

The Happy City

(based on The Plague by Albert Camus)

by

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DESCRIPTION

The play takes place in a fictional city along a major American river, 1932, a port city, though small. It sits on a peninsula which juts into the river so that most of the town's boundary is edged by water. It is a fairly prosperous city, where the extremes of wealth (at least in the white community) are not great and everyone believes in the bourgeois virtues and certainties. In 1932, at the nadir of the Depression, the city contracts an epidemic of bubonic plague. As in the novel by Camus, the citizens must face their existential situation and the full force of their enforced freedom from expectations, habits, and settled meanings.

CHARACTERS (doubling is suggested)

- DR. BERNARD ROYCE
- MIRIAM ROYCE, Dr. Royce's Wife / EMMA REISING, Reporter
- JOHN THOREAU (pronounced "thorough")
- MADELEINE RUE, Mayor's Secretary
- DR. LIONEL CASTLE
- DR. RICHARD FREEMAN
- MAYOR / RASTER, smuggler
- GERALD TERRENCE, Head Of Health Dept. / HENRY CLEW, New Head, Sanitation Dept. / GRAVEDIGGER 1
- JAMES PARKER, Head, Sanitation Dept. / LEONARD JOHNSON, New Head, Health Dept / GRAVEDIGGER 2
- MRS. CORINTH / NURSE (both in the first scene and in ACT II montage)
- PETER, building superintendent / FATHER GREY
- REV. JOSIAH HIGHTOWER
- DR. GALEN LITTLEFIELD
- ORANGE MAN (M'BENGUE)
- HANNAH SAMUELS: Various minor roles: As will be seen, there are a number of minor roles throughout, including children. Inhabitants of Liberty Town must be African American.

SOUND

There will be music indicated throughout for scene transitions and effects within scenes. There will also be other "sonic environments": street sounds, summer night sounds, water sounds, ambulance tocsin, faint music from a radio. Most important is the sound of a whip, loud and frightening.

NOTE 1: Whenever characters write in their journals, they will speak what they are writing. They do not have to mime writing all through the speech, but they should begin with a mime in order to establish that they are voicing over the words on the page.

NOTE 2: When a bed is called for, a chair should be used.

NOTE 3: Slides will be used in the Prologue and throughout the play.

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PROLOGUE

SLIDE: 1932. The Depression. The world had fallen apart.

SOUND: The snap and crack of a whip, three times.

MUSIC: something from 1932.

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ACT I, Scene 1: The apartment of Dr. and Miriam Royce

SLIDE: The Day Begins With A Departure

Stage right is a small wooden table with a single lamp on it, a telephone, two chairs (one for visitors), a pile of mail, a pad of paper, and a Philco radio. A doctor's bag and a hat on the table. MIRIAM ROYCE enters, dressed for travel, accompanied by a NURSE and DR. ROYCE. The nurse is carrying two satchels.

MIRIAM: Are you sure?

ROYCE: As always.

MIRIAM: Are you sure I look all right?

ROYCE gives her a strong embrace.

ROYCE: Yes, you do. Ready?

MIRIAM: Yes.

ROYCE: Her medicines?

NURSE indicates one of the satchels.

NURSE: Yes, doctor.

The three of them walk to downstage center.

Sound: a train station in the background.

ROYCE: I wired the sanatorium again -- someone --

MIRIAM: My always thorough husband.

ROYCE: -- will meet you at the station.

A voice announces the departure of a train.

ROYCE: Miriam --

MIRIAM puts a finger to his lips.

MIRIAM: This is only for a little while. When I get back -- a fresh start!

ROYCE: Yes.

MIRIAM: Things won't change that much until then.

ROYCE: Be sure she rests --

MIRIAM: *(laughing)* She knows what --

ROYCE: -- keep her calm.

MIRIAM: -- to do, Bernard.

ROYCE: I will miss you.

Final boarding call.

MIRIAM: My chariot calls. I'll write as soon as I get there -- if not sooner.

MIRIAM and the NURSE exit.

ROYCE: Take great care of yourself.

Train sounds fade out. There is a beat or two of silence. Then out of nowhere comes a sound, as if large whip had been cracked. It cracks three times. The sound should be sufficiently loud to make people jump. This sound will be repeated throughout the play -- it is the sound of the plague swinging its whip over the city. ROYCE looks up for a moment, puzzled, picks up his satchel, then moves to his "apartment," stage right.

PETER, the building's superintendent, comes on from stage left holding a large paper bag. ROYCE can be looking through mail, etc. The scene with CORINTH is set upstage center.

SLIDE: Beware A Messenger With Any News.

PETER: Dr. Royce! Dr. Royce!

ROYCE: What, Peter?

PETER indicates the bag.

PETER: Found 'em this morning --

ROYCE: What?

PETER: Three dead rats. Ain't right.

ROYCE: I'm sure --

PETER: Ain't the only ones. Other supers --

PETER scratches his arm throughout his lines.

PETER: -- been finding 'em. Ain't right. I keep the garbage sealed, just like you told me.

ROYCE: Good.

PETER: Ain't right.

ROYCE: Bury them -- don't throw them back in the garbage.

PETER: Why're the rats givin' up?

ROYCE: Giving up?

PETER: You know, flat out, legs stiff up, blood all over their faces --

ROYCE: Blood?

PETER: That's how I found 'em. Flat out. Like a king-pin bowled over.

ROYCE: You're sure about the blood?

PETER: Wanna see?

ROYCE: It's not -- no.

PETER: Their muzzles, you know, dipped like a pen nib.

ROYCE: Go bury them. And let me know any more stories from your friends.

PETER exits, scratching his arm. ROYCE turns upstage, where the lights come up on an old woman lying in bed, that is, seated in a chair. Two metal bowls are on her lap. CORINTH is 75 years old. On a table beside the bed is a small Philco radio

playing music, very low. She has a quilt or afghan over her laps and knees. From one bowl she takes a handful of dried peas and drops them into the other bowl, one by one, metronomically. She continues this throughout the conversation. ROYCE prepares an injection.

SLIDE: The Oracle Is Not Always At Delphi.

ROYCE: And how is my strange asthmatic timekeeper today?

CORINTH: Pluckin' the fiddle.

ROYCE: Breathing well?

CORINTH: The bellows work, the brain still ticks. Noticed?

ROYCE: What?

CORINTH: The rats!

ROYCE gives her the injection.

ROYCE: Hold still.

CORINTH: The earth, pukin' 'em out all over the place! Heaped on the garbage cans, stiffer 'n snot in winter time. Some vomiting up blood. People shovel 'em off the steps to escape their houses.

ROYCE: Don't exaggerate.

CORINTH: Only the truth. Take a look, take a look yourself. The Apocalypse has made a reservation at the hotel o' life -- getcher tickets! Getcher popcorn!

ROYCE: Just mind your "peas" and q's, Mrs. Corinth.

CORINTH: I call it the countdown, I call it down for the count. And I'm markin' the time. Plink. Plink. Plink.

ROYCE: In a few days, I'll see you.

CORINTH: I can hear the wheels of the Juggernaut now, Doctor! Crunch, crunch! Better jump out of the way!

ROYCE moves downstage. Lights out on CORINTH; her bed disappears. He pauses for a moment, then walks back to his "apartment," looking concerned. General lighting goes out. As he does so, three more very loud whip cracks -- with each one a pool of red light bumps up, then out. ROYCE times his walk so that he is in each pool with each whip crack. Lights back up after the last one. He reaches his "apartment" and dials the phone. During the calls, PETER's apartment is set: three chairs, one of which will be a "bed," and a small side table.

SLIDE: Science Requires Verification.

EMMA REISING enters stage left and crosses to ROYCE's office. She is young, mid-twenties and carries a canvas knapsack. She has a pad of paper and a pencil in her hand. She stands at the door listening to the conversation.

ROYCE: Hello, Sanitation please. James? Bernard Royce. She's better, good -- young bones -- right, right. Look, what can you tell [me] -- the rats, yes. Extra crews -- jobs, at least. And the bodies? Have your men -- I know that, but have your men been wearing gloves? Keeping count? Could I have the numbers tomorrow? What do I think? Tomor[ow] -- tomorrow, then.

He breaks the connection, makes another call.

ROYCE: Joe Johnson, city desk. Joe? Bernard. I am calling about the [rats] -- the "isn't it strange?" category? -- which means you don't [know] -- well we don't know that. Okay if I call tomorrow? Thanks.

He breaks the connection, makes another call.

ROYCE: Mayor's office please. Maddie, Bernard Royce. I was calling to see if you've gotten any calls -- the rats, yes. Do me a favor -- keep a count. I'll call tomorrow -- Good talking with you, too.

SLIDE: The Brawd From New Yawk Blows Inta Town

ROYCE finishes the conversations, writes down notes.

ROYCE: Yes.

REISING: Dr. Royce --

ROYCE waves her in.

ROYCE: A sec, a second. I need to write this. Excuse the way things look.

REISING: Don't apologize. You should see my den. Hell's Kitchen was named after me.

REISING drops her bag to the floor with an audible "thunk." ROYCE notices.

REISING: My pound of gold.

ROYCE indicates his own bag.

ROYCE: Could you get one for mine?

ROYCE finishes his notes.

ROYCE: Yes?

REISING shakes his hand.

REISING: Emma Reising.

ROYCE: Miss Reising.

REISING: Emma.

ROYCE: Emma, then.

REISING: Sets the tone.

ROYCE: And you know my name.

REISING: I dig, therefore I am. I'm a journalist.

ROYCE: For?

REISING: The Working Class United. Out of New York.

REISING pulls a copy out of her bag and hands it to him.

REISING: My calling card.

ROYCE: New York.

REISING: You've heard of it, I'm sure --

ROYCE: The city?

REISING: The paper.

ROYCE: Sorry, no.

REISING: No? No "culcha" in the "heartland."

ROYCE: Sorry again.

REISING: You're apologizing --

ROYCE: Call it courtesy.

REISING: Mr. Karl said about bourgeois etiquette --

ROYCE: Around here, "red" applies mostly to rare steaks, not politics. Or manners.

REISING: I don't think Marx or Engels wrote about red meat.

ROYCE: I have rounds to make --

REISING: I'm sorry -- now you have me saying it! -- I know you're busy.

REISING points at the paper.

REISING: Notice the byline? The headline? A series of articles on the working class in the "heartland."

ROYCE: What's left of it.

REISING: The heartland or the working class -- be careful how you answer.

ROYCE: You wanted to talk to me.

REISING: I'm trying to do a landscape -- Negroes, Jews, Catholics, medical care for workers --

REISING looks at her pad.

REISING: Medical care -- that's where your name came up -- let's see --

ROYCE: I'm not the only doctor to do --

REISING: Your name popped out more than any other --

ROYCE: Who did you talk to --

REISING: -- especially over in Liberty Town.

ROYCE: So you've been there.

REISING: My contact took me.

ROYCE: Your contact.

REISING: Rather not say.

ROYCE: Liberty Town -- you probably find that an odd name --

REISING: -- for a hell-hole full of Negro tenant farmers and day laborers -- your peculiar institution -- though "odd" -- not at the top of my word list.

ROYCE: No, I imagine it wouldn't be.

REISING: But "odd" is only as far as you go? Yes?

ROYCE: I have to be at the hospital --

REISING: The doctor must doctor.

ROYCE: -- so let me be short-winded: You want my help?

REISING: If you want to give it.

ROYCE: Will you be able to print the truth?

REISING: I always write the truth. Just read.

ROYCE: Not what I asked.

REISING: Then what?

ROYCE: I can get you facts and figures. After all, we're just a small port city, barge traffic mostly. Church on Sunday. Rare steaks.

REISING: Liberty Town.

ROYCE: But would you -- would you, say, print favorable comments about Alston Hargrove -- he owns a local tannery?

REISING: Owner, boss.

ROYCE: Capitalist to the bone.

REISING: So?

ROYCE: Has a nurse full-time for his workers --

REISING: How nice.

ROYCE: Doctors visit workers in their homes --

REISING: Sickness he's probably caused.

ROYCE: Paid for funerals --

REISING: Probably caused --

ROYCE: Even runs the tannery now to give workers some income.

REISING: Lord of the estate.

ROYCE: But his workers benefit.

REISING: What he giveth --

ROYCE: Would you include --

REISING: The workers deserve his "gifts" as a right.

ROYCE: Would you include favorable --

REISING: No.

ROYCE: So you can't print the full truth.

REISING: Your "truth" about him is not truth. He's irrelevant.

ROYCE: Irrelevant.

REISING: (*overlapping*) Being even-handed -- which I'm sure you are, given the way people talk about you -- that plays the game by their rules. And what have we gotten for "their rules"? Read the paper. You see it every day: "all that solid melts into air." Bloat, sickness, despair, deletion. Not interested. "Playing fair" and "telling the truth" ain't the same game. People have had enough "fair" tucked into them.

ROYCE: And I have to tell you that I get tired of people proclaiming the "truth" when all they have is a sales pitch.

REISING: As if being "decent" and "humane" -- qualities you apparently possess in abundance - - repairs the damage, prevents the damage. So --

ROYCE: Not without Alston Hargrove.

REISING: I can't. I won't.

ROYCE: Then, no.

REISING: Well.

ROYCE: I won't stand in your way, but I won't --

REISING picks up her bag.

REISING: Well, Dr. Royce -- this has been -- instructive.

ROYCE: We don't often get visits from the wicked East Coast.

ROYCE walks her to the door, hands her the paper. REISING hands it back to him.

REISING: Keep it -- it may work its charms yet.

ROYCE: If you're hunting for stories, look into the rats.

REISING: Rats.

ROYCE: Dying rats. This is not how you thought --

REISING: The world rips itself apart, and you think fairness is enough.

ROYCE: Sorry.

REISING: Apologizing -- seems to suit you.

SLIDE: The Messenger Arrives Again.

As REISING leaves, she passes PETER and JOHN THOREAU. PETER is leaning on the arm of THOREAU, a new tenant in the building. REISING hesitates, then follows them in. THOREAU is carrying a small battered leather rucksack, which he keeps with him almost always. In it, among other things, he keeps a journal.

PETER: Dr. Royce! Dr. Royce! Hoodlums! Hood--lums! Putting dead rats in the hallw -- Hoodlums!

PETER staggers a bit against THOREAU.

ROYCE: Peter?

THOREAU: I found him, in the alleyway, against the wall. Just thrown up -- bloody.

ROYCE: Bloody. You are --

THOREAU: John Thoreau. I just moved in.

ROYCE: Let me feel.

ROYCE puts his hand on PETER's neck, feels. PETER flinches.

ROYCE: A lump there, hard as wood. When did that hap[pen] --

PETER: Got 'em under my arms.

ROYCE: When?

PETER: Musta strained myself.

ROYCE: Straight to bed. Can you two give him a hand? He lives alone.

THOREAU: A step ahead of you.

PETER wrenches himself out of THOREAU's grasp.

PETER: Ain't a cripple!

PETER begins crossing to stage left on his own. By the time PETER reaches his apartment, he has become visibly more in pain; his body seems to contract and distort. He sits on the chair with great effort.

ROYCE: I hate to impose --

THOREAU: Don't think about it.

REISING: I'll give you a hand.

