


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Puspa Shrestha

A Sunny Morning

Serafin and Joaquin Alvarez Quintero

(translated from the Spanish by Lucretia Xavier Floyd)

Before Reading

Answer these questions.

- Have you ever had an unexpected meeting with someone in a park?
- How do your expectations influence the way you interact with others?
- How have unexpected encounters in your life sometimes turned out to be rewarding?

Serafin Álvarez Quintero (1871-1938) and *Joaquin Alvarez Quintero* (1873-1944) were Spanish dramatists. They grew up in Utrera, a small town near Seville in the region of Spain called Andalusia. They began writing for the theatre at a young age. They were popularly known as the *Golden Boys* of the Madrid theatre. They collaborated in almost 200 dramas depicting the life, manners, and speech of Andalusia.



Their first stage piece, *Gilito*, was written in 1889. Among the brothers' best-known works are the comedies *The Flowers* (1901), *A Sunny Morning* (1905), and *The Merry Heart* (1906), as well as the uncharacteristically serious *Malvaloca* (1912). Several of their plays were translated into English by Helen and Harley *Granville-Barker* (1927–32). Their complete collection of plays was published in seven volumes as *Obras Completas* in the early 1950s.

A Sunny Morning is a light comedy that narrates the reunion of two lovers now in their 70s meeting at a park who in their youth were passionate lovers but torn apart by the cruelty of fate. The setting of this play is a sunny morning in Madrid, Spain on a bench in the park.

Reading

Casting Characters

DONA LAURA

PETRA, her maid

DON GONZALO

JUANITO, his servant

Scene: A park in Madrid, the capital of Spain

(A sunny morning in a retired corner of a park in Madrid. Autumn. A bench at right. Dona Laura, a handsome, white-haired old lady of about seventy, refined in appearance, her bright eyes and entire manner giving evidence that despite her age her mental faculties are unimpaired, enters leaning upon the arm of her maid, Petra. In her free hand she carries a parasol, which serves also as a cane.)

DONA LAURA: I am so glad to be here. I feared my seat would be occupied. What a beautiful morning!

PETRA: The sun is hot.

DONA LAURA: Yes, you are only twenty. *(She sits down on the bench.)* Oh, I feel more tired today than usual. *(Noticing Petra, who seems impatient.)* Go, if you wish to chat with your guard.

PETRA: He is not mine, senora; he belongs to the park.

DONA LAURA: He belongs more to you than he does to the park. Go find him, but remain within calling distance.

PETRA: I see him over there waiting for me.

DONA LAURA: Do not remain more than ten minutes.

PETRA: Very well, senora. *(Walks toward right.)*

DONA LAURA: Wait a moment.

PETRA: What does the senora wish?

DONA LAURA: Give me the bread crumbs.

PETRA: I don't know what is the matter with me.

DONA LAURA: *(Smiling.)* I do. Your head is where your heart is—with the guard.

PETRA: Here, senora. *(She hands Dona Laura a small bag. Exit Petra by right.)*

DONA LAURA: Adios. *(Glances toward trees at right.)* Here they come! They know just when to expect me. *(She rises, walks toward right, and throws three handfuls of bread crumbs.)* These are for the spryest, these for the gluttons, and these for the little ones which are the most persistent. *(Laughs. She returns to her seat and watches, with a pleased expression, the pigeons feeding.)* There, that big one is always first! I know him

by his big head. Now one, now another, now two, now three— That little fellow is the least timid. I believe he would eat from my hand. That one takes his piece and flies up to that branch alone. He is a philosopher. But where do they all come from? It seems as if the news had spread. Ha, ha! Don't quarrel. There is enough for all. I'll bring more tomorrow. *(Enter Don Gonzalo and Juanito from left centre. Don Gonzalo is an old gentleman of seventy, gouty and impatient. He leans upon Juanito's arm and drags his feet somewhat she walks.)*

DON GONZALO: Idling their time away! They should be saying Mass.

JUANITO: You can sit here, senor. There is only a lady. *(Dona Laura turns her head and listens.)*

DON GONZALO: I won't, Juanito. I want a bench to myself.

JUANITO: But there is none.

DON GONZALO: That one over there is mine.

JUANITO: There are three priests sitting there.

DON GONZALO: Rout them out. Have they gone?

JUANITO: No, indeed. They are talking.

DON GONZALO: Just as if they were glued to the seat. No hope of their leaving. Come this way, Juanito. *(They walk toward the birds, right.)*

DONA LAURA: *(Indignantly.)* Look out!

DON GONZALO: Are you speaking to me, senora?

DONA LAURA: Yes, to you.

DON GONZALO: What do you wish?

