

The Happy City

(based on The Plague by Albert Camus)

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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
- General MacArthur / Herbert Hoover / 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. Slides come up for long enough to be read, then go out.

Note 4: *About the Prologue* -- It may not be technically feasible for a company to do the Prologue as it is written. If this is the case, then this following can be substituted for it: a single slide at the top of the show which says, "1932. The Depression. The world had fallen apart."

Act I: Prologue

1) Pre-show music of songs from 1932 fades out as houselights come down and the stage goes to black.

2) A sound begins, low in timbre, that will build, as it gets louder, into the sound of approaching tanks.

3) While the tank sound is building, there are also the sounds of people's voices shouting, all ages and genders. This sound will build as well, along with the sound of tanks.

4) While this sonic environment is building, there is the flicker of light: flames. The flames punctuate the darkness. Also, fog is blown in, though only wisps at first; however, the volume of it should build over these opening moments. (this represents the tear gas used in the attack) It should never be so voluminous as to obscure the slides; otherwise, don't use it.

5) These sounds should build quickly -- use approximately 20 to 30 seconds. This opening should not be long, but it must carry punch -- using only sound, slides, and light.

6) As all this is building, slides come up, rear- or front-projected (whatever is technically possible for the theatre). These slides will give brief bits of information about the Bonus Expeditionary Force, 1932.

Slide: In the desperate summer of 1932, the Depression gripped the country's throat. Washington, D.C. resembled a besieged capital.

Slide: Since May, 25,000 penniless veterans of the Great War had camped with their families in parks, by the river, on government property.

Slide: They had come to ask for relief.

Slide: In 1924, Congress had authorized a "bonus" to pay them for lost earnings during the war.

Slide: However, the bonus did not come due until 1945.

Slide: They wanted it now; they needed it now.

Slide: Calling themselves the Bonus Expeditionary Force, they came to petition their government for redress.

Slide: Washington trembled. Hoover refused to meet them and barricaded the White House.

Slide: General Moseley suggested that those of "inferior blood" be put in concentration camps to "stew in their own filth."

Slide: On June 17, 1932, the Senate refused to pass legislation approving early payment of the bonus.

7) As the cacophony builds, the slides also pick up speed, though not so fast as to be unreadable.

8) Finally, the cacophony reaches its apex; the tanks sound as if they are ready to run people down. The flames rage, and the audience hears the voices of people being attacked and beaten.

Slide: By July, the powers-that-be had decided the veterans had to be removed.

In the midst of the mayhem walks General Douglas MacArthur. His entrance is heralded by a blast of bright white searchlights, throwing everything into stark relief.

Slide: They selected General Douglas MacArthur to do the job.

9) MacArthur delivers his pronouncement. (this is punctuated with a slide using the same words)

MACARTHUR: "MacArthur has decided to go into active command in the field. There is incipient revolution in the air."

Slide: MacArthur has decided to go into active command in the field. There is incipient revolution in the air.

10) By this time the sounds have fallen enough for the actor's words to be heard, or they could be miked if the sound is desired loud. Slides will underscore the spoken words. EISENHOWER's words are in VOICEOVER. The first slide should have on it this text: Major Dwight Eisenhower, General MacArthur's aide: "Let them retreat back to their

camps." After this slide, however, do not include the name of the speaker, just the text of their speech.

Slide: Major Dwight Eisenhower, General MacArthur's aide: "Let them retreat back to their camps."

Slide: MacArthur: "Major Eisenhower, I want Major Patton to continue herding them across the river."

Slide: Eisenhower: "And then what?"

Slide: MacArthur: "We are going to break their back!"

Slide: Eisenhower: "But the President said not to pursue them across the river. Those were direct orders!"

Slide: MacArthur: "General MacArthur did not hear these instructions. He does not want to be bothered by people coming down and pretending to bring orders. Do your duty."

Slide: This was not the last time General MacArthur decided to disobey a President.

11) VOICEOVER: People begin shouting "Shame! Shame!" Other comments that can be voiced as well. These should all be layered and looped.

"Where were you in the Argonne, buddy?"

"The American flag means nothing to me after this!"

"They got the tanks and we ain't got a chance in hell!"

12) The sound of soldiers driving the BEF off diminish. The military sounds go away. In its place are the soft strains of a string quartet. MacArthur steps down center alone. A chair is brought out for him to sit on; the stagehand who brings it out is accompanied by one or two other stagehands who help MacArthur change out of his uniform into a tuxedo. (some of this can obviously be underdressed) He is transformed into Herbert Hoover.