THOREAU: Introductions later, then. (to ROYCE) Tonight, tell me what you think.

ROYCE: Give him water. I'll be right down.

THOREAU and REISING cross to stage left. They minister to PETER. As they do, three cracks of the whip. They respond as if they hear it but don't recognize it. THOREAU removes PETER's shoes, shirt, etc., while REISING goes offstage. She brings back a bowl, a washcloth, and a glass of water and puts them on the side table.

ROYCE checks through his bag and then makes it down to PETER's "apartment."

THOREAU: He's already worse.

ROYCE begins his examination.

ROYCE: (to REISING) Put that cloth on his forehead.

ROYCE Inserts a thermometer in his mouth, takes out his stethoscope and listens to PETER's heart.

ROYCE: Accelerated, erratic. Raspy. Feel these.

THOREAU fingers the ganglia of PETER's neck and limbs.

ROYCE: They're going to get bigger and harder, more painful.

ROYCE takes out the thermometer.

ROYCE: 103. Give him water. There isn't anything else --

REISING: Well?

THOREAU: What?

PETER: Damn rats! Hooligans -- damn!

ROYCE: We need to get him to the hospital. I'll call.

THOREAU: You didn't answer her question.

REISING: What do you think?

ROYCE: (to THOREAU) Stay with him?

THOREAU: To be sure.

ROYCE: (to REISING) I know you have work to do --

REISING: I'll stay. After all, I'm seeing the fair man in action.

ROYCE goes back to his desk to make the call; he will make several to other doctors. As he does so, PETER sits bolt upright. THOREAU and REISING try to restrain him. While ROYCE speaks, the audience simultaneously sees PETER die after a struggle. This is done as a dumbshow, but if PETER were to speak, he would say the following.

PETER: Get 'em off me! They're eatin' away at me!

PETER falls back, arms outspread.

PETER: Everything hurts. So damn thirsty!

PETER tries to get out of the bed.

PETER: Have work to do. Can't let the damn rats--

THOREAU restrains him. PETER grabs at him, then falls back into the bed, muttering "Damn rats!" over and over. With a great spasm, he dies.

ROYCE makes his phone calls.

ROYCE: Dr. Freeman, please. Dr. Royce. Richard? Bernard. Have you had any cases -- Two? Inflamed ganglia? Abnormally large? Well, large then. I've got one -- I'll be in touch.

ROYCE hangs up, makes another call.

ROYCE: Hello, Dr. Castle there? Dr. Royce. Busy? Could you tell me if you've had any unusual patient visits? High fever? Any strange symptoms? Body aches -- where? Under the arms, in the groin. Have Dr. Castle call me as soon as he's free.

ROYCE makes another call.

ROYCE: Hello, Jeb? Dr. Royce. I'm going to need an ambulance. My house. Thanks.

ROYCE hangs up, stands for a moment looking at the notes he's jotted down, then walks to PETER's "apartment." ROYCE sees PETER's prostrate figure.

ROYCE: Tell me how.

THOREAU: First, a delirium -- about rats. Eating away at him. He tried to get out of bed.

REISING: Then he just seemed -- to -- melt away. And he said everything hurt.

ROYCE: I'll go with the body. We'll have to do tests.

THOREAU: You still never answered her.

ROYCE: Are you always this strict with strangers?

THOREAU: (*indicating PETER*) Strangers? You know -- don't you.

ROYCE: I -- suspect --

THOREAU: I was in Los Angeles in 1925 -- thirty-three cases pneumonic, eight cases bubonic.

REISING: Plague.

ROYCE: Now --

THOREAU: When I was a ship's mate, in my callow youth, it was San Francisco. We passed through India just after that -- nobody knew how many millions --

REISING: Plague.

ROYCE: It could be -- other things: diphtheria, anthrax, cat-scratch fever, tularemia -- tularemia is very much like this.

THOREAU: You don't really think that.

ROYCE: I was in Los Angeles as well.

The sound of an ambulance tocsin in the distance, slowly rising in volume.

ROYCE: It's possible.

THOREAU: And you thought we were all strangers. Anyway, you and I will see more of each other -- we live in the same building now.

REISING: I don't think Mr. Karl had a dialectical position about plague.

ROYCE: That word doesn't leave this room.

REISING: Does your decency have any script for this? I've never seen "dead" so close.

THOREAU: Like someone erased the board and no one took down the notes. Where do we go from here?

REISING: Why are you smiling?

THOREAU: The beginning of the great adventure.

ROYCE: (*to REISING*) Where are you staying?

REISING: With some people.

ROYCE: Your contact.

REISING: Should I not?

ROYCE: I want you both to come with me and disinfect. You should trash your clothes. He had no lesions, but --

THOREAU: The dice are ever-rolling.

The ambulance tocsin gets louder.

ROYCE: India -- you'll have to tell me --

ROYCE stands bathed in the ambulance light; then everything bumps to black and silence. Some period music comes up as ROYCE goes to his desk; Doctors FREEMAN and CASTLE enter. PETER's apartment is struck and the MAYOR's office is set stage left.

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ACT I, SCENE 2: The next day -- Royce's apartment; the Mayor's office

SLIDE: Science Finds Its Skepticism Inadequate.

The music becomes music from ROYCE's radio. ROYCE is at his desk, a journal open in front of him. Seated around his desk is DR. RICHARD FREEMAN and DR. LIONEL CASTLE. FREEMAN is ROYCE's age; CASTLE is an older man with little patience for dissembling. ROYCE doodles in his journal the conversation. The first line is said in darkness.

FREEMAN: Don't jump to such a conclusion!

Lights up.

ROYCE: What else, Richard?

CASTLE: You have to adm --

FREEMAN: We haven't done tests yet, Lionel --

ROYCE: How many cases this week?

FREEMAN: Two.

ROYCE turns the radio off.

CASTLE: Doesn't that prickle your curiosity?

FREEMAN: Chance.

CASTLE: And my six cases?

ROYCE: Counting my superintendent -- 28 cases, all buried. The last time we had 28 deaths in a week from anything --

FREEMAN: Spanish influenza --

CASTLE: Fifteen years ago.

ROYCE: Richard, this is not flu.

FREEMAN: Bernard -- plague!

CASTLE: That's the word I hear.

ROYCE: There are protocols --

FREEMAN: But no one really knows --

ROYCE: We need more information.

CASTLE: And the people --

ROYCE: -- will have to be told, yes.

FREEMAN: There's no real evidence --

CASTLE: It's coming. It'll just confirm.

FREEMAN: If we tell -- if we're wrong --

ROYCE: Then let's be right. But let's get ready for the answer we already know. *(to FREEMAN)*
As head of the Medical Association, the Mayor will follow your lead.

The whip sound, loud, followed by the sound of a crowd, as if in a busy lobby. The three doctors walk toward the MAYOR's office, straightening ties, etc. As they do, the characters in the next scene enter. The doctors converse as they walk. REISING enters from upstage center.

SLIDE: The Wise Leaders Bring Forth Policy.

FREEMAN: The mayor did not smile.

CASTLE: Now, if the plague could vote --

FREEMAN: That word --

CASTLE: (*indicating himself and ROYCE*) We own it.

REISING: Dr. Royce.

ROYCE: Miss Reising. Emma.

REISING: Glad I crossed you. I've decided -- a story on rats. Help me with that one?

ROYCE: Join us on the road to the Mayor's office, for an encounter with the truth. (*to the other doctors*) I'll explain later.

They stand in the MAYOR's office. The crowd sounds melt away. Along with the MAYOR are GERALD TERRENCE, the head of the city's Health Department, JAMES PARKER, head of the sanitation department, and MADELEINE RUE, the MAYOR's secretary, there to take notes. REISING takes out her own notebook.

MAYOR: Does everyone know --

FREEMAN: I believe so.

MAYOR: (*to REISING*) I don't believe I know you.

ROYCE: An assistant of mine, doing volunteer work, taking notes for me.

MAYOR: Let's begin, then.

RUE opens her steno pad.

MAYOR: You wanted this meeting -- I called it. What? Well?

ROYCE: It's bubonic plague.

FREEMAN: We don't have solid evidence.

TERRENCE: State lab got the samples a week ago. We should know soon.

CASTLE: Doesn't much matter what you call it when something sweeps the field like this.

MAYOR: Are you telling me the Black Death is going to be my administration's grandest achievement?

ROYCE: Preventing it will be.

MAYOR: A state of emergency?

TERRENCE: There are procedures -- a lot of work --

MAYOR: And?

TERRENCE: Well -- shutting down the city. Just clip off the two major roadways. And the National Guard would probably spike a perimeter and patrol it.

MAYOR: Mayor of a prison camp. Well, gentleman: our decision?

ROYCE: Your decision.

MAYOR: Humor me and give me some sparkingly good advice.

ROYCE: I was in Los Angeles in 1925 -- they had 33 cases. We've had 28 already, with new reports this morning. I have no doubts. I agree with Dr. Castle: let's pull up the drawbridge.

MAYOR: You do? (to TERRENCE) Dig out what we need and meet with me. (to PARKER) Quicklime every rat's ass.

ROYCE: Another suggestion. Start with Liberty Town and the working-class neighborhoods first --

MAYOR: Why?

ROYCE: Worst sanitation -- with so many superfluous people --

MAYOR: We'll see.

ROYCE: Just plan for [it] --

MAYOR: We'll make the policy as we need it. Gentlemen, I hope we know what we're doing.

CASTLE: Always the optimist, huh?

The conference breaks up. TERRENCE and PARKER go to speak with the MAYOR.

MAYOR: Maddie, I need you to take some quick letters for me.

FREEMAN and CASTLE move toward the "door"; ROYCE indicates to them that he will join them in a moment. REISING joins ROYCE. As MADDIE moves toward the MAYOR, ROYCE stops her for a moment; REISING overhears.

ROYCE: I just wanted to ask you --

RUE glances at REISING, slightly embarrassed.

RUE: I'm well, Dr. Royce. Thank you, again, for -- for helping me.

ROYCE: I just wanted to check.

MAYOR: Maddie.

ROYCE: I'll let you get on with your work.

MADDIE moves toward the small knot of men, her pad in hand.

REISING: You do get around.

ROYCE: My job uses all the prepositions.

REISING: They'll close the city?

ROYCE: Yes.

REISING: And no one gets out.

ROYCE: Least of all chroniclers and doctors. Are you in?

ROYCE and REISING join FREEMAN and CASTLE. The three doctors move stage right; REISING stays, watching them, then exits upstage center.

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ACT I, SCENE 3: Three weeks later

Transition music as MAYOR's office is moved offstage. There is a short confab between the three doctors, then FREEMAN and CASTLE exit. ROYCE goes to his "apartment"; he is very tired. THOREAU appears at ROYCE's "door." The music becomes music from ROYCE's radio. ROYCE is on the telephone. He indicates for THOREAU to enter.

SLIDE: There Are Always Paths But Not Always Signs.

ROYCE: Just make sure -- right. Right. Don't -- right. Good.

ROYCE hangs up.

ROYCE: What is the etiquette for shutting down a city?

THOREAU: Isn't that why they give out all those keys? There must be locks somewhere.

ROYCE: I'd prefer the Pied Piper to our Mayor-In-Hiding -- it's so damn hot.

THOREAU: You're going to have -- I think you're going to have -- a visitor tonight. Someone you need to meet.

ROYCE: Courtesy of you?

THOREAU: It was a little presumptuous, yes, in inviting him. But I think you'll find him -- revealing.

ROYCE: Fine. Don't feel --

THOREAU: You look tired.

ROYCE: This heat -- and all the uncertainties --

THOREAU: You know, you haven't asked me yet.

ROYCE: I know. I want to know: San Francisco, India, Asia. I should know. I need to know -- I will need all I can know, of anything, everything. But actually, about what actually happened --

THOREAU: I can understand.

ROYCE: The data. Raw imaginings. I am -- afraid -- I have visions -- nightmares, really --

THOREAU: I'm sure this is all harder without your wife here. Peter talked. And the fact that she can't return --

ROYCE: I am going to change the subject.

THOREAU: Understood.

ROYCE: I never properly thanked you --

THOREAU: Peter needed help. Most natural thing --

ROYCE: Natural thing!

THOREAU: -- in the world.

ROYCE: I've found that helping strangers is the most unnatural thing for people to do. They usually have to be shamed into it.

THOREAU: *(laughing)* Well, then, you've found me out --

ROYCE: What?

THOREAU: My secret ambition in life -- to become a saint. I suspect it's yours, too.

ROYCE makes an inquisitive gesture.

THOREAU: To do things without ego.

ROYCE: That's sainthood? Without ego?

THOREAU: With full self. Transparent.

REISING shows up at ROYCE's door.

ROYCE: I don't follow, transparent.

REISING: Is the lockdown complete?

THOREAU: When sitting, just sit; when breathing, just breathe.

REISING: Is it done?

THOREAU: Hello, Emma. *(to ROYCE)* Later.

REISING: Yes, hello. Sorry. Is it?

ROYCE: What?

REISING: Closed. The city -- closed.

ROYCE: Yes. "All for one -- "

Drops her bag to the floor, with a thunk.

ROYCE: Your pound of gold.

REISING: I have to leave.

ROYCE: I can probably get your stories wired --

REISING: It's not about that.

THOREAU: You can't leave, Emma.

REISING: I was in Liberty Town -- I lost track -- it's easy to lose track over there --

ROYCE: None of us can leave.

RASTER appears at ROYCE's door.

SLIDE: At The Nadir, The Entrepreneurial Spirit Finds Lucre.

ROYCE: May I help you?

THOREAU gets up and goes to the door.

THOREAU: Ah, Mr. Raster. This --

ROYCE: Our guest.

THOREAU: Mr. Raster, a man of, shall we say, definite plans. He lives down by the docks. I met Mr. Raster on one of my -- excursions. He has a great -- interest in what's going on. Don't you?

RASTER hangs by the door.

THOREAU: So, I told him he had to talk with you directly.

RASTER: Is he cool?

THOREAU: He's fair.

RASTER: *(nervous)* I gotta know, doc --

ROYCE: Something medical?

RASTER: My health, you could say that.

RASTER steps into the room.

RASTER: Plague, right? That's why the soldiers and everything, right?

ROYCE: Not the state fair, Mr. Raster.

RASTER looks immensely relieved.

RASTER: Could go on for a long time, huh?

ROYCE: Certainly within our lifetimes.

RASTER looks even more relieved; sits in the second chair.

RASTER: I just hadda find out from somethin' official.

THOREAU: Unless the Mayor, he's it.

RASTER: City Hall is unhealthy for me.

ROYCE: What -- ?

THOREAU: Not too fine a point on it, Mr. Raster is a smuggler. Or soon will be.

RASTER: Hey, you said you wouldn't --

THOREAU: -- talk to any officials. I won't. No use for them. But we can talk freely here.

ROYCE: Did you get your answers?

RASTER: Yeah.

ROYCE: Then you do something for me. Don't interfere with anything we do. And don't take things out, especially people. Resist the temptation. Treat them to a drink and send them home. We don't need you spreading death. Deal?

RASTER: You want me to agree to that? I got ambitions -- I'm givin' people somethin' they want. Tryin' to keep 'em alive, just like you.

ROYCE: Just say it.

RASTER: Or what?