DONA LAURA: You have scared away the birds who were feeding on my crumbs.

DON GONZALO: What do I care about the birds?

DONA LAURA: But I do.

DON GONZALO: This is a public park.

DONA LAURA: Then why do you complain that the priests have taken your bench?

DON GONZALO: Senora, we have not met. I cannot imagine why you take the liberty of addressing me. Come, Juanito. *(Both go outright.)*

DONA LAURA: What an ill-natured old man! Why must people get so fussy and cross when they reach a certain age? *(Looking toward right.) I am glad. He lost that bench, too. Serves him right for scaring the birds. He is furious. Yes, yes; find a seat if you can. Poor man! He is wiping the perspiration from his face. Here he comes. A carriage would not raise more dust than his feet. (Enter Don Gonzalo and Juanito by right and walk toward left.)*

DON GONZALO: Have the priests gone yet, Juanito?

JUANITO: No, indeed, señor. They are still there.

DON GONZALO: The authorities should place more benches here for these sunny mornings. Well, I suppose I must resign myself and sit on the bench with the old lady. *(Muttering to himself, he sits at the extreme end of Dona Laura's bench and looks at her indignantly. Touches his hat as he greets her.)* Good morning.

DONA LAURA: What, you here again?

DON GONZALO: I repeat that we have not met.

DONA LAURA: I was responding to your salute.

DON GONZALO: “Good morning” should be answered by “good morning,” and that is all you should have said.

DONA LAURA: You should have asked permission to sit on this bench, which is mine.

DON GONZALO: The benches here are public property.

DONA LAURA: Why, you said the one the priests have was yours.

DON GONZALO: Very well, very well. I have nothing more to say. *(Between his teeth.)* Senile old lady! She ought to be at home knitting and counting her beads.

DONA LAURA: Don't grumble any more. I'm not going to leave just to please you.

DON GONZALO: *(Brushing the dust from his shoes with his handkerchief.)* If the ground were sprinkled a little it would be an improvement.

DONA LAURA: Do you use your handkerchief as a shoe brush?

DON GONZALO: Why not?

DONA LAURA: Do you use a shoe brush as a handkerchief?

DON GONZALO: What right have you to criticize my actions?

DONA LAURA: A neighbour's right.

DON GONZALO: Juanito, my book. I do not care to listen to nonsense.

DONA LAURA: You are very polite.

DON GONZALO: Pardon me, senora, but never interfere with what does not concern you.

DONA LAURA: I generally say what I think.

DON GONZALO: And more to the same effect. Give me the book, Juanito.

JUANITO: Here, senor. *(Juanito takes a book from his pocket, hands it to Don Gonzalo, then exits by right. Don Gonzalo, casting indignant glances at Dona Laura, puts on an enormous pair of glasses, takes from his pocket a reading glass, adjusts both to suit him, and opens his book.)*

DONA LAURA: I thought you were taking out a telescope.

DON GONZALO: Was that you?

DONA LAURA: Your sight must be keen.

DON GONZALO: Keener than yours is.

DONA LAURA: Yes, evidently.

DON GONZALO: Ask the hares and partridges.

DONA LAURA: Ah! Do you hunt?

DON GONZALO: I did, and even now—

DONA LAURA: Oh, yes, of course!

DON GONZALO: Yes, senora. Every Sunday I take my gun and dog, you understand, and go to one of my estates near Aravaca and kill time.

DONA LAURA: Yes, kill time. That is all you kill.

DON GONZALO: Do you think so? I could show you a wild boar's head in my study—

DONA LAURA: Yes, and I could show you a tiger's skin in my boudoir. What does that prove?

DON GONZALO: Very well, senora, please allow me to read. Enough conversation.

DONA LAURA: Well, you subside, then.

DON GONZALO: But first I shall take a pinch of snuff. (*Takes out snuff box.*) Will you have some? (*Offers box to Dona Laura.*)

DONA LAURA: If it is good.

DON GONZALO: It is of the finest. You will like it.

DONA LAURA: (*Taking pinch of snuff.*) It clears my head.

DON GONZALO: And mine.

DONA LAURA: Do you sneeze?

DON GONZALO: Yes, senora, three times.

DONA LAURA: And so do I. What a coincidence! (*After taking the snuff, they await the sneezes, both anxiously, and sneeze alternately three times each.*)

DON GONZALO: There, I feel better.

DONA LAURA: So do I. (*Aside.*) The snuff has made peace between us.

DON GONZALO: You will excuse me if I read aloud?

DONA LAURA: Read as loud as you please; you will not disturb me.

