

Michael Bettencourt

Full-Length Plays: Volume 3

Block & Tackle Productions Press



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Michael Bettencourt

**The Happy City • Hardball
Homeward Bound**

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Block & Tackle Productions Press



Co-Founders Elfin Frederick Vogel and Michael Bettencourt

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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

The Happy City

(based on The Plague by Albert Camus)

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: The Prologue may not be technically feasible for a company to do 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."

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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 exit.

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.

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.

ROYCE

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

Miss Reising. ROYCE

Emma. REISING

Emma, then. ROYCE

Sets the tone. REISING

And you know my name. ROYCE

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

For? ROYCE

The Working Class United. Out of New York. REISING

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

My calling card. REISING

New York. ROYCE

You've heard of it, I'm sure -- REISING
(with a smile)

The city? ROYCE

The paper. REISING

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?

Owner, boss.

REISING

Capitalist to the bone.

ROYCE

So?

REISING

Has a nurse full-time for his workers --

ROYCE

How nice.

REISING

Doctors visit workers in their homes --

ROYCE

Sickness he's probably caused.

REISING

Paid for funerals --

ROYCE

Probably caused --

REISING

Even runs the tannery now to give workers some income.

ROYCE

Lord of the estate.

REISING

But his workers benefit.

ROYCE

What he giveth --

REISING

Would you include --

ROYCE

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.

He 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 upright. THOREAU and REISING try to restrain him. While ROYCE speaks, the audience simultaneously sees PETER die after a struggle. This is done as a dumbshow, but if PETER were to speak, he would say the following.

PETER

Get 'em off me! They're eatin' away at me!
(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.

* * * * *

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 admit --

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 sparklingly 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.

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

Scene 5: Sunday -- Father Grey's sermon

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

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

GREY

Calamity has come upon you, my friends -- and you have deserved it. Your sinfulness fouls the very breath in your mouth. The dark times in which we live, the collapse of the godless hunger for profit and the whole system based on greed, has not yet wrenched your faces heavenward, as it should. So God has blistered you with the plague to let you know how displeased he is with your indifference. What should you learn from this affliction? For the answer, look into your own soul: in its wretched darkness you will find the light of redemption. This plague strikes down young and old alike, the charitable and the niggard, the colored man and the white man, the faithful and the adulterous -- it harvests everyone. But, as is always true with God, the thing that cuts us deepest also cleans us. In Abyssinia, the Christians would wrap themselves in the clothes of the dead because, to them, the plague was a door into God's mansion and into eternal life. Understand their intention: out of punishment came salvation, punishment for their sins became the way back to the bosom of God's love. This is the plague's message: for each of you to offer your soul in strict and open request for the healing rain of His love. If you do not do this, you deserve the plague and all the ruin it brings to you and everyone you love for your pride, your blindness, your shriveled and unworthy soul. Go in peace. This concludes our Week of Prayer.

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

THOREAU

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

CASTLE enters.

CASTLE
(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.

Scene 6: 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' mamma so ugly --

SOME VOICES

-- the tide won't even take her out!

LITTLEFIELD

Yo' daddy so stupid --

OTHER VOICES

-- he thought a quarterback was a refund.

LITTLEFIELD

Yo' granma so fat --

VOICES

-- when she fell in love she broke it!

Everyone is smiling now.

LITTLEFIELD

So folks. Enough! Enough! Enough!

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

ORANGE MAN

Black men are dust, black women are dirt.

LITTLEFIELD

Not tonight, M'Bengue. Tonight, tonight we have to move forward.

(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.

* * * * *

Scene 7: 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.

* * * * *

Scene 8: 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 terrified 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.

* * * * *

Scene 9: 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 guid.

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.

* * * * *

Scene 10: A speakeasy, early evening

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.

* * * * *

Scene 11: 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.

RUE

For your lover?

REISING

Yes.

RUE

For her.

REISING

Yes.

RUE

You should.

THOREAU

Maddie!

RUE

You love her --

REISING

-- enough not to lie --

RUE

You'd prefer happiness.

REISING

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

GREY

Self-sacrifice --

REISING

(fierce)

Not at all about final rewards!

GREY

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

REISING

(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 --

RUE

Running towards.

REISING

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

A silence falls into the room.

ROYCE

(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.

* * * * *

Scene 12: 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 him? Why him?

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

GREY

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

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

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

MOTHER 2

Mr. John?

(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 --

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

GRAVE 1

-- out here workin' the graveyard shift.

GRAVE 2

(laughing)

Graveyard shift --

GRAVE 1

Me, I been union since before I popped out of my mom. All my life I been saying everyone 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.

* * * * *

Scene 13: 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 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 unruffled 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.

* * * * *

Scene 14: 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.

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

CLEW

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

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?

CLERK

The Bankers' Commission is here for their appointment.

MAYOR

We're done here, I guess.

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

SAMUELS

Seems like it's still in the blood.

They leave. RUE follows them out of the room.

MAYOR

I have an appointment to keep.

* * * * *

Scene 15: 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 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. And opens.

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

BLACKOUT

Hardball

Co-written by Michael Bettencourt, Robert E. Ozasky
and Dean B. Kaner

DESCRIPTION

The protagonist of Hardball is co-writer Dean Kaner's grandfather, Henry Kaner. In his early twenties, Henry Kaner had been a pitching phenom for a semi-pro baseball team in Superior, Wisconsin. Everyone expected him to move up to the majors, and in fact he was offered a contract by the St. Louis Browns. What made his story drama-worthy in Dean's eyes was the fact that Henry was the son of Orthodox Jewish parents who had emigrated from Lithuania to escape the pogroms, and because of their efforts to create a better life, Henry Kaner, twenty-two, had been offered the chance to reach the American dream through that most American game, baseball. The catch, of course, was that he would have had to play on Saturdays. In the end, he said thanks, but no thanks, choosing religion and family (his father was in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's, which in 1922 was a new condition, only named in 1906) over what probably would have been a lucrative career.

CHARACTERS

- BAYLA KANER, 50s - Henry and David's mother
- RAPHAEL KANER, 60s - Henry and David's father
- HENRY KANER, 23
- DAVID KANER, 18
- MORRIE COHEN, 22 - Friend of Henry Kaner
- LOULA PARSONS, 22 - Wife of Lou Parsons
- ROSIE DAVIS, 24 - Daughter of the local butcher
- BARNEY PELTY - Known as the "Yiddish Curver"

MISCELLANEOUS

Even though it would require a bit of inventive blocking, the actor playing RAFAEL KANER could double as BARNEY PELTY if casting is a budgetary concern. The two characters can be distinguished by something as simple as BARNEY wearing a baseball cap. However, the preference is for two separate actors.

* * * * *

Scene 1

Stage in darkness.

In the darkness, the harsh sound of an OUTBREATH, repeated once --

Light comes up slightly -- second time.

Light fully up -- third time.

HENRY KANER appears, on the mound, throwing right-handed. He does not wear a glove, but he holds an actual baseball. The unusual thing about the baseball is that its covering is torn apart.

He stops pitching. At his feet is a discarded baseball uniform, cleats, a glove, socks, a duffel bag -- stuff in a locker room after a game.

BARNEY PELTY appears, indicating he's from the St. Louis Browns.

HENRY

I always liked you, you know.

BARNEY

What's not to like.

HENRY

My father liked you, too -- always liked Barney Peltey. Of course, for him -- the Jewish -- thing -- you know --

BARNEY

For me, too -- you know -- the "Jewish thing" --

HENRY

How did you do it?

BARNEY

I just did it.

HENRY

Barney Pelty just did it.

BARNEY

I, Barney Pelty, became known as the "Yiddish Curver." What pains you about that?

HENRY

You never hid being --

BARNEY

Being a Jew. And why is this suddenly a problem for you?

HENRY

For eight seasons, St. Louis Browns --

BARNEY

They paid me \$850 for my wicked Jew curve ball, so wicked I gave 'em.

HENRY

On Shabbos?

BARNEY

Whenever. That pains you?

HENRY

Maybe not.

BARNEY

You're a liar --

Indicates for HENRY to toss him the ball.