13) While the dressers work, slides will begin. As the slides begin, the string quartet changes to Rudy Vallee singing "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?" The music will gradually soften so that Hoover can speak. He sits in his own light.

Slide: Almost 25% of the work force was unemployed; they had an estimated 30 million mouths to feed.

Slide: Vogue, April 1932: "Spring Styles Say >CURVES'!"

Slide: 20,000 people committed suicide.

Slide: Nine black men in Scottsboro, Alabama, were convicted of raping two white women. Though innocent, the trials dragged on for years.

Slide: Herbert Hoover liked to dress for dinner each night and sit down to a seven-course meal. He felt it would give the people confidence.

14) Hoover speaks. Slides duplicate his words.

HOOVER: "A challenge to the authority of the United States has been met, swiftly and firmly."

Slide: "A challenge to the authority of the United States has been met, swiftly and firmly."

HOOVER: "We cannot tolerate the abuse of Constitutional rights by mob rule."

Slide: "We cannot tolerate the abuse of Constitutional rights by mob rule."

15) Slides continue. The quartet music comes up slightly.

Slide: It was the first time that federal troops has been used by a President to attack citizens in the nation's capital.

Slide: It was the first time soldiers used gas masks in their own country.

16) After the last slide, the lights go down on Hoover sitting alone and stolid. The music fades down with the lights. When completely black, a VOICEOVER comes out of the darkness: "So all the misery and suffering had finally come to this: soldiers marching with their guns against American citizens. The world had fallen apart." During the VOICEOVER, ROYCE's apartment is set.

17) A sound effect: the snap and crack of a whip, three times.

18) 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)
Yes, you do. Ready?

MIRIAM
Yes.

ROYCE
(to the NURSE)
Her medicines?

NURSE
(indicates one of the satchels)
Yes, doctor.

ROYCE picks up one of the satchels; the NURSE picks up the other.
ROYCE grabs his hat. The three of them walk to downstage center.
ROYCE talks as they walk.

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.

They stop. The NURSE stands off to one side. A voice announces the departure of a train.

ROYCE
Miriam --

MIRIAM
(puts a finger to his lips)
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
(to the NURSE)
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.

They embrace. Then MIRIAM and the NURSE continue walking off stage left.

ROYCE

(to MIRIAM, as she disappears)

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, then moves to his "apartment," stage right.

PETER, the building's superintendent, comes on from stage left holding a large paper bag with something heavy in it. 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

(indicating the bag)

Found 'em this morning --

ROYCE

What?

PETER

Three dead rats. Somethin' ain't right.

ROYCE

I'm sure --

PETER

Ain't the only ones. Other supers --
(scratches his arm)
-- been finding 'em. Ain't right. I keep the
garbage sealed, just like you told me.

ROYCE

Good.

PETER

Ain't right.

ROYCE

(readying his bag)
Bury them -- don't throw them back in the
garbage.

PETER

Why're the rats givin' up?

ROYCE

Giving up?

PETER

(scratches his arm)
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

(scratches his arm)
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 finishes with his bag, then 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)

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.

Rises to leave.

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 m -- 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 -- , tomorrow, then.

He breaks the connection, makes another call.

ROYCE

Joe Johnson, city desk. Joe? Bernard. I am calling about the r -- . The "isn't it strange?" category? -- which means you don't kn -- 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)
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)
Could you get one for mine?
(finishes notes)
Yes?

REISING
(shakes his hand)
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.

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

REISING

My calling card.

ROYCE

New York.

REISING

(with a smile)

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.

(points at the paper)

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 --

(looks at her pad)

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.

REISING

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

(picking up bag)

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

ROYCE

We don't often get visits from the wicked East Coast. (walks her to the door, hands her the paper. She 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.

(goes to PETER)

You are --

THOREAU

John Thoreau. I just moved in.

ROYCE

Let me feel.

Puts his hand on PETER's neck, feels. PETER flinches.

ROYCE

A lump there, hard as wood. When did that hap --

PETER

Got 'em under my arms.

ROYCE

When?

PETER

Musta strained myself.

ROYCE

Straight to bed.

(to THOREAU and REISING)

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

(to THOREAU)

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.
(takes out the thermometer)
103. Give him water. There isn't anything else
--

REISING
Well?

ROYCE hesitates.

THOREAU
What?

PETER
Damn rats! Hooligans d -- Damn!

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

THOREAU
(as ROYCE rises)
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 up right. 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!

(falls back, arms outspread)

Everything hurts. So damn thirsty!

(tries to get out of the bed)

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.

(hangs up, makes another call)

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.

(another call)

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

(to both of them)

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
(to ROYCE)
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 --

THOREAU and REISING sit. The ambulance tocsin is as loud as it will get and flashing lights come up as the lights dim to black. ROYCE stands bathed in the 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.