DON GONZALO: (*Reading.*) “All love is sad, but sad as it is, it is the best thing that we know.” That is from Campoamor.

DONA LAURA: Ah!

DON GONZALO: (*Reading.*) “The daughters of the mothers I once loved kiss me now as they would a graven image.” Those lines, I take it, are in a humorous vein.

DONA LAURA: (*Laughing.*) I take them so, too.

DON GONZALO: There are some beautiful poems in this book. Here. “Twenty years pass. He returns.”

DONA LAURA: You cannot imagine how it affects me to see you reading with all those glasses.

DON GONZALO: Can you read without any?

DONA LAURA: Certainly.

DON GONZALO: At your age? You’re jesting.

DONA LAURA: Pass me the book, then. (*Takes book; reads aloud.*) “Twenty years pass. He returns. And each, beholding the other, exclaims— Can it be that this is he?”

Heavens, is it she?" (*Dona Laura returns the book to DON GONZALO.*)

DON GONZALO: Indeed, I envy you your wonderful eyesight.

DONA LAURA: (*Aside.*) I know every word by heart.

DON GONZALO: I am very fond of good verses, very fond. I even composed some in my youth.

DONA LAURA: Good ones?

DON GONZALO: Of all kinds. I was a great friend of Espronceda, Zorrilla, Bécquer, and others. I first met Zorrilla in America.

DONA LAURA: Why, have you been in America?

DON GONZALO: Several times. The first time I went I was only six years old.

DONA LAURA: You must have gone with Columbus in one of his caravels!

DON GONZALO: (*Laughing.*) Not quite as bad as that. I am old, I admit, but I did not know Ferdinand and Isabella. (*They both laugh.*) I was also a great friend of Campoamor. I met him in Valencia. I am a native of that city.

DONA LAURA: You are?

DON GONZALO: I was brought up there and there I spent my early youth. Have you ever visited that city?

DONA LAURA: Yes, señor. Not far from Valencia there was a villa that, if still there, should retain memories of me. I spent several seasons there. It was many, many years ago. It was near the sea, hidden away among lemon and orange trees. They called it—let me see, what did they call it—Maricela.

DON GONZALO: (*Startled.*) Maricela?

DONA LAURA: Maricela. Is the name familiar to you?

DON GONZALO: Yes, very familiar. If my memory serves me right, for we forget as we grow old, there lived in that villa the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and I assure you I have seen many. Let me see— what was her name? Laura—Laura—Laura Llorente.

DONA LAURA: (*Startled.*) Laura Llorente?

DON GONZALO: Yes. (*They look at each other intently.*)

DONA LAURA: (*Recovering herself.*) Nothing. You reminded me of my best friend.

DON GONZALO: How strange!

DONA LAURA: It is strange. She was called “The Silver Maiden.”

DON GONZALO: Precisely, “The Silver Maiden.” By that name she was known in that locality. I seem to see her as if she were before me now, at that window with the red roses. Do you remember that window?

DONA LAURA: Yes, I remember. It was the window of her room.

DON GONZALO: She spent many hours there. I mean in my day.

DONA LAURA: [*Sighing.*] And in mine, too.

DON GONZALO: She was ideal. Fair as a lily, jet black hair and black eyes, with an uncommonly sweet expression. She seemed to cast a radiance wherever she was. Her figure was beautiful, perfect. “What forms of sovereign beauty God models in human clay!” She was a dream.

DONA LAURA: (*Aside.*) If you but knew that dream was now by your side, you would realize what dreams come to. (*Aloud.*) She was very unfortunate and had a sad love affair.

DON GONZALO: Very sad. (*They look at each other.*)

DONA LAURA: Did you hear of it?

DON GONZALO: Yes.

DONA LAURA: The ways of Providence are strange. (*Aside.*) Gonzalo!

DON GONZALO: The gallant lover, in the same affair—

DONA LAURA: Ah, the duel!

DON GONZALO: Precisely, the duel. The gallant lover was—my cousin, of whom I was very fond.

DONA LAURA: Oh, yes, a cousin? My friend told me in one of her letters the story of that affair, which was truly romantic. He, your cousin, passed by on horseback every morning down the rose path under her window, and tossed up to her balcony a bouquet of flowers which she caught.

DON GONZALO: And later in the afternoon the gallant horseman would return by the same path, and catch the bouquet of flowers she would toss him. Am I right?

DONA LAURA: Yes. They wanted to marry her to a merchant whom she would not

have.

DON GONZALO: And one night, when my cousin waited under her window to hear her sing, this other person presented himself unexpectedly.

DONA LAURA: And insulted your cousin.

DON GONZALO: There was a quarrel.

DONA LAURA: And later a duel.