BARNEY

Just look at this. You're pretty busy being a Jew curve ball at this moment in your life. The Jew curve ball of Henry Kaner is on the way, and which way is it gonna break -- will it this way, will it that way --

HENRY

SO WHY DON'T YOU PITCH ME AN ANSWER. BARNEY

One year I sucked bad -- I beaned 19 batters -- on the arm, the leg, both knees --

HENRY

The foot --

BARNEY

Made 'em hurt before they made it to first. Another year, sixth in the league in wild pitches. But.

HENRY

Tell me.

BARNEY

In the World Series, White Sox, 1906, I let in one run in 32 innings. One run. Thirty-two innings.

BARNEY tosses the ball back to HENRY.

BARNEY

Henry Kaner knows his stats, Henry Kaner loves his stats -- but one stat he doesn't have, one stat that waits for every Jew on the inside corner of his life -- Henry Kaner looks in and --

MORRIE COHEN appears, duffel bag in hand. BARNEY melts away.

MORRIE

You ready? You're not even close to ready.

HENRY

Did ya see some blowhard around here in a St. Louis uniform?

MORRIE

You're kidding, right? Get your stuff --

HENRY

I'm not kidding, Morrie.

MORRIE

The only St. Louis here was that scout, Farnsworthy. He talk to you?

HENRY

And he gave me his card. Look --

MORRIE

That's all.

HENRY

-- you sure you didn't see --

MORRIE

Why would there be a St. Louis uniform at one of our games? Maybe they shouldn't let you pitch extra innings -- oxygen-deprives your brain.

HENRY crams his stuff into his duffel bag -- fierce, preoccupied.

MORRIE

So, Farnsworthy --

HENRY

I said, he left me his card. Let's go.

MORRIE

It's a start.

HENRY

I get plenty of starts, Morrie. You wanted to go? So let's go.

* * * * *

Scene 2

KANER kitchen, 1922. HENRY and MORRIE enter the kitchen, see BAYLA. BAYLA sees them, ignores them.

MORRIE

Looks not so good.

HENRY

We'll talk about it later, okay?

MORRIE

Promise?

HENRY

Say hello, then go.

MORRIE

Mrs. Kaner, how ya doing? Henry pitched a great game.

HENRY

That'll buy me nothing. Go -- have one for me.

MORRIE

Over and out. Mrs. Kaner, nice to see you again.

MORRIE salutes HENRY, leaves. The silence stretches.

BAYLA

Is that how you were taught to come in?

HENRY backs up. He touches the "mezuzah," kisses his fingers, comes back into the kitchen.

HENRY

Sorry.

The silence stretches.

BAYLA

No use complaining about Morrie Cohen there -- he hasn't met a holy day he wouldn't play on.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

Go ahead. Say it. Say it -- I'm late --

The silence stretches.

HENRY

And I'll say back to you -- again -- that I'm not late. It's not Shabbos yet. And late is just later than you want --

BAYLA

You take all of this so lightly. Our custom -- look at me -- our custom is always --

HENRY

The game went into extra innings, Mama --

BAYLA

And nobody else on your team pitches?

HENRY

I pitched all of 'em, start to finish, because I wanted to -- I knew what the time was -- I knew how to work it --

The silence stretches.

BAYLA

This is what I really want to know. You're twenty-two -- unmarried -- working nights as a fireman so you can play this semi-pro game --

HENRY

Babe Ruth made twenty grand last year --

BAYLA

What man is called "The Babe" --

HENRY

You want me to quit? You want me to fill my quit-time with a second job?

BAYLA

Stop it.

HENRY

More money -- can always use it --

BAYLA

This isn't an honest offer. Not honest, and not heartfelt.

HENRY

Honor your father and your mother, it says. I honor you if I'm here at 3 PM Fridays? Done. I honor Papa if I live out a life that's not the life I want, like him? Done.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

Just ask for it.

The silence stretches.

HENRY

What? What, Mama?

BAYLA

I sometimes watch you -- when you read the sports pages -- you don't even notice me -- you read them so hard.

HENRY

Yeah?

BAYLA

"Yeah."

HENRY

It's like a butcher has to know his meats --

BAYLA

It's more than just to know, Henoch -- you read them like your father reads what he reads -- both digging in. I read, too. I hear the local boy's got a good ERA.

HENRY

Does he, now?

BAYLA

It's not that hard to figure out those figures.

HENRY

There's a but.

BAYLA

But do those sacred numbers of yours ever say there has been a Shabbos celebrated -- honored -- in baseball?

HENRY

Only nature in a bad mood can stop a game.

BAYLA

But not a Shabbos.

HENRY

Not a Shabbos.

BAYLA

And do those numbers tell you what happens to a 22-year-old boy who ends up a 32-year old boy out there? All of which is why I cannot ask you. If I didn't love you the way I do, then I would ask -- but because of how I love you -- the offer is on your table but not on mine.

DAVID KANER enters. As he enters, he rolls down the sleeves of his white shirt, buttons the cuffs, formalizes himself, checks his watch.

DAVID

Brother Henry in the Shabbos doghouse again. My day is looking up.

DAVID begins placing plates, cups, silverware on the table.

DAVID

Watch how the good son does it. "At about 3PM on Friday afternoon observant Jews begin Shabbos preparations" -- but that's right, you're late --

HENRY

I was actually telling Mama about the weather page --

DAVID

That's not what I heard.

HENRY

Because your big ears were overhearing rather than listening --

DAVID

Who could stay away from hearing yet once again "the continuing struggle of our hero, Henry Kaner, as he -- "

BAYLA

David --

HENRY

I was telling Mama that when I was on the sports page, I looked over to the weather page, which is right next door, and you know what? When does sundown come today, brother of mine?

DAVID

The sun seems to rise and set wherever you walk.

HENRY

Sundown comes today at 8:02 PM. Tell me, oh smart one in the family, when do the candles get lit?

DAVID

Why waste the answer of "18 minutes before" on you?

HENRY

And lit by these wonderful hands.

BAYLA takes her hands back.

BAYLA

Pour the honey somewhere else.

HENRY

And David, what time is it now, since you just checked?

HENRY begins reciting.

HENRY

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam --

BAYLA

Amein. My bullshitter.

DAVID

Mama --

HENRY

You can call me "bullshitter" too --

DAVID

Not in front of her, I'm not --

HENRY

She just said it front of you.

BAYLA

David, you have to use the word for something when there is so much of it around.

DAVID

There are words, and there are words.

BAYLA

I need to cook -- your father is home soon. Your offer --

HENRY

Still there --

BAYLA

--is not an offer. Only ask of yourself, not of me. Your life is your own.

HENRY

And so we end up here again.

DAVID

C'mon, Mama -- I'll give you a hand.

They turn to go. BAYLA turns back.

BAYLA

Can you tell me something, before your father gets home?

HENRY

Shoot.

BAYLA

I watch him listening to radio baseball, watch him clench his fists like this -- "go go" -- and sometimes he stands up and does -- well --

HENRY

Does what, Mama?

BAYLA

Well, all right -- but don't laugh.

BAYLA squats down a little.

DAVID

Mama --

BAYLA

Not you, either.

BAYLA pops her right hand between her knees and makes the signs a catcher would make to a pitcher.

HENRY

You're sure? You're sure that's what he does?

BAYLA

I study his hands -- he doesn't even know I'm in the room, so I can study very closely.

HENRY walks a short distance from BAYLA. He takes his pitcher's stance.

HENRY

Do them again, Mama.

DAVID

Come on --

HENRY

I promise you, it's a secret worth knowing -- Mama?

HENRY

BAYLA hitches up her dress a little, bends at the knees, and does the hand signals.

DAVID

Baseball is stupid.

HENRY

What you just told me is throw a curve ball, low and outside.

BAYLA

I told you that.

HENRY

Not only that, but in Yiddish.

Unseen by the three of them, RAPHAEL enters and stands in the "doorway." He carries a barber's kit under his arm. He kisses the "mezuzah." He watches.

BAYLA

That's crazy.

HENRY

That's Jewish baseball. Morrie and I do it all the time.

HENRY winds and pitches, with his characteristic OUTBREATH. Then HENRY, in slow motion, mimes carrying a ball across the space to BAYLA.

HENRY

And not just a curve but a "table-top curve," that breaks late and drops to the plate.

