The Mitochondria

a short comedy
by Ruth Apolonia Zamoyta

This play was not written using AI.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BUZZ M – chill boyfriend

CHICHI F – vexed girlfriend

Note: BUZZ and CHICHI should appear close in age, somewhere between 30ish and 50ish. Diverse casting encouraged.

TIME & PLACE:
Early twenty-first century; a struggling-class urban kitchen in a developed part of the world.

The Scene

Setting: Kitchen. Two counters, upstage and downstage; an electric juicer; a brown bag of carrots; a plastic shopping bag containing a large plastic bag of carrots and a bottle of insecticide; two bowls; knife; cutting board; more vegetables. There is a saxophone in a stand to the side.

At Rise: BUZZ is chopping vegetables downstage. CHICHI paces nervously behind him, continuously checking her phone.

BUZZ

It's all about the mitochondria.

CHICHI

The what?

BUZZ

You remember. They mediate cell growth?

CHICHI

What do mitochondria have to do with pepperoni?

BUZZ

It means they also mediate cell death. And the nitrites in pepperoni could kill your mitochondria.

CHICHI

But, we're talking about why you spit your chewed-up pizza on Phil's shoes.

BUZZ

Because I asked if it was vegetarian and the pizza girl lied.

CHICHI

You could have just swallowed it.

BUZZ

You know how many mitochondria would have died if I swallowed that pepperoni? Mitochondria are the powerhouse of the cell. If I don't pay attention to my mitochondria, my brain will shrink.

CHICHI
You have billions of mitochondria but I only have one chance to make it into the band. And Phil is the gatekeeper to the band. He should have called already! Why doesn't he call?

BUZZ
The average person pivots careers twelve times in their life.

CHICHI
I'm not going to give up playing the saxophone like you did.

BUZZ
I still play the saxophone.

CHICHI
You play, like, Happy Birthday on the phone to your nephews.

BUZZ
Hey, babe, I looked for a gig for over a year and finally realized you don't need to play the saxophone to have a meaningful career.

CHICHI
So now you water office plants.

BUZZ
Office plants clear the air of toxins and those office plants were going to die of Monsanto until I came around.

CHICHI
(looks at the bottle of insecticide she just bought)
Monsanto?

BUZZ
Monsanto causes cytotoxicity and oxidative effects on human cells. I fertilize the office plants with organic egg shells, coffee grounds, and banana peels.

CHICHI
You leave banana peels in plants at investment banks?

BUZZ
Nitrogen and phosphate are essential for office plants.

CHICHI
If you're leaving the remains of our breakfast in office plants, you're going to lose that job too.

BUZZ
Chill, babe. The office manager said I'm conscientious.

(proud of himself)

CHICHI
Conscientiousness is not a valued skillset in investment banks. You better not blow this job. It could be our only source of income because you spit your chewed-up pizza all over Phil.

BUZZ
Phil was cool. He said I should sue the pizza girl for telling me it was vegetarian.

CHICHI
Well, he's not going to say, "Bro. That was disgusting," because he has manners. He doesn't make people uncomfortable, like by vomiting on their Ferragamos.

BUZZ
Mitochondria are more important than Ferragamos. I was up all night with a migraine just from that one bite of nitrites.

CHICHI
One bite. You took one bite of the pepperoni. You didn't even swallow it.

BUZZ
The nitrites, like, got on my teeth.
(shows his teeth)

CHICHI
First, you stop eating rice between March and October. Then you eat twelve eggs a day, then it's charcoal for breakfast, saltwater between meals, coconut oil in your coffee, and pickle juice—

BUZZ
Pickle juice is a rich source of probiotics, electrolytes, and antioxidants.

(Ding! BUZZ checks his watch and drinks pickle juice.)

CHICHI
But you only drink the juice, so I'm forced to throw away perfectly good pickles because I can't eat them fast enough.

BUZZ
Cucumbers cause imbalance in your bodily fluids. I don't want to become imbalanced.
(he stops chopping)
Can you hand me a bowl?

(CHICHI hands him a plastic bowl.)

BUZZ (Cont.)
Plastic? Really? Thirty percent of plastics are made of monomers that are carcinogenic, mutagenic, or toxic for reproduction.

CHICHI
How is the plastic going to get from the bowl to your testicles?

BUZZ
(shows her the bowl)
See those scratches? The plastic that was in those scratches is right now forming polyps in your ovaries.

CHICHI
(hands him wooden bowl)
Here. Now you can get splinters in your testicles.

BUZZ
Splinters are biodegradable. Hey, babe, can you give me one of those carrots?
(points to paper bag)

CHICHI
(looks into the paper bag)
You bought carrots?

BUZZ
Farmers' market. Only twenty dollars a pound.

CHICHI
I told you, I already got a ten-pound bag at Costco. For ten-fifty.
(shows the plastic bag of carrots)

BUZZ
Do you see anything on that <u>plastic</u> packaging that says or-gan-ic?

CHICHI
No.

BUZZ
Non-GMO?

CHICHI
No.

BUZZ
Biologique?

CHICHI

Non.

BUZZ

Why would I want to eat ten pounds of pesticides?

CHICHI

It's ten pounds of carrot and maybe one microgram of pesticides.

BUZZ

That's enough to kill one mitochondrion, and what if it's the one mitochondrion I need to stay alive?

CHICHI

(hands him an organic carrot)

If I don't get this gig, we'll have to pick rotten carrots out of dumpsters and eat them.

(CHICHI's phone rings.)

CHICHI (Cont.)

Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god— Hello?

(pause, screams into the phone)

No, I do not want an extended car warranty!

(violently hangs up)

That's it. I'm ruined. I'm not going to get the gig.