* * * * *

**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 is doodling in his journal; he does this throughout 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.

(to FREEMAN)

The last time we had 28 deaths in a week from anything --

FREEMAN

Spanish influenza --

CASTLE

A dozen 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, indicating REISING)
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
(indicating everyone)
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. Maddie.
(RUE opens a steno pad; to FREEMAN)
You wanted me to call this meeting -- I called
it. What?

A brief silence falls on the room.

MAYOR
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

(to ALL)

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

ROYCE

Preventing it will be.

MAYOR

(to TERRENCE)

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 i --

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)
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.

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

* * * * *

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.

(hangs up)

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 indicates for him to stop speaking.

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.

Beat as that line sinks in. RASTER appears at ROYCE's door.

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

ROYCE
May I help you?

THOREAU
(get up and goes to the door)
Ah, Mr. Raster. (turning to ROYCE) This --

ROYCE
Our guest.

THOREAU
Mr. Raster, a man of, shall we say, definite
plans. He lives down by the docks.

ROYCE gives THOREAU a questioning look.

THOREAU
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)
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.
(steps into the room)
Plague, right? That's why the soldiers and
everything, right?

ROYCE
Not the state fair, Mr. Raster.

RASTER
(look immensely relieved)
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
(to THOREAU)
What -- ?

THOREAU
(looking at RASTER)
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 --
(checks his watch)
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.

They shake hands.

GREY

A good report, I hope.

ROYCE

Your revival meetings last winter.

GREY

I'll accept that résumé.

ROYCE

John Thoreau.

They shake hands.

CORINTH

I'd shake your hand, too, 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

(preparing the injection)

Oh?

GREY

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

ROYCE

(gives CORINTH the shot)

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, are you 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
(indicating GREY)
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
(packing up his bag)
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.

(to CORINTH)

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'd like to 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 flourish, please.

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. As if they were 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.
(agitated)
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.

(points to journal)

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

(mutters)

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.

(takes in REISING's impatience)

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

(overlapping)

-- 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

(grabbing her knapsack)

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

(nodding hello to everyone in the room)
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

(looking extremely tired)
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 wall paper. A one-armed man hanging wall
paper with an itch. Yours, too. Can't do it by
ourselves, plain, simple.

ROYCE

His plan makes sense.

THOREAU

(taking a sheaf of papers from his coat)
I've written it out for you.

MAYOR

(not even looking over the papers, 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.
(to THOREAU, makes the sign of the cross)
You are officially deputized. Take your bleeding
heart over to Parker and Terrence here --
coördinate -- things.

(turning to the doctors)

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 while.

CASTLE enters.

CASTLE

(to ROYCE)

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

ROYCE

(looking at THOREAU)

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
(to CASTLE)
Were the flames spewing forth?

CASTLE
(points to his eyebrows)
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
(hesitant)
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
(without hesitation)
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.

(starts to leave)
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

(coming right up to the trio)
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

(as if snapping out of trance, said slowly)
No peace. Always war.

(back to his "aria"; he circles them)
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.

He 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.

(swings the lantern in an arc)

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.
(to SAMUELS)
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
(to THOREAU)

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
(moving forward)
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
(to THOREAU and RUE)
You just flacks anyway, you get a salary whether
we live or die --
(to the crowd)
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
(to WOMAN 3)
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' momma 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.

(to the others)

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
(to THOREAU)

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.

* * * * *

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
(somewhat hesitantly)
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.

(makes a gesture of masturbating)

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.

(he puts it down; she takes it)
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)
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

So now 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 -- we live on the edges. Besides, my old man was Wobblies. Us -- we ain't so different.

REISING

We're different.

RASTER

Surface, maybe --

REISING

You're not going to get to be 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

(shrugs)

Okay. Tight lips all around.

(walks closer to her)

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.

* * * * *

**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

(moves to leave)

Visitin' time.

THOREAU

Now?

HIGHTOWER

Affliction got its own 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

(puzzled)

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.

(looking at LITTLEFIELD)
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 tick here -- thrilled to use the knowin'. I confess -- this knowin' even deeper than the thrill of Jesus.

LITTLEFIELD

John?

THOREAU

Miss Maddie?

RUE

(only slightly embarrassed)

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
(to all)

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.

* * * * *

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

(showing great hesitancy)
Concentration--

ROYCE

Well?

REISING

(simultaneously)

Dr. Royce -- Dr. Royce, how long --

ROYCE

-- until the plague ends.

REISING

How long?

ROYCE

Guess.