HENRY has the ball close to BAYLA's hands.

HENRY

Don't take your eye off the ball. Barney Peltz, the "Yiddish Curver" -- best season, 1906, with the St. Louis Browns -- that's the pitch he liked. Okay, drop your hands down a little and to your right.

BAYLA does, and HENRY plants the "ball" into her cupped hands.

BAYLA

So it's a game with a language that has secrets.

RAFAEL

Stee-rike three -- yer out.

BAYLA

Oh. Oh.

BAYLA kisses RAFAEL, tosses the "ball" back to HENRY as she takes RAFAEL's kit and hat.

RAPHAEL

God might have said, "Play ball!", you know, instead of "Let there be light!" And does the seventh inning stretch sound like Shabbos to you? Does to me.

BAYLA

They were just distracting me.

RAPHAEL

Good distracting, then.

RAPHAEL sits. Everyone else sits except BAYLA.

BAYLA

Tea, water, coffee?

RAPHAEL

Do you have any "krekerjek" for the ballgame around here?
Just kidding, Bayla. Water would be nice. So you've been
teaching her what?

HENRY

How to win in extra innings.

BAYLA brings him water, sits.

RAPHAEL

And why a lesson in extra innings?

HENRY

Because we had them today -- enough to win.

RAPHAEL

Good. But it must have made you late.

RAPHAEL looks at BAYLA.

RAPHAEL

Ah. At least he was late because of the game God himself
made.

BAYLA

God does not play baseball.

DAVID

Papa, you can't really say --

RAPHAEL
(mock serious)

Oh, he doesn't?

BAYLA

No he doesn't --

DAVID

No he doesn't --

BAYLA
It's a game made up by non-Jews for non-Jews.

DAVID
And, Papa, I don't think --

RAPHAEL
Aha! It is time for more lesson.

DAVID
I don't think it's right --

RAPHAEL holds up a hand to cut DAVID off.

BAYLA
If I am going to have another lesson thrown at me --

DAVID
Papa, it's not right -- Mama -- I'll help you out -- let's go --

RAPHAEL
David, sit down, please -- we have time. Baseball was what
God thought about on the seventh day. And so shall we.

DAVID
Papa --

RAPHAEL seems to be listening to something else as well as he holds
HENRY's gaze.

HENRY
Papa?

RAPHAEL doesn't answer.

BAYLA

Raphael? The chemicals on people's hair these days --
they can make a person --

RAPHAEL comes back to the present, looks at everyone looking at him,
smiles, pats BAYLA's hand.

RAPHAEL

Don't worry, Bayla, whose name means life, we are, in a
manner of speaking, already observing. David. A question
-- a conundrum -- a mystery -- the things you like -- are the
eight position players like the eight candles of the Hanukah
lamp, lit by the ninth, the pitcher?

Everyone looks at RAPHAEL.

RAPHAEL

And this one: is a baseball game like our hearts? There are
two sides. We have yetzer hatov and yetzer hara, good and
bad. I have another.

But RAPHAEL again stares into the distance. BAYLA puts a hand on his
forearm. He shakes himself awake.

RAPHAEL

I'm sorry -- I just -- well, I don't know -- what did I say --

DAVID

Eight players, eight menorah candles --

RAPHAEL looks completely pleased.

RAPHAEL

Things to think about.

BAYLA

I need to think about dinner. Is that all right with you?

RAPHAEL

Yes, yes -- go.

BAYLA

All right. David, give me your hands. You'll be okay?

RAPHAEL

I am sitting here with my pitcher --

BAYLA and DAVID exit.

RAPHAEL

I cut hair all day and think mystic thoughts -- how bad can life be?

HENRY

Papa -- c'mon on --

RAPHAEL

I would have told your mother a joke, except that she wouldn't have appreciated it so close to Shabbos. David, either --

HENRY

Eighteen going on sixty --

RAPHAEL

He just wants to learn what is old -- I can respect that he respects that.

HENRY

He wants to be you, Papa.

RAPHAEL

He can certainly do better than that.

HENRY

And the joke --

RAPHAEL

Other than me? All right, the joke is that baseball is in the Book -- at least in English -- right from when God decided to be God: "In the big inning, God created the heavens -- "

They laugh.

HENRY

Now I have something to tell you.

RAPHAEL

Good or bad?

HENRY

Good, I think -- maybe -- there was a scout in the stands today -- from the St. Louis Browns.

HENRY pulls a business card out of his pocket and slides it across the table.
RAPHAEL stares at the card.

RAPHAEL

He gave you his card.

HENRY

I asked for two -- one for you.

RAPHAEL pulls the card toward him, reads it.

RAPHAEL

"Farnsworthy." Does this mean anything?

HENRY

Who knows?

RAPHAEL

Nothing on the table.

HENRY

Glad-handed me a big "great" on the game I pitched, though.

RAPHAEL

With the extra innings.

HENRY

With the extra innings.

RAPHAEL taps the card with his index finger.

RAPHAEL

Don't let your mother know about this.

HENRY

There's nothing to know about.

RAPHAEL

I think it's good, Henoch, I do -- I think it's good -- but she has her own fears, and one of them is this --

RAPHAEL stares at the card, taps it again.

RAPHAEL

May I?

HENRY

Sure. That's why I got it.

RAPHAEL pockets the card.

HENRY

Won't amount to anything, probably. Morrie really wanted to get a talk with him.

RAPHAEL

Morrie --

HENRY

(jokingly)

Morrie's got a problem?

RAPHAEL

Sometimes in his head he's already made the throw to second before he gets the ball. Impatient -- wants the cookie before his hand is out of the jar.

HENRY

I'll be sure to tell him that.

RAPHAEL

It won't make a difference.

HENRY

Morrie's okay -- he's thinking about getting a girlfriend --

RAPHAEL

Now, that your mama wouldn't mind for you --

HENRY

And you?

RAPHAEL

I just want to see you happy, Henoch.

BAYLA and DAVID come back in and begin setting up for Shabbos: the plates, the cups, the candles, the bread, the vessel of water.

RAPHAEL

Is it time?

BAYLA

It's getting closer.

RAPHAEL

Closer is close enough to begin. David?

DAVID

Yes, Papa?

RAPHAEL

I haven't greeted you well today. I'm sorry. Come.

RAPHAEL opens his arms, and DAVID goes to be embraced -- at first perfunctory but then with warmth. They all sit. BAYLA puts a veil on her head.

RAPHAEL

And what extra innings did you do today?

BAYLA

Could we please pay attention?

DAVID

"Innings" are his, Papa, not mine.

RAPHAEL

Bayla, a moment. Your schoolwork, then.

DAVID

I won the Nobel Prize.

RAPHAEL

Really?

DAVID

But the Swedes forgot to tell me --

RAPHAEL

Not like them.

DAVID

And I probably won't hear from them by sundown --

RAPHAEL

I'll write a letter of protest in the morning!

DAVID

So you'll have to settle for an "A" on my history paper and a 95 on my math test. Nothing big.

RAPHAEL

Nothing little, either -- and all good.

DAVID

Nothing like extra innings, though, Papa --

BAYLA

Learning, the mind --

HENRY

I keep leaving my brain at the ballpark.

DAVID

Stop it.

BAYLA

He doesn't always admit it -- but in Lithuania your father wrote music for cantors --

RAPHAEL

This they know, and in Lithuania we'd be dead, Bayla, and these two would never have been.

RAPHAEL leans in to make his point.

RAPHAEL

The sun is going down, and the challah is impatient. In America I have these two miracles, and you, and baseball -- from such seeds stars shall grow.

RAPHAEL holds out his hands.

RAPHAEL

Everything to one side. Bayla?

BAYLA takes his hand.

BAYLA

You work so hard to forget.

RAPHAEL

So that I can make more room for remembering.

BAYLA

I don't forget.

RAPHAEL

And that is what makes you superior to me and why I married you. David?

DAVID takes the other hand. HENRY takes DAVID's and BAYLA's hands. They bow their heads.

Lights to black. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 3

HENRY alone. He pulls Farnsworthy's card from his pocket. He reads it. He toys with it. He sings.