ROYCE: I will turn you in.

RASTER: You said he was cool!

THOREAU: I said he was fair.

ROYCE: Just leave people where they are.

RASTER: You got my balls!

ROYCE: I just want your promise.

RASTER: You been straight with me.

ROYCE: I been straight with you.

RASTER: I'll do my best.

ROYCE: No exit visas -- that's the only "best" I want.

RASTER: Yeah, well, don't squeeze too hard, all right? I need 'em.

RASTER gets up to leave.

RASTER: Long time?

ROYCE: Let's just say your dance card is open.

RASTER leaves. REISING hesitates for a moment, looking at ROYCE and THOREAU, then leaves after him. CORINTH's scene is set upstage center.

THOREAU: The underground -- already started. It's going to unravel soon. You needed to know that.

ROYCE: If his "best" is the best we can hope for --

ROYCE checks his watch.

ROYCE: I must see a patient. Would you like to come?

THOREAU: With pleasure.

CORINTH's bed appears upstage center as THOREAU exits first. ROYCE follows THOREAU as they walk toward CORINTH. CORINTH is counting out her peas. Seated next to CORINTH is FATHER GREY. ROYCE and THOREAU talk as they walk. All through this scene CORINTH never loses the rhythm of counting her peas from one bowl to the other. The radio, as always, is on very low; the music shifts from ROYCE's radio to hers. Music plays through the scene.

THOREAU: Who?

ROYCE: Mrs. Corinth -- asthma. Self-bedded, though she could get around if she wanted.

THOREAU: So why?

ROYCE: Perhaps she's trying to become transparent.

SLIDE: The Spirits Are Distilled.

They enter CORINTH's room.

CORINTH: Doctor! On the dot and on the nose. You know Father Grey?

ROYCE: Of him.

GREY: A good report, I hope.

ROYCE: Your revival meetings last winter.

GREY: I'll accept that résumé.

ROYCE: John Thoreau.

ROYCE prepares the injection.

CORINTH: I'd shake your hand, John Theroo, but for that I'd lose track, and then, who knows, the whole house of cards could come down! Doctor, I've conned that you two have some connections.

ROYCE: Oh?

GREY: Before you came in, we were talking about my upcoming Week of Prayer.

ROYCE gives CORINTH the shot.

ROYCE: From what I remember, Father, last year people broke into tears, spoke in tongues -- quite the spectacle.

GREY: Spectacle -- not quite -- "spectacular," yes, true, but spectacle -- that sounds vulgar. No, what happened was almost geological -- great shatterings, large shifts in the soul's topography. God moves powerfully in times like these.

THOREAU: And what times are those?

GREY: Out of joint, Mr. Thoreau.

THOREAU: John. No more than usual.

GREY: Look around us -- everything is going to smash --

THOREAU: No more than usual.

GREY: People have become too complacent.

THOREAU: They need a purgation.

GREY: Precisely!

THOREAU: The plague.

GREY: The perfect -- spur, so to speak.

THOREAU: Spurs imply a rider.

GREY: A guide. People need to re-learn the certainty that suffering is necessary.

ROYCE: Necessary.

GREY: Not chance, not random, not fickle. A purpose behind it all -- some simple truth, some simple catechism they can hold on to when the whirlwind tears at them.

THOREAU: Necessary even for children?

GREY: Ah, Mr. Thoreau -- one of those French existentialists? The absurdity of existence and all that? Dr. Royce, these French -- café nihilists -- think that the death of innocent children proves God lacks the all-mighty mercy he claims for himself.

CORINTH: Doesn't he do a great job of spackling?

GREY: God has his own purposes.

THOREAU: So did the Marquis de Sade.

CORINTH: Sod's bodkins!

GREY: We think no child should ever suffer pain it has done nothing to earn. But we know so little about why --

THOREAU: Agreed --

GREY: -- why anything happens the way it does --

THOREAU: -- our ignorance is vast --

GREY: -- about the great engine that drives the grand scheme --

THOREAU: Drives? More like herds to the grave.

CORINTH: *(to ALL)* What did I tell you?

ROYCE packs up his bag.

ROYCE: Well, Father Grey, I spend my life trying to stop suffering, not explain it -- this plague? only means defeat for me.

GREY: Of the body.

ROYCE: I am very concerned about bodies.

GREY: Of course. But they're really not the brass ring.

THOREAU: Then why did your boss cure lepers?

GREY: He cured their souls. The body was the outward sign of the inward grace. An --
afterthought.

ROYCE: Chalk it up to my primitive state, then -- my forethought is to keep them alive long enough for you to work on them. Some self-interest in that for you, I would imagine.

GREY: Next Sunday, 11 AM. I hope you will be there.

ROYCE: The plague keeps my schedule -- I will try.

GREY: Mr. Thoreau?

THOREAU: I always enjoy magic shows.

CORINTH: This would almost be good enough to rise up out of bed for.

ROYCE: Now that would be a miracle. Until next time.

CORINTH: There will be, the peas predict.

The music fades out. CORINTH's "bed" is struck. ROYCE and THOREAU make their way to ROYCE's "apartment." As they come into the "street," they both stop, startled, at the sound of the whip. Then they proceed to ROYCE's "apartment."

ROYCE: He's not a bad man.

THOREAU: Being so even-handed can make you empty-handed.

ROYCE: That's the second time I've been accused of that.

THOREAU: I think he's a fool.

ROYCE: I'm sure he pities us.

They arrive at his "apartment."

THOREAU: I have something to discuss with you tomorrow. To give you a hand.

ROYCE: Run it by me now.

THOREAU: I want to draft the details. The main point is decided.

ROYCE: Fine. Come by late. I should be back then.

THOREAU: Good night.

ROYCE: Good night.

* * * * *

ACT I, SCENE 4: Several days later

Transition music. ROYCE watches THOREAU leave, then exits. THOREAU moves downstage center; as he does, stage hands set up his "apartment": desk, two chairs. There is a suitcoat on the back of one chair. He sits at the desk, opens his knapsack, and takes out a journal. He begins to write. REISING enters and waits at THOREAU's "door." She clears her throat. He closes his journal and turns to her. Throughout this scene she is nervous and jumpy.

SLIDE: Fear Is Indispensable To Ecstasy.

THOREAU: Good, good, good. Come on in. Emma, please sit.

REISING sits and drops her knapsack with a thunk.

THOREAU: Emma.

REISING: Emma.

THOREAU: After Emma Goldman?

REISING: When my mother was carrying me, she heard Emma speak, once, about birth control. I suddenly became the last of seven. Her symbol of freedom.

THOREAU: Appropriate.

REISING: My mother was good for me.

THOREAU: And you for her, I imagine.

REISING: I think so.

THOREAU: I noticed you followed our smuggler-in-training. Get the interview?

REISING: We spoke.

THOREAU: And your writing?

REISING: My writing, my writing. Things seem to write me -- constant artillery, you know, bam, bam all around me. There is so much pain and despair. So much. Pages jump off the pen. But not exactly sure what -- or for -- or how it fits Mr. Karl. This "thing" --

THOREAU: The "incident," as the Mayor dubs it?

REISING nods yes but does not continue speaking.

THOREAU: This "thing" --

REISING: You're prodding.

THOREAU: I assume that's why you're here.

REISING: Normally, like a duck to water with some "thing" like this. Except for the little drawback of a horrible disease catching you, this "thing" has everything that winds me up as a writer.

THOREAU: Normally.

REISING: Is that a knack of yours, to pick out the one word that's a loose thread?

THOREAU: One word is all it takes sometimes, you know that. So, something else?

REISING: Always something else. When Peter died --

THOREAU: Yes?

REISING: When Peter died, you seemed so calm --

THOREAU: Seemed.

REISING: -- as if you knew exactly what to do.

THOREAU: Seemed.

REISING: You didn't seem afraid.

THOREAU: I've seen this before.

REISING: What was that -- what was that like?

THOREAU: Very -- democratic.

REISING: Don't be shallow.

THOREAU: You're right. It was a devastation more than what we can picture. We don't have a yardstick for it.

REISING: Scared then?

THOREAU: (*laughs*) I was a young boy -- addled by adolescence -- sailing the seven seas -- the great adventure.

REISING: Less.

THOREAU: I was terrified and thrilled --

REISING: The double edge --

THOREAU: -- I thought I was at the center of life -- I was the center of life -- bumping belly to belly.

REISING: But all those people? And weren't you scared?

THOREAU: We never really saw them.

REISING: You must have seen --

THOREAU: We'd pull into port but not get off the ship -- only the agents would do that. But you couldn't miss the bodies floating in Hong Kong --

REISING: Floating --

THOREAU: -- or the corpses piled in Madras or Bombay. But, as I said, at that age, it was all opera -- big and loud.

REISING: In a foreign language.

THOREAU: I wasn't touched, I was just being moved -- like a chess piece. I never saw any one die; I just saw a lot of dead. Scenery. Being opaque like that -- one of the few blessings of being young.

REISING: Maybe for a man. A boy.

THOREAU: You would have felt differently? Different for you?

REISING: I don't think I could stay so -- untouched. This is not something --

THOREAU: What?

REISING: -- I feel proud about, this feeling --

THOREAU: What?

REISING: I've stood there when the cops were swinging, I've walked Harlem streets at night alone, Mr. Karl always right there -- so why do I feel now -- Do you know why I came here? Did Dr. Royce tell you why he wouldn't help me?

THOREAU: I didn't know he wouldn't.

REISING: He said that if I couldn't fold in some good deeds about some capitalist, then I was playing false with the truth.

THOREAU: Disagree?

REISING: Of course!

But she does not sound sure of this.

REISING: The capitalist is irrelevant.

THOREAU: But?

REISING: But nothing! It's just that it seems I've lost a little insight -- seems! The big picture a little dim -- seems tinted -- something else -- something small-minded, something more --

THOREAU: Personal.

REISING: All right, personal. What are you writing? Tell me.

THOREAU: My journal of the obvious. My journal of the quiet parts. I just finished off Mrs. Corinth, one of Dr. Royce's patients. She counts peas to keep her life regular: fifteen pans of peas, time to eat. Done! Then, over there, the old man. He likes to spit on cats.

REISING paces impatiently.

THOREAU: Let me tell you about him. He lives on the second floor, which has a small balcony.

REISING: Fine!

THOREAU: Every day he steps out onto the balcony: well-dressed, trimmed. Stray cats lounge in the alley way. He calls to them, but they never answer -- no food, why bother? But then he shreds confetti and lets it go. They investigate -- maybe a tasty moth. Closer, closer, then -- he hawks a gob at them, and whenever he hits his mark, he snaps them a quick salute.

REISING: The point?

THOREAU: He's been without his cats. Each day he waits and nothing comes. Occasionally I see him spit just for art's sake.

THOREAU takes in REISING's impatience.

THOREAU: I worry. About his well-being. I worry about this complete and utter stranger. Odd?

REISING: Not from you.

THOREAU: You do the same, don't you?

REISING: Try to.

THOREAU: With this difference. You have a bar they have to jump.

REISING: Meaning?

THOREAU: You can miss everything under the bar.

REISING: The quiet parts --

THOREAU: -- quiet parts

REISING: So, so should I --

THOREAU: Sometimes all we can do is figure out what we can figure out and simply tell it simply. Especially now -- everything solid melts into air.

REISING: The consistency in that?

THOREAU: Too young to be so sober!

REISING: I've always been about fighting --

THOREAU: So keep your ammunition dry. But even your namesake knows you have to dance at the revolution.

REISING: Quiet. Parts.

THOREAU: Besides, no theory much helps us get through this dark time. No breaks; all bets are off. No gods. No grand masters. No beloved theorists. Completely on our own. Completely. Completely. Chronicle that.

REISING: But what -- ?

THOREAU: Fight all that. Just don't forget that people are more than --

REISING: Than what?

THOREAU: Than actors on some historical stage.

REISING: There is nothing but history!

THOREAU: The story -- that story, as your namesake would tell you, also folds in, unfolds the small ways small people re-make what the larger history throws them into. Not everyone wants to put their feet on the barricades, but they still live good lives, even if not theoretically "pure," even if a capitalist! Like the rests in music, they're like the rests -- they're music, too. They offer shelter from the storm. Do the chronicle.

REISING grabs her knapsack.

REISING: Got to go.

THOREAU: May I ask now?

REISING: What?

THOREAU: Did any of this help? Help you make your personal decision? The one you came here to talk about.

REISING: I don't know what -- I don't know --

THOREAU: You are always welcome here.

REISING: I know that. I'm just not sure.

THOREAU: Same boat. Keep writing. Take the rests.

REISING leaves. THOREAU re-opens his journal and reads.

THOREAU: "Under the permission of the plague, people usually turn their attention to immediate things. Who can blame them? In the old plagues, when faith dissolved, people lived out their secret desires through the fever. No different today. Raster has been making a killing -- no pun intended. He comes regularly to check the plague forecast, like weather. Market forces never had so much force. Or farce."

ROYCE enters stage right and walks to THOREAU's "apartment."

THOREAU: "Living out secret desires -- that includes me. But so what? Death means nothing to men like me. It's the event that proves them right."

ROYCE enters THOREAU's "apartment." THOREAU gets up, puts on the suitcoat, and packs up his journal in his satchel. As they speak, the MAYOR's office is set up downstage left.

ROYCE: Are you sure?

THOREAU: Yes.

ROYCE: You want to do this?

THOREAU: Why not?

ROYCE: Well, the danger, for one thing --

THOREAU: Look, two weeks, a month, all precautions will break down.

ROYCE: True.

THOREAU: Out of hand.

ROYCE: True again.

THOREAU: I also heard the mayor wants to use the prisoners.

ROYCE: He's thought -- yes --

THOREAU: I'd prefer people chose to help or not. Especially if it means --

ROYCE: I agree. But the Mayor's call for volunteers -- pretty much ignored.

THOREAU: Consider the source. You've read my plan. Get me authorized. I'll get volunteers.

ROYCE: I can't say no.

THOREAU: Then don't. Let's go.

They proceed stage left. In the mayor's office is the MAYOR, CASTLE, FREEMAN, TERRENCE, PARKER, and MADDIE RUE taking notes. ROYCE and THOREAU enter.

MAYOR: Ah, Dr. Royce.

ROYCE: I'd like to introduce John Thoreau. He has a plan: To form sanitation units. And I don't think we have much choice but to accept it.

MAYOR: You want to do this.

THOREAU: Yes.

PARKER: My men have got the process under control.

TERRENCE: Jim -- you know as well as I do --

PARKER: We'll do it.

TERRENCE: My staff is more tired than a one-armed man hanging wallpaper. A one-armed man hanging wallpaper with an itch. Yours, too. Can't do it by ourselves, plain, simple.

ROYCE: His plan makes sense.

THOREAU takes papers from his coat.

THOREAU: I've written it out for you.

MAYOR: *(to ROYCE)* Since you seem convinced --

THOREAU: Don't you want --

MAYOR: Why read what I know I have to accept?

THOREAU: One condition, then.

MAYOR: Yes?

THOREAU: Don't use the prisoners. At least for this kind of work.

MAYOR: And why shouldn't --

THOREAU: They're condemned once --

MAYOR: *(to ROYCE)* Can we trust this --

THOREAU: They shouldn't be forced --

TERRENCE: Look, I need the people.