BUZZ

It's not the end of the world if you don't get the gig.

CHICHI

(increasing desperation)

This is the only remaining full-time, paying, big-band gig in the universe. So when the pizza girl screws up and doesn't know there's a pepperoni hiding in your pizza, and you're standing in front of Phil, you swallow the goddamn pepperoni!

BUZZ

Not to mention the pig that's being farmed for its pepperoni. That pig emits millions of particles of methane into the atmosphere. Which causes climate apocalypse.

CHICHI

The pig's dead already! I don't understand why you couldn't just swallow the dead pig! For me!

BUZZ

(puts down the knife)

Chill, babe. We'll be all right.

CHICHI

How are we going to pay the rent? And, the cat needs Prozac, the car needs tires, we have to pay your nutritionist, there are holes in the bottom of my shoes, and we only have three hundred dollars in the bank!

(breaks down)

BUZZ

(hugs her)

We'll make it through, babe. You and me. Everything we need is right here. Look.

(points to vegetables)

B1, B6, B12, iodine, flavonoids, coenzyme Q.

CHICHI

Coenzyme Q?

BUZZ

(strokes her hair and looks into her eyes lovingly)

It transports electrons within your mitochondria.

CHICHI

(loses it)

I don't care about my mitochondria! Let them die! I never wanted mitochondria! I will stab the mitochondria!

(grabs knife; stabs vegetables repeatedly)

BUZZ

I don't think that's possible without, like, an electron laser.

(She drops the knife.)

CHICHI

I'm doomed! Doomed! What am I going to do? Huh? I am sick and tired of transposing operettas for a living!

BUZZ

You know, babe, I was thinking we should move to the countryside.

CHICHI

What could I possibly do in the countryside? I am a saxophone player!

BUZZ

You can gather eggs and make candles.

CHICHI

I don't want to make candles! I want to play the saxophone!

BUZZ

Everything will be, like, solar or wind-powered, and our house will be made of recycled glass bottles.

CHICHI

I love the saxophone, I'm good at the saxophone, and I had this gig in the bag until you waltzed up to Phil and spit on his shoes! Why did you do that to me?! Why?!

BUZZ

We'll sit together in the sun, alone. No people, no cars, no sounds but the birds and crickets. And we'll sit there, all day long, watching our vegetables grow.

(CHICHI looks at her saxophone. Something dawns on her.)

CHICHI

I know why you spit your pizza on Phil. You don't want me to get the gig, do you?

BUZZ

(ignoring her; continues chopping vegetables)

I found this charming rental yurt on Zillow. It will make a good starter home till we have enough bottles to make the house.

CHICHI

You ruined your career so you want to ruin mine, too.

BUZZ

We'll bathe in a trickling brook, and brew our own pulque out of agaves.

CHICHI

Your last gig. One year ago. You stayed on the stage a whole hour after the show, cleaning your instruments, and Phil had to pay the union guys overtime.

BUZZ

There was, like, rust in my mouthpiece.

CHICHI

So, Phil never hired you again.

BUZZ

Babe. Chill out. In the countryside we can, like, weave hemp garments and sell them on Facebook.

CHICHI

And no one wanted to hire you. Not the orchestra, not the swing band, not the blues band, not even the wedding band.

(Ouch. BUZZ stops chopping.)

CHICHI (Cont.)
And Phil asked me to audition, not you, so you deliberately spit your pizza vomit all over him so I wouldn't get the gig!

BUZZ
(faces her)
Are you going to blame me if you don't get the gig?

CHICHI
Yes! I am going to blame you if I don't get the gig!

BUZZ
Because you think I'm sabotaging your career?

CHICHI
After sabotaging your own.

(Ding of a text. CHICHI looks at her phone.)

CHICHI (Cont.)
I didn't get the gig.

BUZZ
Maybe you need to practice more.

(After a beat, BUZZ turns his back on her and continues chopping. CHICHI looks at the saxophone, festering.)

BUZZ (Cont.)
You know, hon, I really wish you'd use compostable tampons. A year's worth of tampons leaves a carbon footprint of 5.3 kilograms of CO^2 equivalents. But, after we move to the countryside you won't need sanitary products and you won't have to shave. We'll be one with the Earth, completely happy.
(beat)
Hey, babe. Can you juice the rest of those carrots?

(Without turning around, BUZZ points to the brown paper bag. Through the following dialogue, CHICHI deliberately juices non-organic carrots in the electric juicer, then she squirts one with insecticide and juices it.)

BUZZ (Cont.)

I was thinking, hon, instead of a lawn we'll have a meadow with wildflowers for the pollinators. We'll forage for edibles and medicinal herbs and make our own soap and jam. A burro would be useful. And goats. Definitely goats and llamas, for their milk, cheese and wool.

(CHICHI hands BUZZ the glass.)

BUZZ (Cont.)

Mmmm. Looks great. Thanks, babe.

(BUZZ drinks. He suddenly clutches his throat, gags, chokes, struggles for breath. He turns around and sees CHICHI holding the bag of non-organic carrots.)

BUZZ (Cont.)

My mitochondria!

(BUZZ falls to the floor and stops moving. CHICHI approaches him.)

CHICHI

Hello? … Yoo-hoo! … Are you—?

(CHICHI checks to see if he is dead and makes a phone call.)

CHICHI (Cont.)

(into the phone)

Hello? I'd like a meat-lovers pizza with extra pepperoni, five hot dogs, the pulled pork sliders, a liverwurst sandwich, and bacon double cheeseburger. Make it bloody.

(CHICHI picks up the sax and plays a screaming riff as lights fade.)

FADEOUT

END OF PLAY