HENRY

Nem mikh mit tsu der ball geym
(Take me out to the ballgame)

Tsum oylem lomir dokh geyn
(Take me out to the park)

Koyf mir di nislekh un krekerjek
(Buy me some peanuts and crackerjack)

Half-sung, half-spoken.

HENRY

I don't care if I never get back

BARNEY enters. He carries a baseball bat. He occasionally swings it.

HENRY

My father taught me to sing that.

BARNEY

How's the Jew curve ball coming along?

HENRY puts away the card.

HENRY

I've been keeping the card in my pocket.

BARNEY

I wouldn't think of it as just a card --

HENRY

You'd think of it as --

BARNEY

A ticket.

HENRY

It's just a card.

BARNEY

Here is where you need to change your frame of reference.
That's how a curve works. That's how a ticket works. Are

you really dumb or are you just acting at it -- because you don't have much time left.

BARNEY positions himself as if he's going to take a swing at HENRY.

BARNEY

Ball -- bat -- strike or hit. The three elements. In under a second.

BARNEY holds the swing, hold HENRY's gaze. MORRIE enters. As BARNEY exits, he hands MORRIE the bat.

* * * * *

Scene 4

Saturday night. Kaner porch. HENRY looks skyward. MORRIE next to him with a baseball bat.

MORRIE

Come on!

HENRY

Wait. I have to wait until it comes.

MORRIE

Two stars already -- there and there.

HENRY

Got to be three.

MORRIE

You don't even really believe. There's gonna be three anyway, there always is, so just get a jump on the third and let's get going.

HENRY

Just wait.

They wait. The star comes.

MORRIE

Let's go.

HENRY

Barukh atah Adonai Elohaynu melek ha-olam, ha-mavdil
bayn kodesh l'chol -- done.

MORRIE

You didn't finish it.

HENRY

I did enough.

MORRIE

"I'm a Jew, I'm a not-Jew" --

HENRY

Zip it.

MORRIE

We lost today because your arm had to be all Shabbos all
day, but you don't even --

HENRY

Better than being all Morrie all day.

MORRIE

I can live with being Morrie -- on the other hand, you --

HENRY

I'll give you one hand, then the other, if you don't shut up.

A silence. HENRY gestures for the bat. MORRIE hands it to him. HENRY
swings it.

MORRIE

Okay -- so we're not in a hurry.

HENRY

Tell me about the game.

MORRIE

Game was nothing -- when is a losing game something?
But Farnsworthy -- knew that name'd get your attention --
sniffing around again. Asked Coach.

HENRY

What'd Coach say?

MORRIE

Sure you're interested?

HENRY

What did he say?

MORRIE

"Hanks's a good boy -- arm like a bullwhip."

HENRY

Right about that.

MORRIE

"Comes from a good home -- Jewish, but good." Thinks he's big-hearted when he says drek like that --

HENRY

Why would you care?

MORRIE

I'm even less a Jew than a half-Jew like you but --

HENRY pivots and holds the bat in a way that would indicate that he might just swing it against MORRIE's head.

HENRY

Stop. Calling. Me. That.

MORRIE

Then. Stop. Being. What you are. Because I have news that will not leave a bruise. Yeah. Farnsworthy talked to me.

HENRY takes a swing.

HENRY

And the crowd goes wild as Morrie plays on Shabbos -- again.

MORRIE

And lightning didn't strike me dead. And the world didn't spin off its axle.

HENRY

So what's the news for the Jews?

MORRIE

I heard Farnsworth say "ten-day offer" to Coach. I think -- maybe -- I heard your name attached to it.

HENRY

And what'd Farnsworth say to you face to face?

MORRIE

Nothing in the shape of an offer.

HENRY

But.

MORRIE gestures for the bat. HENRY tosses the bat back to MORRIE.

MORRIE

I think if you get a ten-day, I get a ten-day, too. Pitcher-catcher combo deal.

HENRY

That's what you think.

MORRIE

If you don't screw it up. Come on, it's just business.

HENRY

Maybe it shouldn't all be the business.

MORRIE

Look at us, Hank, sitting under the three stars. Your family's got as many nickels to rub together as mine -- if Farnsworth offered us a trip downtown, those nickels'd turn into dollars and we could tuck 'em in our parents' pockets and never worry about them worrying about anything. Not bad, eh? I think that's not a bad thing for a son to do -- if he wouldn't let a Saturday get in the way.

MORRIE takes a mighty swing, then looks at HENRY, who is looking at him.

MORRIE

And what's that look? That look ain't the usual sourpuss look! May wonders never cease!

HENRY

It'd be great, wouldn't it?

MORRIE

Tell me what'd be great.

HENRY

A trip downtown.

MORRIE

Look at that face! It would, wouldn't it?

HENRY

Everything's so -- clean -- when I'm out there. Me, the batter --

MORRIE

Don't forget your catcher.

HENRY

That's it -- it's just so -- clear --

MORRIE

Answer me this -- look at me -- would you kill to play? Would you kill to play?

HENRY

You mean would it kill me not to play.

MORRIE

Right! Right!

MORRIE points to the sky.

MORRIE

Enough of 'em out? If we hurry, we can cop a drink before the second feature starts. Come on.

They start to exit.

MORRIE

Want to hear an ancient Chinese proverb about baseball?
"Man with four balls cannot walk."

HENRY

What's that go to do with anything?

MORRIE

Got nothing to do with anything except to make you laugh.

HENRY

It makes me laugh.

MORRIE

Because you need to laugh, you know.

HENRY

So make me laugh.

MORRIE

Morrie and his four balls.

Off they go, MORRIE waddling as if he's got four balls. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 5

DAVID under a streetlight, wearing a light jacket, cap. A comic book, rolled up, sticks out of one pocket. Not far from him is the doorway of a speakeasy from which oozes jazz and blues. He smokes a cigarette -- not expertly -- and he doesn't smoke it long before he stamps it out.

As he listens to the music, he tries out a few steps of something like the Break-Away -- again, awkward, self-conscious.

From out of the shadows comes LOULA. DAVID doesn't see her. LOULA watches him until he senses her watching him. Which makes him stop.

LOULA

Don't stop on account of me.

DAVID

It's nothing.

LOULA

It ain't much, but it ain't zero.

DAVID

It ain't much more than zero, though.

LOULA

What are you doing out here? Because you so obviously don't belong around here.

DAVID

Nothing.

LOULA

Choir boy, you are such a BS artist -- bad at it, too. Gimme one.

DAVID pulls a cigarette pack out of his pocket and fumbles one out, hands it to LOULA. She takes it, waits. DAVID pulls matches out, lights one, lights her cigarette. She blows out the match.

LOULA

Thanks. Now choir boy, one more time for my survey: what're you doing out here where there isn't a choir? Come on, it's just a question --

DAVID makes a gesture at the door.

LOULA

That some sort of sign language?

DAVID

The music.

LOULA

You do not look the jazz type.

DAVID

And what type would that be?

LOULA

Not you, especially with that comic book sticking up outta your pocket. Radical boy, sneaking out a comic book! You look like you should be doing homework with a warm milk at your elbow put there by your loving mama.

DAVID

I just like it -- the music.

LOULA

Some people think it's the music of the devil. Oh, are you blushing?

DAVID

It's not the music of the devil.

LOULA

I'm not saying it is -- I like it, like the way it mashes things together and makes the blood jump.

Cigarette in hand, LOULA dances a better version of the Break-Away.

LOULA

Can't stop the feet when I hear the beat -- I am a poet and I didn't even know it --

LOULA stops.

LOULA

Look at me. Entertaining a baby. My life has gotten so good.

LOULA stamps out the cigarette.

LOULA

You want to go inside?

DAVID

I can't -- do that -- I really can't --

LOULA

But you'd like to, huh? And you'd like to do that with me --

DAVID

Doesn't matter -- I can't ever --

LOULA laughs.

LOULA

You're a deer in the headlights! All right, can you at least walk me to that bench over there?

DAVID

I can do that.

LOULA offers him her arm. DAVID doesn't take it.

LOULA

Well, then, make good on your word to walk me.

They walk to a bench, sit. LOULA pulls out a flask, drinks. Offers it to DAVID. DAVID takes it, looks at it, hands it back.

LOULA

I don't have germs.