DON GONZALO: Yes, at sunrise, on the beach, and the merchant was badly wounded. My cousin had to conceal himself for a few days and later to fly.

DONA LAURA: You seem to know the story well.

DON GONZALO: And so do you.

DONA LAURA: I have explained that a friend repeated it to me.

DON GONZALO: As my cousin did to me. (*Aside.*) This is Laura!

DONA LAURA: (*Aside.*) Why tell him? He does not suspect.

DON GONZALO: (*Aside.*) She is entirely innocent.

DONA LAURA: And was it you, by any chance, who advised your cousin to forget Laura?

DON GONZALO: Why, my cousin never forgot her!

DONA LAURA: How do you account, then, for his conduct?

DON GONZALO: I will tell you. The young man took refuge in my house, fearful of the consequences of a duel with a person highly regarded in that locality. From my home he went to Seville, then came to Madrid. He wrote Laura many letters, some of them in verse. But undoubtedly they were intercepted by her parents, for she never answered at all. Gonzalo then, in despair, believing his love lost to him forever, joined the army, went to Africa, and there, in a trench, met a glorious death, grasping the flag of Spain and whispering the name of his beloved Laura—

DONA LAURA: (*Aside.*) What an atrocious lie!

DON GONZALO: (*Aside.*) I could not have killed myself more gloriously.

DONA LAURA: You must have been prostrated by the calamity.

DON GONZALO: Yes, indeed, senora. As if he were my brother. I presume, though,

on the contrary, that Laura in a short time was chasing butterflies in her garden, indifferent to regret.

DONA LAURA: No señor, no!

DON GONZALO: It is woman's way.

DONA LAURA: Even if it were woman's way, "The Silver Maiden" was not of that disposition. My friend awaited news for days, months, a year, and no letter came. One afternoon, just at sunset, as the first stars were appearing, she was seen to leave the house, and with quickening steps wend her way toward the beach, the beach where her beloved had risked his life. She wrote his name on the sand, then sat down upon a rock, her gaze fixed upon the horizon. The waves murmured their eternal threnody and slowly crept up to the rock where the maiden sat. The tide rose with a boom and swept her out to sea.

DON GONZALO: Good heavens!

DONA LAURA: The fishermen of that shore who often tell the story affirm that it was a long time before the waves washed away that name written on the sand. (*Aside.*) You will not get ahead of me in decorating my own funeral.

DON GONZALO: (*Aside.*) She lies worse than I do.

DONA LAURA: Poor Laura!

DON GONZALO: Poor Gonzalo!

DONA LAURA: (*Aside.*) I will not tell him that I married two years later.

DON GONZALO: (*Aside.*) In three months I ran off to Paris with a ballet dancer.

DONA LAURA: Fate is curious. Here are you and I, complete strangers, met by chance, discussing the romance of old friends of long ago! We have been conversing as if we were old friends.

DON GONZALO: Yes, it is curious, considering the ill-natured prelude to our conversation.

DONA LAURA: You scared away the birds.

DON GONZALO: I was unreasonable, perhaps.

DONA LAURA: Yes, that was evident. (*Sweetly.*) Are you coming again tomorrow?

DON GONZALO: Most certainly, if it is a sunny morning. And not only will I not

scare away the birds, but I will bring a few crumbs.

DONA LAURA: Thank you very much. Birds are grateful and repay attention. I wonder where my maid is? Petra! (*Signals for her maid.*)

DON GONZALO: (*Aside, looking at LAURA, whose back is turned.*) No, no, I will not reveal myself. I am grotesque now. Better that she recall the gallant horseman who passed daily beneath her window tossing flowers.

DONA LAURA: Here she comes.

DON GONZALO: That Juanito! He plays havoc with the nursemaids. (*Looks right and signals with his hand.*)

DONA LAURA: (*Aside, looking at Gonzalo, whose back is turned.*) No, I am too sadly changed. It is better he should remember me as the black eyed girl tossing flowers as he passed among the roses in the garden. (*Juanito enters by right, Petra by left. She has a bunch of violets in her hand.*)

DONA LAURA: Well, Petra! At last!

DON GONZALO: Juanito, you are late.

PETRA: (*To Dona Laura.*) The guard gave me these violets for you, senora.

DONA LAURA: How very nice! Thank him for me. They are fragrant. (*As she takes the violets from her maid a few loose ones fall to the ground.*)

DON GONZALO: My dear lady, this has been a great honour and a great pleasure.

DONA LAURA: It has also been a pleasure to me.

DON GONZALO: Good-bye until tomorrow.

DONA LAURA: Until tomorrow.

DON GONZALO: If it is sunny.