ROYCE: I need the people as well.

PARKER: Count me in, too.

MAYOR: All right. All right. No prisoners.

MAYOR makes the sign of the cross.

MAYOR: You are officially deputized. Take your bleeding heart over to Parker and Terrence here -- coordinate -- things. Well?

ROYCE: Isolation wards, supplies -- all right, but we'll need more, of everything. Parker's good about disposing waste --

PARKER: Cranked up the old incinerator by the impound lot.

ROYCE: So far, numbers manageable.

FREEMAN: But not for long.

ROYCE: We'll need more wards: armory, schools, church basements, maybe even tents on the football field.

MAYOR: Maddie, draw up a list.

ROYCE: And equipment -- and supplies --

MAYOR: Maddie, call to the governor again. Dr. Castle?

CASTLE: Working on a serum. Right now, we're as far along as the Middle Ages.

MAYOR: Well, one for all. Mr. Thoreau, is it? My newest deputy. The floor is yours.

THOREAU: Here's how we begin --

The sound of the whip in the air. Blackout.

* * * * *

ACT I, SCENE 5: Sunday -- Father Grey's sermon

Immediately in the blackout rises a murmur of voices, as of a large audience. Over them is the music of an organ, playing a Te Deum. There is the smell of incense. FATHER GREY stands elevated; he is in a very tight focused light. This is the final day of his Week of Prayer. During this both THOREAU's apartment and the MAYOR's office are struck. Music and voices out as GREY speaks.

SLIDE: The One Holy Catholic And Apostolic Church Prepares The Cross.

GREY: Calamity has come upon you, my friends -- and you have deserved it. Your sinfulness fouls the very breath in your mouth. The dark times in which we live, the collapse of the godless hunger for profit and the whole system based on greed, has not yet wrenched your faces heavenward, as it should. So God has blistered you with the plague to let you know how displeased he is with your indifference. What should you learn from this affliction? For the answer, look into your own soul: in its wretched darkness you will find the light of redemption. This plague strikes down young and old alike, the charitable and the niggard, the colored man and the white man, the faithful and the adulterous -- it harvests everyone. But, as is always true with God, the thing that cuts us deepest also

cleans us. In Abyssinia, the Christians would wrap themselves in the clothes of the dead because, to them, the plague was a door into God's mansion and into eternal life. Understand their intention: out of punishment came salvation, punishment for their sins became the way back to the bosom of God's love. This is the plague's message: for each of you to offer your soul in strict and open request for the healing rain of His love. If you do not do this, you deserve the plague and all the ruin it brings to you and everyone you love for your pride, your blindness, your shriveled and unworthy soul. Go in peace. This concludes our Week of Prayer.

Light out on GREY. He stays at his "pulpit" in darkness. THOREAU and ROYCE enter.

THOREAU: You think he'd use "we" every once in a while.

CASTLE enters.

CASTLE: Come with me to my office. I have something to show you, about the serum.

ROYCE: Need me for anything?

THOREAU: No. I start the training today over in Liberty Town.

ROYCE: Good luck.

THOREAU: I'm not off to some foreign country! Well, shame on us, then. Padre Grey is right about one thing: the plague is a great democratizer.

ROYCE: Be sure to connect with Hannah Samuels and --

THOREAU: Dr. Galen Littlefield. You've already told me that.

CASTLE: The sermon, Mr. Thoreau?

THOREAU: Already forgotten what's so forgettable.

CASTLE: You don't agree?

THOREAU: That the plague kills us to save us? Those -- well, whatever -- who believe that -- get them in their graves as quickly as possible and out of our way. I'll take the children up into the hills --

CASTLE: The Pied Piper!

THOREAU: -- until his kind of stupidity burns itself out --

ROYCE: He's usually a lot angrier than this.

THOREAU: -- we'll keep life alive until his infection disappears --

ROYCE: He's being so mild and tolerant right now.

THOREAU looks at them both for a beat.

ROYCE: You lost transparency.

THOREAU laughs.

THOREAU: Were the flames spewing forth?

CASTLE points to his eyebrows.

CASTLE: Singed.

THOREAU: Horns?

CASTLE: Just the tips.

THOREAU: Work on your serum, doctor.

CASTLE: Work on yours.

THOREAU: To Liberty Town, then!

THOREAU starts to leave again as MADDIE RUE approaches him. ROYCE watches the meeting for a few seconds, then he and CASTLE exit.

RUE: Mr. Thoreau?

THOREAU: Yes.

RUE: You don't know me --

THOREAU: Madeleine Rue.

RUE: Yes -- people call me Maddie.

THOREAU: Maddie. Can I help you?

RUE: Your plan --

THOREAU: I was just off to get things ready --

RUE: I'd like to work -- with you.

THOREAU: Excellent. You're my first.

RUE: Good. Good.

THOREAU: Are you doing anything at the moment?

RUE: Back to the office, but -- evenings --

THOREAU: I'm starting in Liberty Town tonight. Do you want to come?

RUE: Tonight would be fine.

THOREAU: You're sure?

RUE: Violets may shrink, Mr. Thoreau, but I don't.

THOREAU: You're sure.

RUE: I get off work at 6:30.

THOREAU: I'll pick you up, then, here. The beginning of the great adventure. Thank you.

THOREAU exits.

RUE: Yes.

RUE turns upstage to face the church. The stage goes to black and almost immediately the whip cracks. At each crack a tightly focused red light appears on the floor. At first the rhythm is slow, but the pace increases, as does the number of lights. A dozen or so should do, and they should form, when all up, a very red pool in the center of the stage. In addition to the cracking of the whip, there should be sound reminiscent of the opening scene of tanks and soldiers moving in: not the same sound but something that recalls it and thus the sense of invasion and repression.

As this is happening, GREY descends from the pulpit, REISING enters with a pad of paper taking notes, and RASTER enters counting money. The audience sees RUE downstage and GREY upstage staring at the pool and REISING stage left staring and RASTER stage right. All should stand just on the rim of the pool. With one final loud series of thunderous claps and the culmination of the "invasion" noise, the stage goes to black as a long drawn chord, like the chord at the end of The Beatles' "A Day In The Life," plays until the houselights come up for intermission.

INTERMISSION

During the intermission there will be music.

ACT II, SCENE 1: That evening -- Liberty Town

Liberty Town. The scenery need not be elaborate here; in fact, as much of it should be indicated by light, slides, and sound as possible. It should indicate conditions of extreme poverty, but not squalor: these are people who have tried to keep up with things with what few resources they have.

THOREAU and RUE enter stage right, walking along what is the "street"; there is no streetlight, only the light spilling out from windows and what might come from a late sunset moving into moonshine or starshine. In the distance there is the sound of a train, a dog barking, and any other night summer sounds the director chooses for a sonic environment. These should underscore the scene. THOREAU and RUE have flashlights; THOREAU carries his knapsack.

SLIDE: Darkness Visible.

RUE: How does anybody find anybody out here? No house numbers.

THOREAU: Why, if no one ever comes looking for you?

RUE: Or you already know where everybody is.

Suddenly, out of the darkness comes a voice, strong and strident, both declaiming and singing: an aria from the ORANGE MAN. At least 6'4", of strong African features, he is dressed in orange clothing of a variety of shades. There is no "style" to this ensemble -- simply a collection. He wears a brimless cap made of red, green, and black cloth or of leather and is carrying a sack and a lantern. He looks both regal and crazed. He is singing about the Scottsboro boys. The emphasis is on "singing." There is no formal "tune" per se; it is more in the nature of a chant, though not "tuneless" -- there is modulation of voice. He does not have an American accent but instead a blend of African and Caribbean accents: it is clearly a distinct non-Midwest voice.

ORANGE MAN: Let me tell you why no black man can get justice in this world. Let me tell you why justice for the black man will never happen. There is no justice for the black man in this country.

He walks toward THOREAU and RUE; they stop, unsure what to do. SLIDES will come up of M'BENGUE's words as he speaks them.

ORANGE MAN: Scottsboro, Scottsboro, Scottsboro -- oh, place of evil, place of injustice --

From stage left enters REV. JOSIAH HIGHTOWER holding a kerosene lantern. ORANGE MAN's chant takes place under the dialogue.

HIGHTOWER: Who be there?

ORANGE MAN: Charles Weems -- save him, oh yes. Will Robertson -- save him, oh yes --

THOREAU: John Thoreau. This is Miss Madeleine Rue. From the Mayor's office --

ORANGE MAN: Ozzie Powell -- they want his bones. Heywood Patterson -- they want his blood. Eugene Williams -- they want his skin. No justice for the black man -- injustice rapes them all --

HIGHTOWER: M'Bengue -- go off.

ORANGE MAN stands very close to them; only HIGHTOWER is anywhere near him in height.

ORANGE MAN: Wright, Montgomery, Norris, Wright -- crushed by the white man, poisoned by the white woman. This is injustice. This is evil. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. Black men are dust, black men are dirt.

HIGHTOWER: Peace, M'Bengue. Guests.

Slides stop.

ORANGE MAN seems to snap out of a trance.

ORANGE MAN: No peace. Always war.

ORANGE MAN falls back to his "aria" as he circles them.

ORANGE MAN: How many lynchings? How many mutilations? Scottsboro -- Ruby Bates, harlot; Victoria Price, whore. Prick cut off, body burned, hanging from the tree of Gethsemane, of Calvary. Yes. Yes.

ORANGE MAN starts to wander away, his voice trailing behind him, until he exits. His voice remains strong. HIGHTOWER watches him closely.

ORANGE MAN: Colored is made into evil. Plessy. White is not right. Scottsboro. Scottsboro. Place of shame. No justice for the black man, no respect for the black woman. Dred Scott. Yes. Yes. This is our home.

There is a heavy momentary silence as ORANGE MAN moves offstage. HIGHTOWER turns to THOREAU and RUE.

HIGHTOWER: Mayor's office?

THOREAU: Yes. We're looking for --

HIGHTOWER: Wait. Wait a breath. Wait. You're a stranger in the middle of a dark road -- let the moment get used to you.

HIGHTOWER swings the lantern in an arc.

HIGHTOWER: Thus speaketh M'Bengue.

There is a moment of silence as HIGHTOWER finishes speaking and THOREAU and RUE stand in the light of his lantern. In the brief interim we hear night sounds, sounds of people in houses, someone singing. It is not so much a confrontation as a pause in some ritual. Then, from stage left comes the voice of HANNAH SAMUELS.

SAMUELS: Reverend? Reverend? You there?

HIGHTOWER: Convenin’

SAMUELS enters, carrying another kerosene lantern. She is a strong-featured woman, carrying herself with dexterous presence.

SAMUELS: Can’t you use a one-cent word?

HIGHTOWER: They say they from the Mayor’s office.

SAMUELS: These I was tellin’ you about --

HIGHTOWER: That’s what they say.

THOREAU: Hannah Samuels?

SAMUELS: Yes. *(to HIGHTOWER, strongly but with respect)* Why such a hard time?

HIGHTOWER: *(to THOREAU and RUE)* This is where we live. M’Bengue made his welcome.

SAMUELS: In case he hasn’t introduced himself, Reverend Josiah Hightower, of Ebenezer Baptist.

HIGHTOWER: “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword” --

SAMUELS: Our protector -- he thinks.

HIGHTOWER: All shepherds are.

THOREAU: Revelation.

HIGHTOWER: *(hint of satisfaction)* Yes.

THOREAU: 19. 15.

HIGHTOWER: Even better.

THOREAU: *(to SAMUELS)* Miss Madeleine Rue. She’s volunteered to help me.

SAMUELS: Miss Maddie.

RUE: “Miss Maddie” is fine.

SAMUELS: And your name?

THOREAU: John Thoreau.

SAMUELS: Welcome. Dr. Royce said you'd probably wanta talk to as many as you could --

THOREAU: Dr. Royce --

They start to walk.

SAMUELS: -- out here today.

HIGHTOWER: Makin' straight the way.

SAMUELS: We have to hurry.

RUE: A moment. M'Bengue?

HIGHTOWER: Prophet without honor.

SAMUELS: Saw his father lynched. And burned. When he was thirteen. His mother was raped. And killed. At the same time. Thrown on the same fire. We took him in.

RUE: The -- clothes?

HIGHTOWER: Flame.

SAMUELS: We should get --

RUE: Why?

HIGHTOWER: Drunks. Pure meanness. Never went to court. Dark out here.

THOREAU: (to RUE) And what would Father Grey say to that?

They move stage left, and as they do the living room of SAMUELS is set stage right, crowded with perhaps a dozen people of color, including 3 or 4 children, all dressed in laborer's clothes, split between men and women. They will be referred to as MAN 1, WOMAN 1, etc. The room should again reflect extreme poverty but not squalor. One of the participants is dressed in a shirt, tie, and vest, despite the heat: DR. GALEN LITTLEFIELD. Even though the room is crowded, he should appear as if standing slightly apart from the others. The room should be lit softly, by kerosene lanterns -- there is no electricity in this part of town. A table should be included as part of the furniture.

SAMUELS, HIGHTOWER, THOREAU, and RUE enter.

SLIDE: A Border Crossed Is A Border (dis)/Solved.

HIGHTOWER: Bless this house, bless this time. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Matthew, 8:17.

General murmur of "Amen," etc. LITTLEFIELD says nothing.

SAMUELS: Thank you, Reverend. Won't waste your breaths. Sickness is upon all of us -- some here already filled out graves. These people have come from the Mayor to help set things right. They friends of Dr. Royce, so respect.

He indicates for them to speak. THOREAU hesitates, unsure. He tries to open his knapsack to get his notes; RUE helps him steady it. After he closes it, RUE gently places a hand on his lower back and guides him forward. At the moment he steps forward, ORANGE MAN enters the room, stands in the back.

THOREAU: Thank you for coming. I won't waste your breaths, either. Just to make it official, what you -- what we -- have is plague. Bubonic plague. 'Sbeen tested. Here's the short version: The city is quarantined, cut off. Things come in but nothing, and nobody, gets out. My job is to help you set up sanitation teams to stop -- to try to stop -- the disease. That's it. Plain and simple. I need your help.

Silence greets him. He looks at SAMUELS, who doesn't move.

THOREAU: That's about it.

MAN 1: How we know, how do we know, this ain't some kind of thing to get rid of us?

MAN 2: Yeah, erase us?

General murmur.

THOREAU: I don't --

SAMUELS: Don't play with that nonsense. *(to THOREAU)* Some got on their mind a conspiracy --

WOMAN 1: Plain fact. White people ain't dyin' from this.

THOREAU: That's not true -- let me show you the numbers --

WOMAN 2: You make 'em up.

MAN 3: Got no reason to trust --

WOMAN 3: You just flacks anyway, you get a salary whether we live or die -- we ought to make 'em hurt.

SAMUELS: Enough of this! Georgia, stop talkin' trash. You, too, Hiram, Joseph. These times dark for everyone. Reverend?

HIGHTOWER: Truth on her lips.

WOMAN 2: Why on their side?

SAMUELS: Nobody's side 'cept your side --

WOMAN 2: I got a child dyin' --

MAN 1: Can't trust white people, I just can't!