DAVID

I can't.

LOULA

You're really a little "can't" boy, aren't you? Such self-discipline.

LOULA goes to drink again, doesn't, puts the flask away.

LOULA

Nice just sitting here. Now that I apply my grey matter to the matter -- I don't think I really want to go in there. Again. Jazz or no jazz.

LOULA holds out her hand.

LOULA

I am being terribly rude. Loula Parsons.

DAVID stares at her hand.

LOULA

Can't?

DAVID half-reaches, then takes her hand, shakes it.

DAVID

David Kaner.

LOULA

Kaner.

DAVID

Is that a problem?

LOULA

You got a brother.

DAVID

Henry.

LOULA

You know my husband? Parsons -- he plays baseball. With your brother. On the whatever team it is. Stupid damn game. Pardon my goddamn swearing.

DAVID

I don't like baseball either.

LOULA

Even with a famous bro?

DAVID

I really don't like baseball.

LOULA

So you don't like your brother.

DAVID

I didn't say that.

LOULA

Just about.

DAVID

No, it doesn't. I like my brother.

LOULA

It'd say it for me, especially when you say it like that.

DAVID

You don't even know him.

LOULA

I'm only listening to you.

DAVID

I like my brother.

LOULA

Then it's good for a brother to like a brother.

DAVID

Then that's settled.

LOULA

For you. Not for me. I don't have to know him to not like him because he being so good a pitcher makes my husband want to play baseball, and I am not much liking my husband or baseball at the moment --

DAVID

What?

LOULA

This thing I just noticed: you're really listening.

DAVID

You're talking.

LOULA

What the hell. My husband -- who this very tonight is hanging out with his fellow teammates "jes' fer a few beers, hon." Swear he likes being with them a lot more than -- Well, maybe not "what the hell." Not your problem, sweetie. Not your problem.

DAVID

Your not liking my brother could be a problem.

LOULA

I don't mislike him -- it's not about -- I don't really have the energy -- so no problem between us, okay?

LOULA takes out the flask, takes a sip. Offers it again to DAVID. He gives it a stare, then refuses it.

LOULA

The music, eh -- isn't it great?

LOULA hums with the music. She puts the flask away.

LOULA

I gotta go.

DAVID

I really do hate baseball.

LOULA

Good to know -- I gotta go.

DAVID

I really do -- don't go --

LOULA

Then that's a problem, David Kaner, when your brother's so good at it. "Henry Kaner -- what an arm!" Like he's got no other body part worth mentioning. Hah -- made you blush again.

DAVID

No, I really do hate baseball. I really do. I think it's so stupid. Just really stupid.

LOULA

Well, so do I --

DAVID

I mean, it's really stupid, isn't it? Spitting and scratching themselves -- "humbaby, humbaby" -- what is that supposed

to mean? -- "let's hear some chatter!" -- and slow! -- slow slow slow -- and someone throws a ball at your head and you just stand there! -- I think it needs some jazzing up, I really do. I really do.

LOULA

Okay -- I'll bite.

DAVID

Players shouldn't be allowed to wear gloves -- if they're real men, let 'em play with bare hands.

LOULA

You've thought this over.

DAVID

A lot.

LOULA

Give me another.

DAVID

The ball should be set to explode if a guy makes an error. Or maybe one team gets bats and another gets balls and they try to hurt each other for a while, then switch.

LOULA

The man is on fire.

DAVID

And make the game only one inning long. Or what's a "ball"? Make a "ball" really a strike against the pitcher, and if he gets three strikes against him, he is outta there! For good! That one I like a lot.

LOULA

This is my husband you're talking about. Your brother.

DAVID

No apology.

LOULA

Not asking. I'm just saying how impressed I am by how much you hate it. I thought I hated it, but I am a piker next to you, I am in the minors. Maybe you and me could form like a mutual hatred society -- the "I Hate Baseball" League -- I'm sure we could get lots of other people to join up --

LOULA takes out the flask.

LOULA

So cheers and huzzah and hats off to us!

She drinks. DAVID holds out his hand. She hands him the flask. He puts his hands on the flask and the flask to his mouth.

LOULA

You be the president or should I?

DAVID

Doesn't matter.

LOULA

Doesn't matter -- share the power -- so you'd like it if your brother didn't play?

DAVID

Like it if your husband didn't play?

LOULA

Yes I would.

DAVID

Okay, then.

LOULA

You're deeply serious.

DAVID

Why not?

LOULA

This is just talk.

DAVID

In the beginning there was the word. And then words lead to actions --

LOULA

You are -- hmm -- I don't know. I don't know. And with that -- I am going home.

LOULA stands up.

LOULA

You know --

DAVID

What?

LOULA

You saved me tonight. Sort of. But yeah. Nice work.

DAVID

Maybe we could listen to the music again. Later.

LOULA gives him a long look.

LOULA

Maybe.

LOULA turns and exits. The music plays. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 6

HENRY and BAYLA, HENRY in a suit. BAYLA steps up to HENRY, primps his suit.

HENRY

Mama, this is --

BAYLA

Not "stupid" --

HENRY

I wasn't going to use "stupid" -- just --

BAYLA

Not "silly" --

HENRY

You're running me out of words, Mama.

BAYLA finishes, pats down his lapels, pulls his sleeves.

BAYLA

There -- you'll like her.

HENRY

You talk like I don't know Rosie already.

BAYLA

I know you know her, but you don't know her.

HENRY

What's to know about the kosher butcher's daughter --

BAYLA

Said by the semi-pro fireman. Sit down.

HENRY

I feel forced at second.

BAYLA

Because I'm forcing you, Henoah -- sit down -- I have something we need to talk about before Rosie gets here. To help you know your own mind.

HENRY

I know my own mind.

BAYLA

There's something you don't know.

HENRY sits.

BAYLA

Your father.

HENRY

What's going --

BAYLA

What have you noticed lately about him? David's already figured it out.

HENRY

He seems to stare a lot more now -- I mean, he always stared, you know, like he was traveling somewhere -- in his head. But a coupla times I've had to shake him -- give him a joke punch in the arm or squeeze his shoulder. He comes around.

BAYLA

He had his physical with Dr. Timmers -- I was there with him -- and Dr. Timmers told us that --

ROSIE DAVIS appears at the door. She touches the "mezuzah," kisses her fingers, waits. BAYLA ushers ROSIE in.

BAYLA

Later. Come in, come in. Henoch --

HENRY

Rosie, good to see you -- without having to stand on line.

ROSIE
(laughing)

"Next!"

HENRY

("Jewish" accent)

"What a minute, I was here first -- " "No you were not -- "

ROSIE

But nothing happens until Mrs. Krumwich gets her little bit of pastrami and then orders the hard cervelat instead.

HENRY

Like the sun rising, her doing that. Maybe you should get one of those ticket dispensers.

ROSIE

Maybe we should. Good to see you, too.

BAYLA

Sit, sit, please. Henoch, the lemonade.

HENRY brings over a pitcher and glasses, pours.

BAYLA

Made fresh. Henoch and Mr. Kaner like it that way. Fresh.

ROSIE

So do I.

BAYLA

Who wouldn't? Fresh is always better.

HENRY

Mama is always about fresh.

ROSIE

That's what my father says about his meats. "Kosher is as kosher does."

BAYLA

Your father runs a good shop. The hard salami --

ROSIE

His specialty.

BAYLA

I can taste why. This is very nice.

ROSIE

Yes, it is.

They drink lemonade.

ROSIE

And David?

BAYLA

Tops in his classes at high school. And his teachers are talking college -- can you imagine that?

ROSIE

College --sort of like the major leagues, isn't it?

BAYLA

After that, who knows?

ROSIE

I remember David in the store -- he'd make the change faster in his head than my father could make it at the register.

HENRY

"The boychik adding machine" --

ROSIE

And Mr. Kaner?

BAYLA

In good health.

ROSIE

My father misses their talks about baseball -- the pitcher as the ninth candle that lights the others -- my father thought that was brilliant.

HENRY

Did you know that in Lithuania, my father wrote music for the cantors?

ROSIE

I did not.

HENRY

Here he talks about baseball. Is that an up or a down?

ROSIE

Anything that keeps the mind alive is an "up."