DONA LAURA: A sunny morning. Will you go to your bench?

DON GONZALO: No, I will come to this—if you do not object?

DONA LAURA: This bench is at your disposal.

DON GONZALO: And I will surely bring the crumbs.

DONA LAURA: Tomorrow, then?

DON GONZALO: Tomorrow! (*Laura walks away toward right, supported by her*

Maid. Gonzalo, before leaving with Juanito, trembling and with a great effort, stoops to pick up the violets Laura dropped. Just then Laura turns her head and surprises him picking up the flowers.)

JUANITO: What are you doing, señor?

DON GONZALO: Juanito, wait—

DONA LAURA: (Aside.) Yes, it is he!

DON GONZALO: (Aside.) It is she, and no mistake. (*Dona Laura and Don Gonzalo wave farewell.*)

DONA LAURA: “Can it be that this is he?”

DON GONZALO: “Heavens, is it she?” (*They smile once more, as if she were again at the window and he below in the rose garden, and then disappear upon the arms of their servants.*)

CURTAIN

NOTES

Senora: a Spanish way of addressing a married woman, similar to ‘Madam’. Senorita is the term used to address unmarried women, and señor is used to address men.

Adios: a courteous way of saying ‘goodbye’ in Spanish

Mass: a religious celebration held regularly in the Roman Catholic Church

Aravaca: a village near Madrid

Campoamor: Ramón de Campoamor (1817–1901), a Spanish poet and philosopher

Espronceda: José de Espronceda (1808–1842), a Spanish romantic poet

Zorrilla: José Zorrilla (1817–1893), a Spanish romantic poet and dramatist

Bécquer: Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836–1870), a Spanish poet

Ferdinand and Isabella: the king and queen of Spain who financed Christopher Columbus’s voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in the late 1400s

Valencia: a city on the eastern coast of Spain

Seville: a city in southern Spain

Glossary

atrocious (adj.): very bad; disgusting; horrifyingly wicked

boudoir (n.): a woman’s bedroom

caravels (n.): ships built in Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth century

duel (n.): a contest between two people with deadly weapons in order to settle a point of honour

glutton(n.): a person who is greedy for food

gouty (adj.): suffering from the swelling in the joints

snuff (n.): powdered tobacco

graven (adj.): carved

grotesque (adj.): comically or repulsively ugly or distorted

indignant (adj.): feeling or showing anger because of something unjust or unfair

parasol(n.): a small, colourful umbrella used for protection from the sun

Providence (n.): a force that determines human fate; God

spryest (adj.): active and lively

threnody (n.): a song of lament for the dead

Understanding the text

Answer the following questions.

- a. What makes Dona Laura think that Don Gonzalo is an ill-natured man? Why do neither Dona Laura nor Don Gonzalo reveal their true identities?
- b. At what point of time, do you think, Laura and Gonzalo begin to recognise each other?
- c. When does Dona Laura realise that Don Gonzalo was her former lover?
- d. Why do Dona Laura and Don Gonzalo spin fictitious stories about themselves?
- e. How do Dona Laura and Don Gonzalo feel about each other?

Reference to the context

- a. Look at the extract below and answer the questions that follow:

“Yes, you are only twenty. (She sits down on the bench.) Oh, I feel more tired today than usual. (Noticing Petra, who seems impatient.) Go, if you wish to chat with your guard.”

 - i. Who is the speaker?
 - ii. Who does ‘you’ refer to?
 - iii. Who is the ‘guard’ the speaker is talking to?
- b. Read the extract dialogue from the play and answer the questions that follow:

DONA LAURA: (Indignantly.) Look out!

DON GONZALO: Are you speaking to me, senora?

DONA LAURA: Yes, to you.

DON GONZALO: What do you wish?

DONA LAURA: You have scared away the birds who were feeding on my crumbs.

DON GONZALO: What do I care about the birds?

DONA LAURA: But I do.

DON GONZALO: This is a public park.

- c. Who is Dona addressing by saying “Look out”?
- d. What was Dona doing?
- e. Who scared the birds? Are they pet birds?
- f. Where are the speakers at the time of the conversation?
- g. What is the effect of flashback in the play when Dona Laura and Don Gonzalo knew that they were the lovers in the past?
- h. Discuss how the play is built around humour and irony.
- i. How is the title ‘A Sunny Morning’ justifiable? Discuss.

Reference beyond the text

- a. What do you predict will happen in the next meeting between Dona Laura and Don Gonzalo? Discuss.
- b. Was it wise for Dona Laura and Don Gonzalo to keep their identities secret? How might their secrets affect future meetings?
- c. Write the summary of the play.