SAMUELS: They from the Mayor's office --

WOMAN 3: I had four dead already --

SAMUELS: -- here to keep the rest of us from bein' buried.

WOMAN 3: Why take so long to get out here?

MAN 4: Why should they care? Better off if we all just sank down.

The meeting is getting restive. THOREAU clearly does not know what to do. An overlap of voices; those speaking lines are underscored by lowered conversations among the others.

SAMUELS: You all invited here because --

HIGHTOWER: Such vanity should not --

MAN 5: My granddad --

WOMAN 4: Too damn hot for all this wrasslin' --

Suddenly, LITTLEFIELD steps forward and raises his hands.

LITTLEFIELD: Stop this, stop it right now! Hiram, Hiram Bates? Look at me, Hiram. Hiram, you're so ugly you could make an onion cry.

The noise quiets down a bit as people look at him questioningly.

LITTLEFIELD: Joseph -- Joseph, let me see your eyes. Joseph, your house is so small you could use a washcloth for wall-to-wall carpeting.

A few people chuckle.

MAN 1: Gotcha on that one.

LITTLEFIELD: Georgia, your dog's so fat he's gotta take two trips to haul ass.

WOMAN 2: Doin' the dozens.

People are laughing now.

LITTLEFIELD: Yo' mamma so ugly --

SOME VOICES: -- the tide won't even take her out!

LITTLEFIELD: Yo' daddy so stupid --

OTHER VOICES: -- he thought a quarterback was a refund.

LITTLEFIELD: Yo' granma so fat --

VOICES: -- when she fell in love she broke it!

Everyone is smiling now.

LITTLEFIELD: So folks. Enough! Enough! Enough.

Each "enough" is said more quietly to let its effect sink in. In the silence, ORANGE MAN speaks.

ORANGE MAN: Black men are dust, black women are dirt.

LITTLEFIELD: Not tonight, M'Bengue. Tonight, tonight we have to move forward. You're forgetting what's important. Take a breath -- it's hot. Cool the blood -- it's hot. Think of the dying ones -- a breath for them. They're here to help -- skin color gone for the moment. If we forget, we die -- agreed?

HIGHTOWER: "Amen" 'll do for the doctor.

Murmur of "Amen."

HIGHTOWER: "Praise be" would help the doctor.

Murmur of "Praise be," a bit louder.

SAMUELS: What do you want?

THOREAU: What do I want? Yes, yes -- may I use this table?

The people around the table move back. THOREAU opens his knapsack again, takes out a large chart, and spreads it on the table.

THOREAU: If you gather around, Miss Maddie will show you what we need to do.

Several people move to the table; finally, they all do. RUE begins to point things out as they look at the chart that THOREAU has set up. LITTLEFIELD walks over to THOREAU.

THOREAU: *(half-jokingly)* Dr. Littlefield, I presume?

LITTLEFIELD: The same.

THOREAU: Dr. Royce told me --

LITTLEFIELD: We must talk --

THOREAU: Yes.

LITTLEFIELD: -- afterwards.

THOREAU: Thank you.

LITTLEFIELD: There's more -- always is. Get to your work.

THOREAU joins RUE, and they mime talking to the crowd and explaining how the teams will work. LITTLEFIELD walks to SAMUELS and HIGHTOWER, and for a moment the three of them clasp hands. As they do, REISING brings on two chairs downstage left; a stagehand brings on a table. Lights fade on Liberty Town; everyone relaxes and turns to watch the following scene. Sounds change to street sounds, a radio somewhere playing.

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ACT II, SCENE 2: That same evening -- Reising's apartment

REISING sits at her desk, writing. RASTER approaches her "room" and enters.

SLIDE: Where There Is Hope Left, There Is Fear.

REISING: Yes?

RASTER: Anybody else?

REISING: Who do you see?

RASTER: I gotta be careful.

REISING: Don't whisper. There isn't anybody else.

RASTER sits in the other chair and waits.

REISING: You can get me out.

RASTER: I can try. Ain't like snapping a dove outta a hat. Takes money. Money and finesse. Finesse I got.

REISING: Money --

RASTER: Your part.

REISING: Money I got -- I have.

RASTER: Here?

REISING: A little. My paper will pay the rest.

RASTER: Look, honey child, my kind of paper has dead old men on it. Up front. On the palm.

REISING: How much?

RASTER: Ballpark two thousand.

REISING: I know my paper can --

RASTER: How?

REISING: I know --

RASTER: Ain't been a phone call or telegram addressed by you outta here in weeks.

REISING: They can --

RASTER: Let's not, eh? I don't think some rat's-ass pinko rag in "New Yawk" has an account with the Rothschilds -- right? We have nothin' to share here --

REISING: Arrangements --

RASTER: Arrangements?

REISING: You know -- arrangements --

RASTER: Oh. Oh.

RASTER makes a gesture of masturbating.

RASTER: I take care of myself. In or out?

REISING hesitates. RASTER moves to leave.

REISING: Wait.

She reaches for her knapsack, pulls out a heavy canvas bag about six inches square. She drops it on the table with a metallic thud. She indicates for him to open it. RASTER takes out gold coins.

RASTER: A Commie with gold.

REISING: My grandfather's. For good luck. How goes gold these days?

RASTER: Check with my broker. But things look much higher all of a sudden.

REISING: Put the bag down.

RASTER looks her straight in the eye.

REISING: Down.

RASTER: I thought Bolshies and business --

REISING: Down. Capitalists and criminals -- no difference. Deal?

RASTER: Sealed and signed.

REISING: What do I do?

RASTER: I'll be in touch. You gotta trust me now. Funny how this -- condition -- turns everything over. Good night, sweet princess.

RASTER turns to leave but then turns back to REISING.

RASTER: Not that a little in-out with you -- but you know, business --

REISING: -- is business --

RASTER turns to leave again, turns back.

RASTER: I gotta ask, though -- gotta ask: why so hot to trot? Aside from, well, dying, this is a great place for a writer to be -- thick mother lode here. You got the niggers over in Liberty Town --

REISING: You want to engage in conversation?

RASTER: Well, a little -- I got some moments. A little social intercourse -- we're partners now. We got a covenant.

REISING: May Mr. Karl forgive me.

RASTER: Like I said -- great place for a class warfare, suffering masses kinda person.

REISING: What do you know about that?

RASTER: (*overlaps*) What do I know about that? I'm a criminal -- live on edges. Besides, my old man was Wobblies. Us -- we ain't so different.

REISING: We're different.

RASTER: Surface, maybe --

REISING: Not my priest.

RASTER: So no confession?

REISING: Something you wouldn't know about.

RASTER: I know a lot.

REISING: Not this. Social hour is over.

RASTER: Okay. Tight lips all around.

RASTER moves closer to her.

RASTER: Probably better. I'll be in touch.

RASTER puts his hand on her crotch. REISING replies by trying to grab his crotch. He instinctively backs away, then laughs and exits.

REISING: I cannot believe -- may Marx, Engels, and Lenin forgive me. I shouldn't be doing this.

Lights out. Tables and chair are struck. The sound of the whip.

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ACT II, SCENE 3: That same evening, after the meeting in Liberty Town

The crowd of people inside the room are now outside in the darkness by simply coming downstage. Several people are holding lanterns and candles, and as before the scene is bathed in any light left from moonshine or starshine. Night sounds play underneath the conversation. THOREAU addresses them.

SLIDE: Yo' Brother So Big That He Be On Both Sides Of The Family.

THOREAU: Let Dr. Littlefield or Miz Samuels know, and they'll get in touch with me. Thank you all for coming.

The crowd murmurs, a variety of "Good nights" and other similar phrases ad libbed.

HIGHTOWER: Wait! Malachi, 4:2 -- "But unto to you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings -- " Amen.

ALL: Amen.

The crowd disperses. Several take the table with them.

THOREAU: Well --

They all laugh gently.

THOREAU: I don't know how to thank you --

LITTLEFIELD: Goes all around.

HIGHTOWER: Visitin' time.

THOREAU: Now?

HIGHTOWER: Affliction got its schedule.

HIGHTOWER moves off into the night.

THOREAU: He's a big man.

SAMUELS: He got a big heart -- even if his head gets wood-like every once in a while.

THOREAU: We should go, too.

LITTLEFIELD: Wait -- please.

THOREAU: Right --

LITTLEFIELD: That can wait -- something else. And Hannah, please stay. Mr. Thoreau, Miss Rue --

THOREAU: John.

RUE: I still like Miss Maddie.

LITTLEFIELD: *(laughs gently)* I just want to, to warn you about the days to come. They won't be easy.

THOREAU: Yes?

LITTLEFIELD: Don't miss my point. The irony of "Liberty Town" -- almost everyone you saw in that room, including Hannah here, is only a generation, two maybe, from slavery.

RUE: I think I know --

LITTLEFIELD: Do you, Miss Maddie? How old are you?

SAMUELS: You have the manners of --

RUE: Thirty-five.

LITTLEFIELD: Only about twice your age since Lee kneeled to Grant. Only twice your age since people owned us like a pan or an axe. This Depression? Our slave collar for over three hundred years.

SAMUELS: Blame goes nowhere.

LITTLEFIELD: It's not blame, Hannah. I believe in uplift like the next man. I'm just saying -- several plagues here.

RUE: Is that why you're here?

LITTLEFIELD: Another time.

THOREAU: No, no, no. If we're closing in on each other, at least a taste, then -- while the mind is still straight.

LITTLEFIELD: *(laughs gently)* My parents -- born to parents who went to Liberia --

THOREAU: Liberia.

LITTLEFIELD: -- as freedmen, who slaved not far from here. I studied medicine in Paris -- my color was not a blindness. And I came here to come back.

RUE: *(mostly to herself)* Come back.

THOREAU: Miz Samuels?

SAMUELS: Hannah's fine. Dr. Littlefield's teachin' me to nurse. Always wanted more than the herbs and plants my mama taught me, but who would take me? Dr. Littlefield's givin' me that knowin'. And now this -- I don't whether to be terrorfied or -- a guilty tic here -- thrilled to use the knowin'. I confess -- this knowin' even deeper than the thrill of Jesus.

LITTLEFIELD: John?

THOREAU: Miss Maddie?

RUE: I work in the Mayor's office. No one notices me, but I notice them -- people in, out each day sniffing for favors, "greasin' the skids."

SAMUELS: Eels 'n leeches.

RUE: It's not enough for me. When Mr. Thoreau -- John -- said he needed volunteers -- I'm not sure I even thought once, much less twice. Hannah, like you -- a call. After that --

THOREAU: She should be Mayor herself.

RUE: Not in my lifetime!

THOREAU: You'll have a long life, so who knows.

LITTLEFIELD: And you?

THOREAU: I've seen this before -- I know what the disease can do. I know what we can't do. I know what I should do. And there's no way to say no to this.

There is a pause as the night settles around them, like the pause before battle.

LITTLEFIELD: Covenant.

THOREAU: We must get back.

LITTLEFIELD: I will walk you to your car. Hannah, will you be --

SAMUELS: Found my home in the dark before.

THOREAU: Thank you -- again.

RUE: Goodnight, Hannah.

The three exit one way while SAMUELS goes in the opposite direction. As the lights fade, the night sounds rise slightly in volume, as does the sound of the music on a radio. In background we hear the ORANGE MAN's voice. ROYCE's "apartment" is set during the interlude.

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ACT II, SCENE 4: Several days later -- Royce's apartment

REISING is pacing outside ROYCE's "apartment." She grabs her knapsack, goes "in," and stands in the doorway. ROYCE and THOREAU are there.

SLIDE: The Fault Lies Not In Our Stars.

ROYCE: Come --

REISING enters, hesitates when she sees THOREAU there.

REISING: I'll come back.

ROYCE: -- in.

REISING: I'll come back.

ROYCE: We could use the break.

THOREAU: How is the writing?

REISING: (*hesitant*) Concentration--

ROYCE: Well?

REISING: Dr. Royce -- Dr. Royce, how long --

ROYCE: -- until the plague ends.

REISING: How long?

ROYCE: Guess.

REISING: And no one --

ROYCE: No one.

REISING: No excep[tion] --

ROYCE: None. Your stories?

REISING: That's the least. The least. Look, doctor, I have to get out --

ROYCE: You can't --

REISING: I mu[st] --

ROYCE: Impos --

REISING: I must --

ROYCE: -- sible.

REISING paces.

THOREAU: Why?

REISING: (*sarcastic*) Why.

THOREAU: Why?

REISING: Fuck off.

THOREAU: Usually. But not now.

REISING: It's irrelevant --

ROYCE: (*mild exasperation from exhaustion*) Your body may have murder in it.

REISING: I feel fine.

ROYCE: Proof?

REISING: I just am.

ROYCE: You forget there's a greater good --

REISING: Not for me!

ROYCE: That's not what you said, wait, you let me finish, that's not what you told me when we first met, then, when you could leave as you pleased.

REISING: I'm not a coward --

THOREAU: No one said you were.

REISING: I have obligations --

THOREAU: To?

REISING: Don't turn me in.

ROYCE: Nothing done yet.

REISING picks up her knapsack to leave, then pauses.

REISING: I have to.

No response.

REISING: I have to, I have -- reasons, I have -- reasons.

Still no response. REISING is obviously torn between leaving and speaking her mind.

REISING: You think I want, you think I want your blessing. I just needed some information -- pure journalism. A tic. So here's some information in exchange -- pro quo. I have a lover -- no, better than that -- I don't have the word -- the word, the word -- I cannot die here. That cannot happen.

THOREAU: He knows you're here?

REISING: She knows.

THOREAU: She knows.

REISING: I wired her just before -- I knew you wouldn't understand --

ROYCE: On the contrary.

REISING: I'm sorry, sorry, I am --

ROYCE: For --

REISING: It feels, it feels like -- dropping -- giving up.

REISING hesitates, then starts to leave ROYCE's "apartment."

ROYCE: All this makes the "big picture" --

REISING: -- the big picture?

ROYCE: The big picture -- feel a little cold, doesn't it?

REISING: Doesn't it.

ROYCE: I'll stay -- agnostic -- about the police --

REISING leaves. THOREAU follows her out.

THOREAU: Wait --

REISING: What?

THOREAU: Wait. There's something you ought to know -- pure journalism.

REISING: What?

THOREAU: Dr. Royce is married -- the ring? Observant reporter that you are. Ah, well, that would explain why you didn't --

REISING: Where?

THOREAU: You should ask him. Directly. But he would be reluctant to talk about his own problems --

REISING: Where is she?

THOREAU: In a sanatorium.

REISING: In a sana[torium] --

THOREAU: Dying. Your quid.

THOREAU returns to the apartment; they go back to their work. The lights cross-fade to stage left. REISING crosses the stage to a speakeasy; RASTER brings on two chairs. ROYCE and THOREAU exit. ROYCE's apartment stays on.

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ACT II, SCENE 5: A speakeasy, early evening

RASTER and REISING in a bar.

SLIDE: The Conspirators Meet -- Who Can Tell Them Apart?

RASTER: The plan. I have a house near one, near one of the checkpoints. We've gotten inside some of the guards, but we gotta wait until their turn for duty, until it comes up again. The brass shift things around, you know, so hard to know when. Where. In. Out. Just have to stay at the house and be ready to blow when it blows.