BAYLA

But some things are better for an "up" than others, wouldn't you say?

ROSIE

That could be said.

BAYLA

A difference, isn't there, between knowing that the British mandate in Palestine is beginning and Babe Ruth is coming back to play?

HENRY

My mother has taken up a newspaper a day.

BAYLA

It's my "up." Or between that they're jailing anarchists and that Gorgeous George Sisler is at the top of the batting heap. And what kind of name is "Babe" for a man?

ROSIE

I would agree that a newspaper a day's an "up." Can't say much about "Babe."

HENRY

To newspapers.

They drink lemonade.

HENRY

More?

ROSIE

A little.

HENRY

Mama?

BAYLA holds her hand over her glass. HENRY pours for ROSIE.

BAYLA

If you'll excuse me both -- I have some housework to finish. I'll let you two talk. Nice to see you, Rosie.

ROSIE

Pleasure's all mine, Mrs. Kaner.

BAYLA exits. HENRY and ROSIE toy with their glasses.

ROSIE

"Housework" in the evening -- she's a carbon copy of my mom.

HENRY

All mothers are a carbon copy.

ROSIE raises her glass.

ROSIE

Here's to mothers.

HENRY does not raise his glass.

HENRY

To mothers.

ROSIE

She's not that bad. My mom? She worries me about past, present, and future and every verb tense in between.

HENRY

Carbon copy.

HENRY raises his glass.

HENRY

To mothers, then. And what is it about mothers that makes it that you and I are sitting here with each other?

ROSIE

Who wouldn't take the invite to come see in person the locally famous Henry Kaner, "The Hebrew Hurler," the King of the Curveball?

HENRY

Well, I'm sure you probably noticed the dozens pounding the sidewalk out front demanding my autograph. "Next!" "Next!" I'm sure you had to fight your way through.

ROSIE

It was brutal.

HENRY

My adoring fans --

ROSIE

It's been a while -- I only get to see your mom when she comes by the shop -- used to see you all.

HENRY

And that's why?

ROSIE

That's why.

HENRY

Like old home day?

ROSIE

In a manner of speaking.

HENRY

And that's why we're sitting here together? A visit out of the blue?

They laugh.

HENRY

Bayla Kaner has not been coming by just for the salami --

ROSIE

She and my mother have been pretty buddy-buddy over by the veal.

HENRY

Feeling a little filleted at the moment.

ROSIE

Laid out in the "specials" section of the display case --

HENRY

For Mrs. Krumwich!

ROSIE

And her "leettle bit"!

They toy with their glasses.

HENRY

I gotta admit --

ROSIE

To what?

HENRY

That I was nervous before you got here.

ROSIE

You still nervous?

HENRY

You saying you aren't nervous?

ROSIE

Did you hear me say that?

HENRY

I, in fact, did not hear you say that.

ROSIE

I'm still a little nervous.

HENRY

Carbon-copy on that.

ROSIE

But not just this --

HENRY

You mean "this" right now?

ROSIE

Yes -- nervous about a lot of things lately --

HENRY

Know what you mean --

ROSIE

As my mama keeps telling me --

HENRY

Mamas always keep telling --

ROSIE

"When you're young, you add minutes to your life, when you're twenty-four -- "

HENRY

The beads are falling off the abacus.

ROSIE

Even if I don't believe her -- completely -- it's hard to get the wailing and the gnashing of her teeth out of my ear. On the other hand -- I'm not planning to be the butcher-shop bookkeeper forever.

HENRY

That so?

ROSIE

That is so.

HENRY

If you chose today, this second, to be the ex-bookkeeper of the butcher shop --

ROSIE

What would I do?

HENRY

What would you do, that choice put there by you on the table?

ROSIE drains her glass, gives HENRY a direct look, waits.

HENRY

You don't have to say --

ROSIE

How do you throw a curveball?

ROSIE puts her glass down.

HENRY

This is the burning question.

ROSIE

I want to know. Who better to ask?

HENRY puts his glass down.

HENRY

Like me asking you to add up some numbers for me.

ROSIE

Don't mock.

HENRY

It's just a strange --

ROSIE

What's strange about asking you something you know about?

HENRY

I don't have a ball.

ROSIE holds up her fist.

ROSIE

Use this.

HENRY

You really --

ROSIE

I want to know.

HENRY

First thing: stand up.

They stand up. HENRY grips ROSIE's right hand with his right hand in a curveball grip.

HENRY

Make believe your first two knuckles are the seams of the baseball. You know what a baseball looks like.

ROSIE

Got a vague picture in my head.

HENRY

My index and middle finger lay on the seams, the rest of the fingers meet underneath the ball --

They are standing close to each other. HENRY brings her hand back slightly, then forward.

HENRY

Then coming forward, I snap my wrist --

ROSIE

To curve it --

They now stand close to each other. HENRY steps away.

HENRY

(gesturing)

The ball drops off the table -- goes from 12 to 6 --

ROSIE

And you got strike three.

HENRY

Strikes one and two aren't bad either.

ROSIE mimes the throwing gesture.

ROSIE

What else you have in your bag of tricks?

HENRY

Got a screwball, a knuckleball, a changeup, a slider --

ROSIE

Sounds like you're naming my cousins.

ROSIE "pitches" her fist and travels it to HENRY, who puts up his hands to catch it. He catches it. A silence. ROSIE sits.

ROSIE

The ex-bookkeeper of Davis Butchers would do this: she would grab the suitcase she always has ready-packed under her bed and take the first bus out of town to a city that begins with the letter "A."

HENRY sits.

HENRY

Like Albuquerque.

ROSIE

Atlanta. Akron. Albany. Amherst. Believe me, I've made a study and written the list.

HENRY

So when you choose, you'd choose to leave.

ROSIE

Sometimes it's good to burn the bridge behind you.

HENRY

Yeah?

ROSIE

Yeah.

HENRY

Why "A"?

ROSIE

More "A's" than "Z's" in cities.

HENRY

And that suitcase --

ROSIE

I've had one ready-packed ever since I was tall enough to reach the top shelf of the closet to pull it down. Not a big one -- a valise -- don't need much. Don't want much.

HENRY

These are interesting things to know about a person.

ROSIE

Like throwing pitches.

HENRY

You mind if I borrow from your plan?

ROSIE

I suspect the King of the Curveball maybe has plans of his own.

HENRY

Maybe he does.

ROSIE

Maybe.

HENRY

Maybe. Look, you take the trolley back, right?

ROSIE

You trying to get rid of me?

HENRY

There's an ice-cream shop near the stop, right?

ROSIE

Right --

HENRY

So let's blow this house with all its ears and get something sweet.

ROSIE

Only if we go dutch.

HENRY

I don't get to be gallant?

ROSIE

For later. You can tell me about the slider.

HENRY

It's a mysterious miracle.

ROSIE

Any better kind?

HENRY

Mama!

BAYLA enters almost immediately.

HENRY

Pretty quick housework, Mama.

BAYLA

A little of this, a little of that.

HENRY

I'm gonna walk Rosie to the trolley stop. We may indulge in some ice cream.

BAYLA

It's a good night for that.

HENRY

And then, like the gentleman you've taught me to be, I will offer to escort her home.

ROSIE

It's a good chance she'll accept.

BAYLA

Well, then, give our best to your family.

ROSIE

You know they give their best to yours. Tell Mr. Kaner to come by -- Papa would welcome a change of menu from the brisket and corned beef.

BAYLA

A new menu never hurt anyone.

HENRY

You want any ice cream on my way back?

BAYLA

You both take your time -- a little flavor, a little savor, doesn't come often enough in life.

HENRY

Tell Papa I'll be back soon. And you and I, we'll talk.

BAYLA

Always time for talk, but go, go, before they run out of flavors!

HENRY escorts ROSIE out. BAYLA watches them exit. RAPHAEL comes in, touches the "mezuzah," kit under his arm.

BAYLA

I hate these nights when you're working late -- you just missed Rosie -- Raphael, what's the matter? Your face -- what's the matter?

RAPHAEL

Huh?

BAYLA

Your face, a million miles away, like you didn't know me.

RAPHAEL stares for a moment longer, then smiles a broad smile.

RAPHAEL

Of course I know you.