REISING

And no one --

ROYCE

No one.

REISING
(agitated)

No except --

ROYCE

None. Um, 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 irrelev --

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
(to ROYCE)

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 --

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.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 5: A speakeasy, early evening

RASTER and REISING in a bar.

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

RASTER

(to LEON, offstage)

Not to worry, Leon. New shipment. Tonight. Now
go -- serve --

(RASTER turns to REISING)

Only as much as they need to know -- 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?

REISING

Through?

RASTER

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)

"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.

* * * * *

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)
I'd forgotten how.
(breathes)
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
(shrugs)
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 th --

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

(noticing their "wet" hair)

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

(looking at all the people)

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

(laughing gently)

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

REISING

(to ROYCE)

Can I speak with you?

ROYCE

(gestures to everyone)

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

REISING

Enter the circle, then? 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.

For your lover?
RUE

Yes.
REISING

For her.
RUE

Yes.
REISING

You should.
RUE

Maddie!
THOREAU

You love her --
RUE

-- enough not to lie --
REISING

You'd prefer happiness.
RUE

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

Self-sacrifice --
GREY

Not at all about final rewards!
REISING
(fierce)

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

(raising her hand in a "stop" signal)
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 --
REISING

Running towards.
RUE

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

(a great weariness)

Reising --

REISING

Dr. Royce, I know about your wife --

ROYCE

(cutting her off)

And 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
(to THOREAU)
In the morning.

THOREAU
Here, dawn.

GREY
Good night.

THOREAU
(to REISING)
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. The words are also projected as a slide.

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.

(takes a drink of coffee)

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.

Beat.

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
(to ROYCE)
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.
(comes to the first bed)
How are we doing today?

CHILD looks at him, does not speak, looks away. GREY's face looks pained. During switch to Scene 1, 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 switch to Scene 2, 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.
(turning to child)
"Whoever perished, bein' innocent?"

Switch to Scene 3.

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 h -- ? 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?

(touches her own cheek)

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
(looking at child)
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 --

(shrugs shoulders)

Sloppy. We were we running out of room!

GRAVE 1

(making a stacking motion)

Like cordwood sometimes.

GRAVE 2

That's why they cranked up the incinerator.

GRAVE 1

Had to.

(shivering)

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.

(looking down at REISING's pad)

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)

Writin' my name in the snow.

GRAVE 1

Easy to get a little loopy --

(waggles his hips, as if he were urinating in the snow as well)

-- 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 zips 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

(hip flask in hand, obviously drunk)
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

(still bothering her)
Look, what's the point, honey? We're all gonna die. Let's have a good time before we go. It ain't wrong.

(as if this would convince her)
I got protection.

WOMAN
Let me go.

MAN
No.

WOMAN
(struggling)
What's up with you?

MAN
I'm gonna show you.

(pins her arm behind her)
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
(on her hands and knees)
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

(finishing up a calculation)

There.

THOREAU

(startled)

What?

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

THOREAU
Yes.

RUE
You all right?

THOREAU
(shaking himself, as if to wake up)
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
(forcing himself to pay attention)
What is it?

RUE
(turns the pages)
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
(flips the pages)
Down.

RUE
(turning back several more pages)
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

(going down a list)

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

(placing on hand on her arm)

Don't worry --

RUE

But it's not right --

LITTLEFIELD

(saying the last word in unison with her)

-- 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.

(looks at both of them)

You know, as well as I --

RUE

What? We've all been exposed --

THOREAU
(smiling)

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.

(looks to LITTLEFIELD)

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
(sitting THOREAU in "bed.")
Now just relax.

THOREAU
I'm relaxed.

RUE
I'm going to get Bernard.

THOREAU
You don't --

RUE
Humor me, please. Please.

(finishes fussing with him)
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 unrumpled professional look. We know what he will find -- he knows that I know.

(ROYCE prepares an injection)

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.

(his journal falls to the floor)

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

(RUE puts it back into his hands)

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.

She 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
--

She 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.

* * * * *

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

(to ROYCE)

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

(distinctly irritated at the MAYOR)

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.

(looks around at everyone)

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

(coming to meet them)

Glad you could make it.

MAYOR

Dr. Royce -- ?

ROYCE

(ignoring the MAYOR for the moment)
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

(speaking to everyone)

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

(to MAYOR)

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 --
(holds out her hand)

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

(while the MAYOR shakes LITTLEFIELD's hand)
This is unacceptable. Your Honor, I have work to
do.

CLEW moves toward the door.

MAYOR

Uh, 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

(relieved that someone is speaking)

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

(to everyone)

I have an appointment to keep.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 10: 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