REISING: Wait --

RASTER: Patience is a virtue --

REISING: Fuck yourself --

RASTER: -- I hear.

REISING: Fuck off.

RASTER: Skin's gettin' thin. Thin, thin.

REISING: I'll stand it.

RASTER: No doubt. Well, that's it.

REISING: When?

RASTER: I'll have to, uh, I'll have to get back to you on that. See, you see, there's a thousand eyes everywhere, everywhere. Eyes up, eyes down, eyes, you know, there and there and there. I got only a pair. A single pair. I gotta be careful. I have to use mine to great advantage. I don't want the "eyes" to have it, know what I --

REISING picks up her knapsack and turns to go.

RASTER: Can't figure you. Like before I said, this a writer's paradise, ain't it -- pair-oh-dice. Material forever. You got grit -- New York cunt, leftie, writer --

REISING: Look --

RASTER: Do I shock you? No cotillion for you, huh, no whoosh of dress down the carpeted stairs, hey? I see Dr., Dr., Dr. -- Royce and that Thorooo guy working their collective asses off -- really, you know, hard, ain't gonna make a dime, but hey -- soul food for them, I guess. You could really help them -- soul food for you. But you, you, you got one-way on your brain, one-way, it's leadin' your feet. It must be love.

REISING: We're done here.

RASTER sings as REISING leaves.

RASTER: "I can't give you anything but love, baby..."

REISING makes a gesture and exits.

RASTER: Bullseye!

Snap of the whip and a crashing sound; lights bump to black. Chairs are struck.

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ACT II, SCENE 6: Several weeks later -- the river

Evening. Street sounds; radio in the background. THOREAU and RUE stand outside THOREAU's "apartment building." ROYCE's "apartment" should still be set as well. They are both exhausted. They stand in a light that resembles the incandescence of a streetlight.

SLIDE: The Best Fighter Is Not Always The Most Ferocious.

RUE: Actually a moment to breathe.

THOREAU: First in -- how long?

RUE: To breathe. A moment.

THOREAU takes a deep breath. Street sounds in the background.

THOREAU: Weeks.

Breathes.

THOREAU: I'd forgotten how.

Breathes.

THOREAU: That's how.

They stand silent for a moment.

RUE: Well --

THOREAU: Who heals the healer?

RUE: What?

THOREAU: You know -- who cuts the barber's hair?

RUE: No brain left --

THOREAU: Do you know what we should do? What I think. I think we should go for a swim.
Minister to ourselves, for the moment.

RUE: We can't do [that] --

THOREAU: Can. With our passes. We can get through the gate. We'll go, we'll go to Light
Beach. Let's do it.

RUE: I --

THOREAU: You're appropriately stunned. Good. Just think for a moment. Just think -- Even
saints slacked off a little -- Just think about it. Just think. We have towels, in the back of
the car. We have, for the moment, nothing to do. Nothing. Breathe, just breathe. Think
about it. The cool water. The cool water.

RUE: Let's --

THOREAU: Let's --

*To effect the change in place and activity, they move across the stage from stage
right -- their "apartment building" -- to stage left. The lights will change and shift with
them, and as they get closer to the "beach," there will come up, as underscoring, the
soft lapping of water.*

*Halfway across the lighting turns dim and bluish, barely enough to show them; the
streetlight cross-fades out. They continue moving to stage left, and as they do, the
light should shift to something brighter, bluish-green edged with white moonlight, and
the water sound gets as loud as it will; it should be suggestive. They undress. Given
the discretion of the director, the actors can go for being completely nude or keep
their underwear on. If they wear underwear, THOREAU should be in boxer shorts.
The preference is for full nudity.*

*They finish undressing and "step" into the water -- that is, they move into the full light.
They do not mime swimming. Instead, they simply stand there, heads tilted slightly
back, eyes closed, arms loosely at their sides. At this point, two things should
happen. First, music should come up slowly, and it should be music that somehow
captures the peace and serenity of the moment; it should be soothing and
interesting, and it does not have to be from that period. Second, as the music plays,
the lighting should be so designed as to be able to "circle" the swimmers. That is,
beginning with the lighting on them full front, it should fade down on that and fade up
on light coming from about 10:00 on their right; that cross-fades with light coming up
from about 8:00 on their right; and so on, until the light describes one complete circle
around them. The fades should be timed so that they are in continuous light. The
light should always have cool colors. It would also be good if there could be the*

reflection of water ripples on them from the front. The circling should take no longer than a minute or so -- the length of time can vary, but remember that the purpose of the scene is to give the audience the same sense of serenity felt by RUE and THOREAU.

When the light comes full front, RUE and THOREAU open their eyes and look at each other briefly, long enough to regain connection. They then "climb out" of the water and re-dress themselves. The music will soften slightly, but it will only completely fade out as they move away from the "beach." The underscoring of water sounds will continue and will only fade as they move back to their "apartment," in reverse of what had happened before. As they move past mid-stage, the water sounds should fade away completely, and then they move toward the incandescent streetlight that had opened the scene.

Enter REISING center left, walking briskly toward ROYCE's "apartment building." She should enter just as RUE and THOREAU pass mid-stage. Enter GREY at the same moment from upstage left, also heading in the same direction. They encounter each other.

GREY: Good evening.

REISING: Hello.

They pause, not sure what else to say.

GREY: Dr. Royce's?

REISING: Yes.

GREY: Shall we walk together?

REISING: The streets are open.

They begin walking.

GREY: You're the New York writer --

REISING: You're the pulpit-pounder --

GREY: The Communist --

REISING: Which means your Pope hates me.

GREY: But I don't.

REISING: Life is suddenly good, then.

GREY: We do have a common fight -- for justice --

REISING: Spare me, sky pilot -- nothing --

They arrive just as RUE and THOREAU come back from their swim. ROYCE also enters stage right.

THOREAU: A welcoming party.

GREY: Baptism?

THOREAU: Of a sort.

REISING: Swimming?

THOREAU: Breathing.

ROYCE: Why don't you all come out of the darkness?

ROYCE's apartment. GREY, THOREAU, and ROYCE stand; REISING and RUE sit.

ROYCE: Well -- mixed nuts, as my mother used to say --

RUE: Father, please sit.

GREY: No -- what I have is brief.

REISING: The soul of wit.

GREY: I would like to offer my services as a volunteer.

ROYCE: Don't you have -- other duties?

GREY: Doctor, how is your wife?

ROYCE: How is my wife?

GREY: Your wife.

ROYCE: My wife. My wife. As well as can be expected. The last telegram was a while ago.

GREY: Nothing you can do.

ROYCE: It's out of my hands --

GREY: -- out of your hands. You can only go so far.

ROYCE: The rest -- confusion.

GREY: And you go on.

ROYCE: On -- well, yes.

GREY: On my rounds yesterday, I came to a very young couple, young child. Out of work for a long time -- like many. *(to THOREAU)* One of your crews was there -- the child had taken fever, and they were -- well, you all know. The mother, understandably, she fought. The father tried to, to, to negotiate -- but your crews -- well trained, Mr. Thoreau.

THOREAU: Whatever that means.

GREY: I offered to ride to the hospital, to go with the child. So that he wouldn't be alone. But they wouldn't let me. No. All I could do, before they slid him in -- my hand on his brow -- like this -- and tell him to have faith. I said the same to the family as I sat and comforted them -- have faith. Have faith. That advice -- hundreds of times, thousands, most likely. But something -- happened -- his hot forehead -- glassy eyes, terrified. His fear seemed - - absolute. Telling him to have faith while his terror ate, ate him alive seemed -- well, it seemed obscene. I felt obscene -- and useless. Only for a moment, it was -- but when I turned to his parents, I gave them a mind clouded -- clouded -- and the clouds have not lifted. I need to do something more, Doctor, which is why I offer -- as long as it involves actual contact with people. No desk. I hope your wife recovers quickly.

THOREAU: There's a humanist in you yet! I know exactly where -- in the children's wards.

REISING: Can I speak with you?

ROYCE: At this point -- there's not much that's private.

REISING: Here? Okay, I step. I've decided not to go.

RUE: Go?

REISING: *(to ROYCE, though everyone hears)* My feelings -- no change. But if I leave, I betray what's valuable -- the only thing valuable -- and I can't -- that's a greater sickness -- *(to GREY)* It's about a non-traditional relationship.

RUE: You're trying to leave?

REISING: Was.

RUE: For your lover?

REISING: Yes.

RUE: For her.

REISING: Yes.

RUE: You should.

THOREAU: Maddie!

RUE: You love her --

REISING: -- enough not to lie --

RUE: You'd prefer happiness.

REISING: My happiness is not -- that's my point -- is not the point --

GREY: Self-sacrifice --

REISING: Not at all about final rewards!

GREY: Not that -- oddly enough. Service to others --

REISING: Service. My "service" for the last -- Christ, how many weeks has it been? -- my service has been to sit in rancid bars talking to rancid men about running away. Lover of the masses, crusader --

RUE: Running towards.

REISING: This business, this bright horizon -- "beloved" masses -- well, it's another thing, isn't it, when it comes down to individual faces. I will love her, I think, love me, love better if I stay -- here.

A silence falls into the room.

ROYCE: Reising --

REISING: Dr. Royce, I know about your wife --

ROYCE: So you know. All right, so here we all are, here we all are, with something, all of us, with some pearl to lose. The conclusion?

REISING: We're all full tilt crazy.

RUE: Full tilt.

THOREAU: Hey, Maddie -- yo' momma is so heavy --

RUE: -- when she fell in love she broke it!

GREY: What?

THOREAU: Yo' daddy is so ugly --

REISING: -- he could make an onion cry. Hear it all the time. So try this -- we all of us so stupid -- (to ROYCE) C'mon -- we fight the plague --

ROYCE: (*points to RUE*) We fight the plague --

RUE: (*points to GREY*) Standing on one "laig" --

GREY: (*points to THOREAU*) Trying not to lay an egg --

THOREAU: (*points to REISING*) Goin' to the Mayor to "baig" --

REISING: (*points to ROYCE*) Always feeling vague --

ROYCE: That's how we fight the plague.

THOREAU: Full tilt.

RUE: Full tilt crazy.

ROYCE: Is there any other way?

GREY: In the morning.

THOREAU: Here, dawn.

GREY: Good night.

THOREAU: For you --

REISING: It doesn't matter.

ROYCE: You've let -- his name?

REISING: I sent him a note --

Turns to leave.

REISING: Dawn?

THOREAU: Dawn.

REISING exits.

ROYCE: And you two?

THOREAU: I should get you home. Dawn's early light.

They exit, speaking.

THOREAU: Yo' momma is so sweet --

RUE: -- sugar asks her for advice.

ROYCE is alone. Lights out.

* * * * *

ACT II, SCENE 7: Montage

SLIDE: Meanwhile...

ROYCE's apartment is struck. The following scenes are played as a montage; each little scene will be a self-contained vignette. The set up for the montage is covered by music. Upstage center, hunkered over a shortwave radio, will be a kind of choral character, who will occasionally relate information from the outside world. The transition between vignettes should be done quickly and smoothly so as to create a flow of action. The vignettes with the radio operator will cover the scene changes. At the end of each vignette, the whip sound.

Vignette #1: RADIO OPERATOR is twirling dials; the audience hears static, and then, clearly, the voice of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, governor of New York. Since this speech was not recorded, Roosevelt's voice will have to be imitated. Some method must be used so that the words are looped and reverbed, as if the signal were bouncing off clouds or obstructions and repeating itself.

SLIDE: "These unhappy times call for the building of plans that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid."

VOICE OF ROOSEVELT: "These unhappy times call for the building of plans that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid."

Voice gets lost in static.

OPERATOR: Damn!

Vignette #2: Rudy Vallee's "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?" plays briefly as lights come up. Diner -- single table with chairs. Four men out of work, each with a coffee mug. Use any other signs to indicate diner. One or several or all can be smoking. MAN 4 is distinctly quiet.

MAN 1: Hell, no work in a year.

MAN 2: Me, neither.

MAN 3: Hoover, the fuck -- I hear he dresses for dinner every night --

MAN 1: -- every night, I hear --

MAN 3: -- and eats seven fucking courses.

MAN 2: Seven fu --

MAN 3: Seven courses.

MAN 1: Been living off my garden -- lucky get a course and a half.

MAN 1 takes a drink of coffee.

MAN 1: Chicory! Wish I had hooch.

MAN 2: My wife cut the sheets the other day, resewed them --

MAN 3: Done that, yeah --

MAN 2: -- so that the wear wouldn't, you know, show so much.

MAN 3: Know that one.

MAN 1: Eleven million people outa work, I hear.

MAN 3: Eleven million.

MAN 2: Another thing I heard --

MAN 3: Yeah?

MAN 2: 20,000 people committed suicide last year.

MAN 1: Hope they were all stockbrokers.

MAN 3: Yeah.

MAN 1: Or bankers. Or both.

MAN 3: Oh, yeah.

MAN 2: Lawyers, too.

MAN 1: Fucking coffee.

MAN 3: And now this.

MAN 2: Heard they split the atom -- whatever the fuck that is.

MAN 1: And still buryin' people like cordwood. Who woulda thought?

They fall silent for a moment, drinking their coffee. Meanwhile, MAN 4, who hasn't said a word, begins to look ill, and the gaze of the other men go to him. They look at each other. MAN 4 falls out of his chair, out cold. The other men put their mugs on the table and move slowly away. Lights down. They strike the scene. CORINTH is set.

Vignette #3: RADIO OPERATOR spins dials, static, then voices. The same morphing of the signal can be done.

VOICE 1: *(in rapid news-style voice)* "Today, the armed forces of the United States, under the capable command of General Douglas MacArthur, routed the Communistic rabble of the so-called Bonus Expeditionary Force."

Twirls dials.

VOICE 2: *(with great anger)* "Today, the forces of reactionary capitalism struck down innocent people as General Douglas MacArthur, flunky for the capitalists, used the military forces of the United States, paid for by tax dollars, to kill veterans demanding simple justice."

Twirls dials.

MUSIC: "Happy days are here again! / The skies above are clear again! / Let's all sing a song of cheer again / Happy days are here again."

Fade this out beginning with "Let's.... and it should segue into CORINTH's radio in the next vignette.

Vignette #4: The death of CORINTH. Her radio, as always, is on low. It is playing "Happy Days Are Here Again." Three sanitation workers are there, along with THOREAU. One worker picks her up and takes her out. The second worker empties the bowls of peas into a paper sack, closes it, takes it and the "bed," and leaves. THOREAU switches off her radio. Lights out. THOREAU strikes the table.

During this action, ORANGE MAN is onstage continuing with his "aria," which becomes, in an ironic way, a dirge for CORINTH.

ORANGE MAN: Black man dies in a land of fire. White man dies in a land of fire. We all must hang together. We all will hang together. Time makes the mad mind clean. We should have some happiness made of love after so much pain. The end. So much pain. The end.

Vignette #5: RADIO OPERATOR, with headphones on, speaking.

OPERATOR: Jeez, you don't say! Dumpin' milk in the road? In Sioux City? Jeez, you don't say! What? What was that? -- Damn, good line about the Boston Tea Part -- Seems like the whole shebang's comin' apart, don't it? Comin' apart! I mean, if Iowa, the President's home state, is like Moscow -- What? What was that? -- Lindbergh case -- who cares? He loses a kid -- so? Always get a new kid -- What? What? Yeah? Oh okay, then, over and out to you, too. Okay.