In the big inning God created the Heavens and the Earth. Eve stole first.

Adam stole second.
Gideon rattled the pitchers.
Goliath was put out by David.
Brilliant, eh?

BAYLA takes his coat, hat, and kit. RAPHAEL sits down. BAYLA gets him a glass of lemonade, sits beside him. He speaks simply to her.

RAPHAEL

Brilliant -- it's so simple, so beautiful, isn't it. The pitcher and the catcher -- glory and groundedness -- they work together to get the ball past the batter, the foundation, while the batter tries to make runs, to make additions, just like making children. But the batter, is not the enemy -- the three of them, together, they make the game happen -- they make life happen -- together in struggle -- whatever the players do, a scorekeeper records the results -- an accounting of the soul -- if someone scores a run, he comes home -- home --

RAPHAEL sips.

RAPHAEL

This is what I think about when I am cutting hair.

RAPHAEL puts the glass down, takes BAYLA's hands and looks her square in the face.

RAPHAEL

Dr. Timmers has a name for it. He's very proud he has a name for it -- he wants to show us he reads the journals.

BAYLA

When he told me, he made me say "Alzheimers."

RAPHAEL

The same. He said it will only get worse.

BAYLA

He says they have nothing they can do for you.

RAPHAEL

And you, name that means life -- what will you do?

BAYLA

I quote a very smart man: "They make life happen, together in struggle."

RAPHAEL

Poor Henoch. Poor David.

BAYLA

It is their time anyways --

RAPHAEL begins whisper-singing the Hatikvah. BAYLA joins him. Only a few lines. Then they stop. They look at each other with great love.

RAPHAEL

I cannot promise you anything anymore.

RAPHAEL lays his head in her lap. BAYLA strokes his hair.

Transition.

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Scene 7

DAVID and LOULA outside the bar, LOULA seated on the bench. DAVID paces. Jazz seeps out.

LOULA

So that's the story?

DAVID

That's the latest news flash.

LOULA

So -- is he -- demented?

DAVID

He's not crazy.

LOULA

What you laid out for me --

DAVID

He's not crazy! He's -- touched. But he's not crazy!

LOULA

Fine, your word is the gold standard -- and your brother, the great Henry Kaner -- he's maybe got an offer to go away, which leaves you taking care of everything with your mom. Yeehaw.

DAVID looks at her, says nothing.

LOULA

Oh, I know that look -- I know that look -- "bruhdah against bruhdah" -- Davy's been trying so hard not to trash his big "bruhdah," but Loula's not deaf -- she can read between the words up there on the movie screen --

LOULA gets up. She does a pantomime of an impassioned actor on the silent screen, then stops and mimes holding up the placard that would have the actor's words written on them.

LOULA

And what does it say up here? Go on, you can say it -- I know you can say it.

DAVID

You say it.

LOULA

Me doing the heavy lifting. Okay, I would guess it says, "I hate my brother."

(looks at placard)

Yup, that's what it says.

(pointing to words)

"I. Hate. My."

DAVID

Leave off --

LOULA

How's it sound in your ear, Davy? Huh?

DAVID doesn't answer.

LOULA

So, my friend, what're gonna do about it? Something like "I. Hate. My. Brother." doesn't just go [away] --

DAVID steps away from her.

LOULA

Fine -- this is stupid -- this is going nowhere -- so I'm going to go --

DAVID

Don't.

LOULA

Sorry, Davy -- it's come the time for me to go into that gin joint over there and wash away Lou Parsons and the Hebrew Hurler and you -- in that order, by the way --

DAVID

Don't do that --

LOULA

I am going to do just that.

DAVID

Don't!

LOULA

And what's with the tone?

DAVID

Nothing --

LOULA

You don't talk to me like that.

DAVID

It's nothing -- not what you think --

LOULA

It's very much something, whatever I think.

DAVID

Just don't. Don't.

LOULA

And what does this "don't don't" mean? Huh? For me?
Save me again, Mr. Knight?

DAVID

I don't know how you mean, "save" -- just don't go --

LOULA

Then give me a solid reason why I should "don't go," should
stay here, with my angel pal, who hates his brother, and not
go do something adult and tragic like I am supposed to --

DAVID

I like you.

LOULA

That's your offer.

DAVID

I said I like you.

LOULA

You like me.

DAVID

That's what I said.

LOULA

He likes me. And that is supposed to be saving enough.

LOULA sits down. She pats the bench. DAVID sits down.

LOULA

This is my life -- this is so pathetic -- you know that?

DAVID

Are you going in or aren't you?

LOULA

Look, we got to get something straight about this "I hate baseball" club we got going here. You're still mad -- I can see it in your eyes -- look at me -- it's still there. Isn't it.

DAVID

Yeah. Yes.

LOULA

You could hurt him. It's all right to feel that -- but you could hurt him, right? I know about that.

DAVID

How?

LOULA

You think Lou Parsons is always a gentle soul?

DAVID

Your husband hurts you?

LOULA

Give that man the kewpie doll.

MORRIE enters, gives them the once-over.

MORRIE

Now, hey hey hey --

LOULA

Christ. Hay is for horses.

MORRIE

What is this I see before me?

LOULA

Bug off.

MORRIE

David, what're you doing here? Does Henry know --

LOULA

He's gonna know now because he won't keep his flapper tight about this -- will you?

MORRIE

Don't know -- feeling good -- we won today -- your brother was an ace on fire. Scout from the St. Louis Browns was there -- again --

LOULA

Look, Morrie, just go get bent in there and leave us alone.

MORRIE

Lou did great, too --

LOULA

How nifty is the news report tonight -- now just go bend an arm and dry up --

MORRIE

Can't.

LOULA

Go.

MORRIE

Can't. You said "us": "Leave us alone."

LOULA
(sotto voce)

Damn.

MORRIE

"Us," Loula? You? Little Davy Kaner, with the Jewish smarts -- "us"? You gotta be kidding. Wait'll Lou hears --

LOULA

Lou don't need to hear.

MORRIE

He doesn't need to hear, but baby-snatching is a serious offense -- hey, Davy, what'd'ya think Henoch's going to think when he hears about this?

LOULA

Look, I'll join you, okay? Okay?

MORRIE

That's a step taken in the right direction.

LOULA

Just go on in, start your first sheet to the wind -- I'll meet you for one, all right?

MORRIE

Gotta celebrate the great game of baseball -- nothing like it this side of paradise -- one might not do it --

LOULA

Morrie --

MORRIE

Fine -- fine -- I'll go see the man about a dog. It's okay to see you here, kid -- it's okay -- your brother's got the goods out on the field, but, you know, when the game's over -- he can be a pain in the ass. Good to see that one of the Kaners 'sgot some blood in his veins. All right, all right, I'm going --

MORRIE exits into the speakeasy.

LOULA

You look pole-axed. I gotta go.

DAVID

You and Morrie --

LOULA

It's nothing -- really nothing -- but I can't have him telling Lou --

DAVID

So I didn't save you --

LOULA

You did more than you think. It's all this goddamn baseball --

DAVID

I'll wait.

LOULA

Don't. You can't.

DAVID

I can.

LOULA

You don't understand -- you can't. Go back. Go home.

LOULA starts to leave, turns back.

LOULA

Like I said, it's okay to feel it -- I feel it all the time. It doesn't feel okay, but it's okay.

LOULA starts to exit again, then stops. She reaches into her handbag and pulls out a baseball. She tosses it to him. He catches it.

LOULA

Lou gave it to me before he ducked out tonight -- big present, he thought it was -- made the last out in the game. I don't really care.

LOULA moves toward the speakeasy.

DAVID sits. He reaches into this pocket, pulls out a pen knife. With the knife, he methodically cuts and rips apart the baseball.

LOULA watches him for a moment, then exits into the speakeasy.

DAVID cuts, keeps hacking at it as lights fade to...

INTERMISSION

* * * * *

Scene 8

HENRY and ROSIE on the Kaner front porch. They have lemonade.

HENRY

Nice night, huh?

ROSIE

It's a very nice night.

HENRY

Nice sitting out here.

ROSIE

And the lemonade is tart and sweet.

HENRY

Like the woman who made it, now that I think about it.

ROSIE

Do you think she can hear you?

