
Isn't that precisely why
you want to take it over?
You should've achieved a noble failure
if you wanted the state's approval.
There's nothing we like better
than a noble failure.
Its deeply reassuring
to a trading nation such as my own.
You're not going to read it?
I don't need to read it
to know what it contains.
So, what will you do?
As my conscience dictates.
What else?
He's been in there five hours.
Come with me to my mission
in San Carlos.
There are so many distractions here.
Its hard to see anything clearly.
I think that, there, your prayers
might meet with better fortune.
I think, there, God would tell you
what it would be good to do.
And he'd give you the strength
and the grace to do it...
...whatever it costs you.
The Garden of Eden.
Its a trifle overgrown.
Though I knew, in Europe, states were
tearing at the authority of the church...
... and though I knew that to
preserve itself there...
... the church must show
its authority over the Jesuits here...

... I had to wonder whether these
Indians would not have preferred...
... that the sea and wind
had not brought any of us to them.
They say they don't understand
what you mean.
They want you to speak more clearly.
What do you want them to do?
They must leave the mission.
They say the mission is their home.
They must learn to submit
to the will of God.
Tell them.
They say it was the will of God...
...that they left the jungle
and built the mission.
They don't understand
why God has changed his mind.
I cannot hope
to understand God's reasons.
He says, how does he know
you know God's will?
He thinks you speak not for God,
but for Portugal.
I do not personally speak for God,
but I speak for the church...
...which is God's instrument on earth.
- He says, speak to the king of Portugal.
- I have. He will not listen.
He said he is also a king.
He also will not listen.
He says they were wrong
ever to have trusted us.
- They're going to fight.
- You must persuade them not to fight.
I have failed to persuade you
to fight on their behalf.
If they do fight, it is absolutely
imperative that no one of you...
...should even seemed
to have encouraged them to do so.
And therefore, all of you will return
with me to Asuncin tomorrow.
If anyone should disobey this,

he will be excommunicated.

Cut off. Cast out.

Why must they fight?

- Why can't they return to the jungle?

- Because this is their home.

Did you know this was going

to be your decision?

- Yes.

- Then why did you come, Your Eminence?

To persuade you not to resist the
transfer of the mission territories.

If the Jesuits

resist the Portuguese...

...the Jesuit order

will be expelled from Portugal.

And if Portugal, then Spain,

France, Italy... Who knows?

If your order is to survive at all...

...the missions here

must be sacrificed.

What were they saying?

They said the devil

lives in the forest.

- They want to stay here.

- And what did you say?

I said I'd stay with them.

I want to renounce

my vows of obedience.

Get out.

- I want to explain...

- Get out. I won't listen to you.

Just you?

No. It's Ralph and John too.

What do you want, captain,

an honorable death?

They want to live, Father.

They say that God has left them,

he's deserted them.

Has he?

- You shouldn't have become a priest.

- But I am, and they need me.

Then help them as a priest!

If you die with blood on your hands,

you betray everything we've done.

You promised your life to God.
And God is love!
Weren't you supposed
to be on guard last night?
Look what happened!
Get back there with the others.
They've taken three guns,
gunpowder, pistols...
...and I don't know what else.
Father, I've come
to ask you to bless me.
No.
If you're right,
you'll have God's blessing.
If you're wrong,
my blessing won't mean anything.
If might is right...
...then love has no place
in the world.
It may be so.
But I don't have the strength
to live in a world like that.
I can't bless you.
Down there. Down there.
Bring up both cannons.
Quickly. Quickly.
The other cannon as well.
Indians! Turn around!
Turn around! Face them!
Fire!
We'll have to move the cannon.
Move this cannon. Move it.
And that one.
Over there. Shoot the priest.
Get him!
- None of us wants to do this.
- I'm not interested. Get in position.
Row.
After him! Faster!
Don't let the priest get away!
After him!
Look out! The falls! Halt!
Back! Back! Halt!
Go back!

And you have the effrontery to tell me
that this slaughter was necessary?
I did what I had to do.
Given the legitimate purpose,
which you sanctioned...
...I would have to say, yes.
In truth, yes.
You had no alternative, Your Eminence.
We must work in the world.
The world is thus.
No, Seor Hontar...
...thus have we made the world.
Thus have I made it.
So, Your Holiness...
... now your priests are dead,
and I am left alive.
But, in truth, it is I who am dead,
and they who live.
For, as always, Your Holiness...
... the spirit of the dead
will survive...
... in the memory of the living.
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