RADIO OPERATOR switches off the radio, takes off his headphones, and stares into space, contemplating as the following from the Internationale is sung: it can be done off-stage or with an old recording, if one can be found. The set for the next vignette can be set during the song.

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation
Arise, ye wretched of the earth
For justice thunders condemnation
A better world's in birth...

The verse repeats, but much louder.

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation
Arise, ye wretched of the earth
For justice thunders condemnation
A better world's in birth...

Vignette #6: Three scenes with children, all played simultaneously. As always, chairs serve for beds. Scene 1 is with ROYCE, in a white household: shabby gentility.

Scene 2 is with THOREAU and RUE in a black household: economic privation.

Scene 3 is with GREY in two children's wards, one white, one black. In the white ward there is a white nurse; in the black ward, there is SAMUELS. Three or four children standing in each ward will be sufficient to indicate the places. They stand upstage to downstage. The children in the wards do not speak unless GREY speaks to them.

Scene 3 should be upstage center; scenes 1 and 2 are set on either side. In scenes 1 and 2, parents are present at the bedside. When the scenes shift, actions still continue in the other scenes, though mimed. The effect is to have the audience feel that action is occurring in three different locations at the same time.

Even though "he" is used to refer to the children, they can be played by either gender. The NURSES can be either gender. GREY is seated on one side of bed, the mother on the other, holding the hand of the child.

ROYCE: Afraid all we can do is wait.

MOTHER 1: All we've been doing.

FATHER 1: May I speak with you a moment?

The two confer while shifting to Scene 2.

MOTHER 2: He gonna make it?

RUE: Hard, Miz Baldwin. This time of day, the fever rises.

THOREAU: We're probably going to have to take him --

MOTHER 2: No!

THOREAU: -- to the children's ward.

FATHER 2: He'll die there.

THOREAU reaches out to the FATHER; they go back to watching the CHILD. Switch to Scene 3. GREY and NURSE are walking along the beds in the white ward.

NURSE: -- we keep children in the -- *(drops her voice)* -- later stages. We don't --

GREY: We must always hope, nurse.

GREY comes to the first bed.

GREY: How are we doing today?

CHILD looks at him, does not speak, looks away. GREY's face looks pained. During the switch, GREY can move to second bed, make as if he is trying to comfort the CHILD.

FATHER 1 and ROYCE finish conferring.

ROYCE: I'm afraid that can't --

FATHER 1: But if -- we can't put him where -- our family --

MOTHER 1: *(to no one in particular)* You should be ashamed!

During the switch, GREY moves to third bed. The CHILD whispers something to GREY.

FATHER 2: He die there.

THOREAU: You can't keep him here. You don't have the choice.

FATHER 2: Ain't never had the --

MOTHER 2: *(to FATHER 2)* Ain't the time for that. Stop. Thinkin' a yo'self.

MOTHER 2 turns to the child.

MOTHER 2: "Whoever perished, bein' innocent?"

Switch.

GREY: *(speaking to CHILD)* Why do want to know about angels?

CHILD: I saw one.

GREY: I never have. Tell me.

The next lines will switch from scene to scene and overlap.

FATHER 1: *(standing)* We have to talk about it.

MOTHER 1: *(standing)* He's still here!

RUE: I'm afraid that --

MOTHER 2: It's time.

CHILD: The angel -- it left me.

GREY: They never really leave.

ROYCE: *(standing as well)* This is not the place --

FATHER 2: Cain't we be taken? Why [him] -- ? Why him?

As GREY speaks his next lines, the CHILD in Scene 1 dies, in this manner: The CHILD rises and, if there is any bedding, takes it, looks at the adults briefly, and exits; they watch him leave. They sit quietly.

GREY: They give us hope. They are there to guard us. They let us know that we always will have a home to go to.

GREY moves on to the black ward. He comes to a CHILD who stands quietly with eyes closed. As GREY speaks, the CHILD does not respond. GREY touches him, calls SAMUELS over. She quickly examines the CHILD by checking his pulse; finding none, she lowers the hand slowly.

As this is occurring, the following happens in Scene 2. MOTHER 2 leans down to kiss the CHILD, holds her cheek against his mouth.

MOTHER 2: Mr. John?

MOTHER 2 touches her own cheek.

MOTHER 2: Nothin'.

THOREAU checks for pulse, finds none, puts the hand back. The following lines are said as if one person were saying them. As with the other CHILD, this CHILD also rises, takes any bedding, and exits.

ROYCE: We'll have to take --

GREY: -- the body --

MOTHER 2: -- away. Don't matter --

FATHER 2: -- spirit stays. --

MOTHER 1: -- How will we --

FATHER 1: -- go on? --

SAMUELS: -- We'll go on. --

THOREAU: -- I wish I knew --

NURSE: -- why. --

FATHER 1: This --

THOREAU: -- plague --

MOTHER 2: -- has --

MOTHER 1: -- become --

GREY: -- our --

FATHER 2: -- way --

ROYCE: --of --

RUE: -- life.

THOREAU looks at the child.

THOREAU: No.

Vignette #7: While the RADIO OPERATOR spins the dial, the "children" scenes are struck. The OPERATOR is spinning the dial through bits of the most popular shows of the year -- these can probably be taken from recordings that have been made. Or, if that is not possible, something from "Little Orphan Annie" would suffice -- Warbucks as financier, Annie as Depression waif -- "Jack Armstrong," or "Amos 'n' Andy."

RADIO OPERATOR twirls the dial again, and this vignette ends with this song excerpt, which plays until the following vignette begins:

Gee, I'd like to see you looking swell, baby
Wearing bracelets Woolworth's doesn't sell, baby
But until that day you know darned well, baby
I can't give you anything but love.

Vignette #8: REISING is interviewing two GRAVEDIGGERS.

GRAVE 1: Hard at first, you know.

GRAVE 2: Hard, yeah.

GRAVE 1: Hard. At first we tried to keep everything, well, normal, you know?

GRAVE 2: Normal -- sheesh!

GRAVE 1: Slipping people into their family plots, holding proper funerals, that sort of thing. You know?

GRAVE 2: But then --

GRAVE 1: Bam --

GRAVE 1: Right. Noah's flood, you know? No room at the inn.

GRAVE 2: Trenches --

GRAVE 1: Yep.

GRAVE 2: Trenches was the only way. Only way. That and quick lime --

GRAVE 1: Quick lime, yeah --

GRAVE 2: -- quick lime saved us.

GRAVE 1: Though it ruins your hands, eats everything.

GRAVE 2: Well, supposed to. Why they call it "quick." And, boy, did we need it quick!

GRAVE 1: Bodies came in like logs down a river.

GRAVE 2: Bam, bam, bam -- coal down a coal chute.

GRAVE 1: At first, you know, with the trenches, we made 'em nice, you know, out of respect. Squared and all.

GRAVE 2: But after a while -- sloppy. We were we running out of room!

GRAVE 1: Like cordwood sometimes.

GRAVE 2: That's why they cranked up the incinerator.

GRAVE 1: Had to. Didn't like it, though. Creeps.

GRAVE 2: Me, too.

GRAVE 1: But I gotta admit --

GRAVE 2: Me, too.

GRAVE 1: -- handling ashes was a lot easier, huh?

GRAVE 2: Yeah.

GRAVE 1: Like cleaning out the furnace.

GRAVE 2: And we didn't have to deal with the families anymore, which was a great relief.

GRAVE 1: Great relief.

GRAVE 2: Hardly anyone came -- blame them? Hard to work up tears over a teacup of cinders.
Got enough? We gotta get back.

REISING: Just one more thing: what do you think about when you work?

GRAVE 2: Think?

GRAVE 1: About?

GRAVE 2: Don't think about anything.

GRAVE 1: One thing I noticed: everyone looks the same dead.

GRAVE 2: The same, yeah.

GRAVE 1: All the work people put into being different -- like piss on a hot griddle --

GRAVE 2: *(laughing)* Piss on a hot --

GRAVE 1: -- when you're belly up.

GRAVE 2 mimes urinating.

GRAVE 2: Writin' my name in the snow.

GRAVE 1: Easy to get a little loopy --

GRAVE 1 waggles his hips, as if he were urinating in the snow as well.

GRAVE 1: -- out here workin' the graveyard shift.

GRAVE 2: *(laughing)* Graveyard shift --

GRAVE 1: Me, I been union since before I popped out of my mom. All my life I been saying everyone buttons up their pants the same way. This proves it. Enough?

REISING: Yes. Thanks.

GRAVE 2: If you need more, you know where to find us. Hey, maybe we could send you stories by smoke signal!

GRAVE 1: You know, a couple of puffs for a baby -- !

REISING: Maybe not.

GRAVE 2: Hey, not so seriously!

GRAVE 1: Not at all.

GRAVE 2: Think it this way -- think all the work it's givin' the workingman.

GRAVE 1: That's what the bright side's for.

REISING: And your family?

GRAVE 1: Can't have a family on this job. Job requirement. They don't want you to have any strings.

GRAVE 2: Snip snip.

GRAVE 1: Look, we really gotta go. Bam, bam, bam -- coal's down the chute.

The two GRAVEDIGGERS leave. The song excerpt at the beginning of the vignette comes up again as REISING completes her notes. When she's done, she heavily dots the page with a period, then again, more forcefully, almost as if she's stabbing the pad with the pencil. She exits as light comes up on center stage just as the last of the lyrics plays.

Vignette #9: A MAN and a WOMAN.

MAN with a hip flask in hand, obviously drunk.

MAN: Come on. What's the problem?

He offers her the flask; she refuses it.

WOMAN: Jack, leave me alone. Jack! You been drinkin'. I don't want -- I don't want to.

MAN: Look, what's the point, honey? We're all gonna die. Let's have a good time before we go. It ain't wrong. I got protection.

WOMAN: Let me go.

MAN: No.

WOMAN struggles.

WOMAN: What's up with you?

MAN: I'm gonna show you.

MAN pins her arm behind her.

MAN: I'm not lettin' you --

WOMAN: Jack!!

MAN: -- tell me no.

WOMAN: Jack! That -- hurts -- Jack!

The MAN lets her go and instead grabs her by the waist from behind. He pulls her skirt up over her hips and mimes taking her from behind.

MAN: Here's -- to -- the -- new -- world -- order -- only -- the-- strong-- survive.

He finishes with her; she collapses to the floor.

MAN: All bets are off.

MAN leaves.

WOMAN: What's new?

Lights cross-fade with RADIO OPERATOR's light coming up.

Vignette #10: RADIO OPERATOR has his headphones on and is speaking.

OPERATOR: Gettin' desperate here, too. Right, right. But, you know, it's queer, too. Queer. Niggers over in Liberty Town, they marched down to the Mayor's office -- I ain't shittin' you -- and one of their ministers -- I ain't shittin' you -- one of their ministers suggested that they have this ceremony to bring the citizens together. Balls, you gotta admit it. And instead of just tellin' 'em to go to hell, the Mayor, well, it sounded like he agreed! And the priest over at the Catholic Church -- he agreed, too! Yeah, the Kluckers got upset -- I have no use for them -- but -- Yeah, to be sure, it is strange, it's a strange world we're livin' in, ain't it? Everythin's going to powder and all those things you depended on -- But people pull together, too. Seems like you can't have one without -- yeah, people can haul the load. Maybe Roosevelt'll do somethin'. The devil sure knows Hoover's been as bad as this plague -- Well, I thank you for that thought. Roger.

RADIO OPERATOR twirls the dial one more time and comes across a playing of the last strains of the national anthem: "the land of the free and the home of the brave." This can be orchestral or sung. RADIO OPERATOR turns off the radio; lights out.

Transition music.

* * * * *

ACT II, SCENE 8: Several weeks later - hospital ward, Liberty Town

A hospital ward in Liberty Town. A line of chairs are set up -- eight -- and the men and women seen at the top of the act are sitting in them facing the audience. The men should sit in one half, then a gap two chairs wide, then the women. These are the hospital "beds," separated by gender. LITTLEFIELD, RUE, and THOREAU are in the ward. LITTLEFIELD is going down the row of "beds" checking patients. He does this in the background. RUE is sitting at a table writing down figures; THOREAU is sitting as well but staring.

SLIDE: In Our Beginnings We Find Our Endings.

RUE: There.

THOREAU: What?

RUE: The day's figures. The report. The report.

THOREAU: Yes.

RUE: You all right?

THOREAU shakes himself, as if to wake up.

THOREAU: Yes. I was thinking -- Not really -- The figures -- Keeping track --

One of the patients cries out as LITTLEFIELD examines him. The cry startles RUE.

RUE: Think I'd be used to it --

THOREAU: Good you're not.

RUE turns the book toward him, leafs back several pages.

RUE: Look at this.

THOREAU forces himself to pay attention.

THOREAU: What is it?

RUE: What do you notice?

LITTLEFIELD takes the pulse of another patient, puts the hand down, and closes the patient's staring eyes. The patient stands and then exits.

THOREAU: Numbers.

RUE: No, look closer.

THOREAU: Down.

RUE turns back several pages.

RUE: A month ago. And now.

THOREAU: It's not a lot.

RUE: But it's down. From the other districts as well.

THOREAU: I had forgotten that.

RUE: Are you all right?

One of the patients is imploring something with LITTLEFIELD. Reluctantly, LITTLEFIELD kneels down by the edge of the bed while the patient prays.

THOREAU: Fine. Tired.

RUE: I'll do the full report later.

THOREAU: *(absently)* Good.

LITTLEFIELD finishes praying, moves to the last patient, then joins RUE and THOREAU. RUE runs her finger down a list.

RUE: Everything's low, though: fumigant -- harder to heat enough water to wash things.

The sound of the whip. RUE and LITTLEFIELD do not hear it, but THOREAU takes notice. LITTLEFIELD enters to hear the last of RUE's lines.

LITTLEFIELD: Welcome to the town of liberty.

The sound of the whip again. Again, RUE and LITTLEFIELD do not hear it, but THOREAU does.

RUE: I spoke -- when was it? yesterday -- with the Mayor about it. "All over the city," he said. But I know that's not true. Some of the suburbs --

LITTLEFIELD: Don't worry --

RUE: But it's not right --

LITTLEFIELD: -- right. I know. Just don't worry about it.

The third sounding of the whip. THOREAU stands suddenly, though smoothly, not startled. He looks at both of them while they look at him. He looks away for a moment, as if he's listening for something. Then he sits slowly, with dignity.

THOREAU: Galen? Galen? Would you check me?

LITTLEFIELD: What?

THOREAU: Would you check me?

LITTLEFIELD: I don't understand --

The patients shift restlessly in their beds.

THOREAU: You know the drill.

LITTLEFIELD glances at RUE, then moves to THOREAU. He performs a brief check: under the armpits, the groin, for fever, etc.

THOREAU: Well?

LITTLEFIELD: Nothing --

THOREAU: Full disclosure.

LITTLEFIELD: Nothing conclusive. Some hardness, maybe -- Bit of fever, but it's summer, damn it -- *(catches himself)* -- and we're all exhausted -- How do you feel?

THOREAU: I heard -- something. You both know, as well as I --

RUE: What? We've all been exposed --

THOREAU: Luck of the dice.

The patients shift again, restlessly.

LITTLEFIELD: Maddie --

RUE: We are not -- It's not clear -- He can stay with me.

LITTLEFIELD: Bernard won't allow --

RUE: He is not going -- ! *(to THOREAU)* Overwork. You've pushed yourself -- It's just that. Let's go -- we're done for the day here.

RUE looks to LITTLEFIELD.

RUE: Right?

LITTLEFIELD: Maddie --

RUE: Good. (to THOREAU) Let's go. I'll drive.

LITTLEFIELD: Maddie --

RUE helps THOREAU stand, though he's quite capable of standing on his own.

RUE: A night's good sleep --

THOREAU: Maddie --

RUE: No.

THOREAU: Galen, don't worry. I'll take care of everything.

RUE: There's nothing to take care of --

THOREAU looks at LITTLEFIELD with a calm face.

THOREAU: (to LITTLEFIELD) You're very thorough.

RUE: Let's go.

THOREAU: No pun intended.

LITTLEFIELD: Doubt it.

RUE: Let's go.

THOREAU and RUE exit. LITTLEFIELD walks back to the "ward"; the patients turn restlessly again.

LITTLEFIELD: Be calm, my friends. Peace in your hearts.

Lights down on this scene; lights come in THOREAU's "apartment." The patients leave; two chairs should also be put far upstage, in the dimness. THOREAU sets a chair downstage center facing upstage; this is the bed. A stagehand brings out a bedside table upon which will be placed various objects. On the table already is THOREAU's journal and a pen or pencil RUE sets the other chair. The death of THOREAU will be placed with THOREAU facing upstage and everyone else facing him, and thus the audience. The transition music should be something incongruously lively from that period.

RUE sits THOREAU in "bed."

RUE: Now just relax.

THOREAU: I'm relaxed.

RUE: I'm going to get Bernard.

THOREAU: You don't --

RUE: Humor me, please. Please. I'll be right back.

THOREAU: I won't go anywhere. I promise. I live here.

RUE leaves. THOREAU sits there, several beats, facing upstage. Then he picks up his journal and holds it. Underscoring his words is the music used for the swimming scene.

THOREAU: I looked for the old man today, again. Nothing. He has not come out on his balcony for weeks. I feel sorry for him, but why? I feel sorry for him for the simple sad fact of his human frailty. In short, I feel sorry for no reason, simply as a condition of being human. That, I think, is a step forward. It's all very clear. I have felt it stirring for several days now. The bacillus had a little housekeeping to do to set up shop. Now it's ready. And so am I.

ROYCE and RUE rush into the apartment and come to the bed; ROYCE has a doctor's bag with him. The dialogue under the following VOICEOVER is mimed; the actors will have to work out an ad lib dialogue between them (the dialogue should concern itself with THOREAU's prognosis, what they should do with him, etc), but they do not actually speak. They can move about as they wish, but their movements should, if possible, complement THOREAU's thoughts. What the audience hears instead is THOREAU's observation of them and of himself.

NOTE: If preferred, THOREAU can speak these lines instead, body-miked if needed.

THOREAU: They are worried. I wish I could tell them to let go because nothing they do will help. I wish they could let go without guilt. Bernard -- trying to keep that unruffled professional look. We know what he will find -- he knows that I know.

ROYCE prepares an injection.

THOREAU: Yes, the serum -- it will make you feel more useful. And Maddie -- trying very hard to do what she thinks she should do: put the brake on fate, her faith will overcome biology. Such affection will only deepen her wounds -- I wish her heart were a little harder so it would be more useful to her.

THOREAU's journal falls to the floor.

THOREAU: Suddenly so very tired. No, leave it there. It's a very weak witness.

RUE puts it back into his hands.

THOREAU: If you must, then -- Already I can feel the first wave of poison -- diffuse, like a vapor, oddly warm. I must pay attention. I must pay attention.

RUE and ROYCE confer. ROYCE comes to the bed, says something to THOREAU, and leaves. RUE stays, sits by the bed.

THOREAU: He'll be back. She stays. The long night begins.

There is a light shift to indicate the passage of time; the light should be soft, like dawn. RUE falls asleep in her chair. ROYCE enters the room quietly, followed by REISING, SAMUELS, and HIGHTOWER. SAMUELS bring a glass and a small pitcher of water; HIGHTOWER brings in a small towel. ROYCE wakes RUE, and the five of them move to the side to confer. During their talk the light shifts slowly to brighter day; it should be timed to the duration of their dialogue.

ROYCE: I don't know -- I've given him the serum, but there's no telling -- We'll watch. We'll watch.

REISING: *(to RUE)* I'll take over.

SAMUELS: Let me. Like sittin' with my children.

ROYCE: Soon. One way or another -- soon.

REISING: *(to SAMUELS)* Next, then. Four hours?

SAMUELS: When you can. There is where I am.

REISING: Okay. Okay.

REISING pauses briefly, then leaves.

HIGHTOWER: I know I should be there --

ROYCE: Understood.

HIGHTOWER: My prayers --

ROYCE: I'm willing to try anything --

HIGHTOWER stands at the foot of the "bed" and looks at THOREAU.

HIGHTOWER: Grace.

HIGHTOWER leaves. SAMUELS and ROYCE continue to talk, but now mimed: he is giving her instructions on how to care for THOREAU. Then ROYCE leaves. THOREAU's VOICEOVER.

THOREAU: I heard that. Though hard to hear things clearly. Well, almost. Street sounds clear, for some reason: the trolley again, shouts on a corner. People sampling each other again. My own heart keeps pounding -- the grace of the ignorant muscle. But words -- vapors.

He lets the journal slide out of his hands again. SAMUELS picks it up, but he indicates for her to hold it, then to open it. In his own voice, thick, THOREAU speaks.

THOREAU: Read, please.

SAMUELS: I cain't read. I cain't read --

THOREAU: That's fine. No harm.

SAMUELS: Could tell you a story.

THOREAU: No, no stories. No parables. Give me your hand --

SAMUELS takes his hand. THOREAU turns his face away from her. As SAMUELS speaks, the light shifts again to indicate the passage of time. The light change should last as long as her speech and have the quality of early evening in late summer.

SAMUELS: Held his hand. Strong hand, delicate. I looked through his book -- I wanted, I wanted the words to jump into my eyes, into my mouth so I could give him what he wanted. But they laid flat like stones. Pictures in there, people, places -- he'd paid his attention, he had. Terrible to watch him. I'd give him water every time when he seemed to come up. Then, sink again. He never moved, just laid there -- his own willpower. Face -- flushed, sweatin'. Watch the color rise in it, then fade away. Terrible to see my friend wasted away. My friend. Not much white in my life to say that about. Maybe none. What a damnable gift.

Light change should be complete. REISING enters, carrying a chair. She puts the chair on the side opposite SAMUELS. SAMUELS gets up, still holding the journal, and goes to REISING. They confer about THOREAU's condition, how to care for him, etc. THOREAU's VOICEOVER -- increasingly strained, though still under control.

THOREAU: It is a long business. I can feel it, like a miner digging: a burst to rip out the ore, then a breather, a break. But no mistake about it: everything will be excavated. I must pay attention. It is a long business.

SAMUELS hands REISING the journal, then retreats upstage, where she sits in the shadows. REISING hesitantly opens the journal, then shuts it. The lighting should change during her speech as well, to a gradual darkness with the bed area lit as if by a bedside lamp. During her speech she does various ministrations for him: wipe his forehead, give him water, rearrange the covers, etc.

REISING: I wanted to tell him -- At first I wrote her name every day, as if by writing it I could keep everything alive, about her, us. I would conjure her, recall -- everything. But an odd thing -- all that love became -- theory. Without her solid body, I might as well have been worshiping the goat god or Karl Marx's beard. Just the buzz of a memory, like a retinal burn, fading. Forgetting even as I remembered. Distance, time -- shaping a death by degrees. And here? Here death sculpted life into life. This -- condition -- it thinned out

everything we thought was solid, made a gift out of so much in our former lives we would have, in our former lives, otherwise avoided. It made us real against our will.

The light change should be complete. RUE enters. As with SAMUELS, REISING and RUE confer. The lights remain as they are through the rest of the scene. REISING hands RUE the journal and joins SAMUELS in the shadows upstage. As with REISING, RUE ministers to him as she talks.

RUE: I'd be lying -- if I didn't tell you -- But, irrelevant now. The important thing -- survive this. That day, when you asked, I just didn't know -- But I cannot go back. Life is -- larger. I couldn't cry. I started reading to him from his journal, trying to make a serum by my voice. I held one hand, I held both hands, I wiped away the sweat, the spit, I gave him water, watched the fever tense him and then release him with a fit of coughing -- he would smile when he surfaced, turn his face, away, when the pain burned. It was a long business, this living through dying.

During her last words ROYCE enters and sits on the other side of the bed. REISING and SAMUELS bring their chairs from upstage and also sit around the bed. For perhaps 10 to 15 seconds the audience hears, fading in, the sounds of a morning: occasional traffic, birds, wind, etc. The lights will also come up to dawn levels during the soundover. At the end of this time THOREAU lets out one long breath.

Any emotion in this scene comes from the faces of the actors who are watching THOREAU. His death must be seen through their faces. Light fades down on scene to black.

Transition music: music from the swimming scene.

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ACT II, SCENE 9: The end of the plague

SLIDE: The Fault Lies Not In Our Stars: Part 2.

While the MAYOR's office is set, ROYCE comes downstage to speak to the audience.

ROYCE: The plague did end. Or, more precisely, it slipped away, as usual, hiding in the soil, in the rats that, ironically, returned -- as did the cats, to the delight of John's old man. Miss Maddie's numbers told all, and by the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's election, our happy city believed it had nothing left to fear, not even fear itself.

ROYCE walks into the scene of the MAYOR's office. In the office are CASTLE and FREEMAN, RUE, ROYCE, and the MAYOR. Two other people are there, new: LEONARD JOHNSON, the new head of the city's Health Department, and HENRY CLEW, new head of the sanitation department.

MAYOR: May I call this a victory celebration?

ROYCE: If you want.

MAYOR: And just in time for the elections.

MAYOR laughs, but no one else joins in except for the two new men, who only do so half-heartedly.

CASTLE: I think it's safe to say it's over -- for the time being.

JOHNSON: Can it come back?

CASTLE: I'm sorry, I don't know who you --

MAYOR: My fault. *(to RUE)* See what happens when I don't have you around any more? Leonard Johnson, health department, and Henry Clew, sanitation department. Gerry and Jim didn't make it. But life goes on.

CASTLE: *(irritated)* Yes, it can, probably will come back.

CLEW: A little pessimistic, don't you think?

FREEMAN: It will. The serum, the sanitation crews -- they didn't hurt, I'm sure, though I don't really know how much they helped, with all respect to Mr. Thoreau. The fact is --

MAYOR: The fact is, the plague is over. A cause for celebration. That's how it reads to me. C'mon, let's at least take some satisfaction in surviving.

The "door" to the MAYOR's office opens, and SAMUELS and LITTLEFIELD enter, accompanied by a CLERK. ROYCE moves to meet them.

ROYCE: Glad you could make it.

MAYOR: Dr. Royce -- ?

ROYCE: Was everything all right?

MAYOR: Dr. Royce --

SAMUELS: I'm glad we had the escort.

MAYOR: Dr. Royce --

ROYCE: I'm sorry -- I just wanted to make sure --

CLEW: Your friends?

ROYCE: I'd like to introduce Hannah Samuels and Dr. Galen Littlefield.

FREEMAN: Why don't I know your name?

LITTLEFIELD: I know yours, Dr. Freeman.

ROYCE: I invited them, for the "celebration." They were absolutely indispensable in Liberty Town. They deserve your thanks -- just like everyone.

RUE: I agree.

SAMUELS: Your Honor. I never been in City Hall --

SAMUELS holds out her hand.

SAMUELS: Pleased to meet you.

There is a momentary hesitation on the MAYOR's part before he takes her hand. ROYCE indicates LITTLEFIELD, and the MAYOR shakes his hand as well.

CLEW: This is unacceptable. Your Honor, I have work to do.

CLEW moves toward the door.

MAYOR: Clew --

CLEW waits, but the MAYOR doesn't finish his sentence. CLEW leaves.

MAYOR: Well --

There is an uncomfortable silence.

MAYOR: Well --

Silence continues.

MAYOR: Well, what do you think we should do to celebrate?

Several beats of silence before LITTLEFIELD speaks.

LITTLEFIELD: Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR: Yes?

LITTLEFIELD: I have a question.

MAYOR: Yes?

LITTLEFIELD: Liberty Town needs help. Will you help?

The MAYOR is silent.

LITTLEFIELD: Can we get a commitment from you?

Silence, several beats. The CLERK enters.

CLERK: The Bankers' Commission is here for their appointment.

Silence, several more beats.

MAYOR: We're done here, I guess.

The MAYOR looks directly at LITTLEFIELD. LITTLEFIELD looks at the people in the room, slowly turns, and takes SAMUELS by the elbow to lead her from the room. ROYCE makes a motion toward them, but SAMUELS stops him with her words.

SAMUELS: Seems like it's still in the blood.

They leave. RUE follows them out of the room.

MAYOR: I have an appointment to keep.

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EPILOGUE

SLIDE: What Will We Do Without Him? We Will Do Without Him.

Light cross-fades from MAYOR's office to downstage center. RUE, ROYCE, and REISING come in with chairs to transition music. The chairs are in this order, stage right to stage left: REISING, ROYCE, and RUE. Each chair is in its own pool of light. Behind REISING stands SAMUELS; behind ROYCE stands LITTLEFIELD; behind RUE stands ORANGE MAN.

ROYCE: They finally released her body; I buried Miriam today.

REISING: I sent her a telegram; I ache to see her.

RUE: The sound of water pains me; my heart swims in silence.

ROYCE: Now the flesh is gone. I'm feeding on ghosts.

RUE: What is the reward for our sacrifice?

REISING: But there were cracks when freedom oozed through, like honey.

RUE: "A great absence, like a flute swirling through the hardening dusk."

REISING: Some got to taste and will not forget.

ROYCE: Inevitably, we travel alone. And just as inevitably, we're tied to each other by ripening shades of title.

RUE & ORANGE MAN: How to expand the possible --

ROYCE & LITTLEFIELD: How to let go of love to keep it --

REISING & SAMUELS: How to keep fighting the good fight --

SAMUELS: We can never forget --

ROYCE: -- and we will always forget --

LITTLEFIELD: -- the plague that never stops --

RUE: -- simmering in our lives --

ORANGE MAN: -- hiding in our silences --

REISING: -- and emptying the shared bed.

RUE: The rats will go forth again --

LITTLEFIELD: -- to die in a happy city --

ROYCE: We will have enlightenment --

SAMUELS: -- inflicted on us again --

REISING: We will learn once more to love freedom --

ORANGE MAN: -- and eat its sweet pain.

ALL: The circle is closed.

They all look directly at the audience.

ALL: And opens.

The sound of the whip three times in quick succession. At each snap, one pool of light bumps out until all is dark.

BLACKOUT