HENRY

If she could get away with it, she'd be the fly on the wall.
Naw, she's in the kitchen taking care of Papa.

ROSIE

You sound --

HENRY

Yeah, well, it all feels like it's moving downhill so fast.

ROSIE

Your papa's worse?

HENRY

Rosie, I wouldn't say worse -- he's still going to his shop every day -- but it's like he's -- shifting -- moving from here to here -- to some place else -- we can see him but --

ROSIE

(overlapping)

But he's not all there. I mean -- he's all there here, but, somehow, in his body --

HENRY

You sound like you know this.

ROSIE

Your papa has his baseball, right? My papa has his meats. Every day before he cuts, before he wraps, before he delivers and accepts deliveries, he says a prayer to his knives.

HENRY

What'd'ya say to a knife?

ROSIE

Since I'm a woman, he never tells me. But he's told me why -- the knife divides this from that, just as we need to divide this --

(touching her body)

-- from this --

(hand over heart)

-- in order to keep God in our sight and ourselves in God's sight and on and on and on and on. And then he will say a bracha to each of his meats. Cut them all with kavannah -- brow furrowed, deep look, a holy act -- when all anybody wants is just beef brisket, not too fatty for braising -- it's a daily regular spiritual work-out with my father.

HENRY

Something -- I don't know --

ROSIE

What?

HENRY

Pure, maybe? -- in them doing that.

ROSIE

My father's got this whole song and dance about Adam and vegetarianism -- I'm not kidding you! -- and Noah saving the animals and that's why we eat meat --

HENRY

Go back --

ROSIE

Don't ask me to repeat it! -- and he ends with this idea that food is a hiding place for Godliness and when we eat in

a holy manner, then the Godliness comes out of hiding, boosting everyone up a good few notches. Meat will make ya holy -- that's how he starts his day.

HENRY

And your day, too.

ROSIE

And my day, too!
with the letter "A."

But like I said before -- some city

HENRY

Well -- "St. Louis" doesn't begin with an "A" --

ROSIE

What are you getting at?

HENRY

A scout from the Browns at the game today.

ROSIE

And you didn't point him out to me?

HENRY

He's kinda made me an offer.

ROSIE

"Kinda"?

HENRY

An offer to talk about an offer some more. It's nothing -- it'll turn out to be nothing.

ROSIE

But he came to you?

HENRY

Yeah.

ROSIE

Then it's not nothing. He leave you his card?

HENRY

The second time he's left me his card.

ROSIE

Then it's definitely not a nothing, Henry. This could really be a something.

HENRY

Could be, could be not, especially since St. Louis doesn't begin with an "A."

HENRY drains his glass.

ROSIE

The alphabet can shift.

HENRY

That so?

ROSIE

Twenty-six letters -- be stupid to let just one take over everything.

HENRY

Huh. You want more?

ROSIE

You're not letting out a peep, are you?

HENRY

Not until I have a peep to peep about.

ROSIE

(handing off her glass)

Hope your mother has better luck reading your face for clues.

HENRY

Unlike my brain, my mug'll be clueless.

They laugh. The laugh is interrupted by DAVID, who bulls into the scene looking distraught and tight. HENRY stops, looks at him.

HENRY

You look like you've seen a ghost. He look okay to you?

HENRY moves closer to him, sniffing.

HENRY

Cigarettes? Liquor? You?

DAVID struggles to get something out of his pocket.

DAVID

You're so smart -- damn! Offer -- damn!

DAVID finally pulls out the carved-up baseball. He sets it on one of the glasses HENRY holds.

Before HENRY can react, DAVID sucker-punches HENRY in a way that crumples HENRY to the ground. HENRY drops the glasses. DAVID is on him.

BAYLA appears in the doorway, holding a pitcher of lemonade. RAPHAEL hovers behind her.

With HENRY out of action for the moment, everyone stares: a frozen moment.

DAVID grabs HENRY's right hand and bends the fingers or wrist in a way that, if he keeps bending, he will break something in the hand.

BAYLA

David! David!

But DAVID does not let go.

BAYLA

David!

RAPHAEL moves past her to DAVID. He stands near DAVID, not touching him, just looking at him.

RAPHAEL

A really smart man would only think of doing what you are thinking of doing. A really smart man would not do it.

DAVID does not let go.

RAPHAEL

You hungry, David? Are you hungry, son? I have something that can take the hunger away.

DAVID does not let go.

RAPHAEL

If you don't take what I offer, David, I will do something to hurt you. You are not the only one enraged in this house. "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations."

DAVID

"Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel."

DAVID does not let go. Without hesitation, RAPHAEL reaches out and grabs DAVID by the throat, but before he can do any damage, he collapses.

DAVID catches him, cradles him. ROSIE cradles BAYLA.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 9

BARNEY PELTEY shakes HENRY, who comes to both groggy and fighting mad.

BARNEY

Whoa there champ --

HENRY

I'll -- I'll --

BARNEY

You'll what? Against who? What day of the week is it?

HENRY

Back off --

HENRY shakes out his hand.

HENRY

Damn!

BARNEY

Who's president?

HENRY

I'm not getting like my fa[ther] --

BARNEY

How many fingers do I [have] --

HENRY

Just get back --

BARNEY gets back.

BARNEY

So you got a mind composed -- good --

They sit, gather themselves. BARNEY watches HENRY's agitation.

BARNEY

So go on.

HENRY gets up, paces. BARNEY offers him his hand, and HENRY pulls BARNEY to his feet. HENRY massages his pitching hand.

HENRY

Why --

BARNEY

Why what?

HENRY holds up his pitching hand.

HENRY

Why does -- why is it all about hating me?

BARNEY

Give me your hand -- c'mon, give me your --

HENRY places his pitching hand in BARNEY's hands. BARNEY massages it.

BARNEY

My hand'd get so charged sometimes, I'd have to flop it on a block of ice to cool it down. So, this is the hand that's gonna do it.

HENRY pulls his hand away, paces.

HENRY

I am not gonna do it.

BARNEY

So you know what I'm talking about --

HENRY

How could you even [think] --

BARNEY

You really do need to learn how to get mad, Henry -- pissed off, even apocalyptic --

HENRY

Why? Why? They all hate me --

BARNEY

That's a start --

HENRY

And they all want to steal from me --

BARNEY

(like an engine)

Rev --

HENRY

I feel like I'm suffocating half the time --

BARNEY

Rev --

HENRY

-- the other half drowning --

BARNEY

Revelation --

HENRY

Why is it so hard? Why are they making it so that I --

BARNEY

Who is saying that you can't?

HENRY

They all --

BARNEY

I only hear one person circling around here saying "can't can't," and it ain't me.

HENRY

Drowning -- suffocating --

BARNEY

So do something --

HENRY

This hand can't --

BARNEY
(mocking)

Can't --

HENRY

Won't --

BARNEY
(mocking)

Won't --

HENRY

Shouldn't --

BARNEY

Shouldn't -- the good man can't -- won't -- shouldn't -- and so he suffocates and drowns. Everything else about him is just a nervous tic, like frog legs stuck with electric wires, the walking dead --

HENRY explodes. BARNEY does not flinch.

BARNEY

You really ought to use that hand for something better.

HENRY stares at his hand as if were a stranger, enemy, and savior.

BARNEY

If it's got "can't" in it -- If it's got "can't" all through it -- if it's got "can't sir" [cancer], you should cut it off.

BARNEY puts his right hand on imaginary ice with a hissing sound.

BARNEY

Ahhh -- when this hand was hot, it made for me the world that I wanted to live in. It didn't have to be good --

BARNEY shakes out his hand, puts it back on the "ice."

BARNEY

-- I beaned hitters, I chucked wild pitches in all four directions -- it just had to have heat -- when it had heat --

BARNEY blows on his hand to cool it off.

BARNEY

I had life. Go on -- test it --

HENRY lays his hand down on the "ice" -- and a hiss escapes from him.

BARNEY

Listen to that!

HENRY

What is the life I want.

BARNEY
(singing)

"If they don't win, it's a shame."

HENRY cools his hand, makes a fist. Lights out. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 10

About 24 hours later. BAYLA, HENRY, and DAVID at the hospital. BAYLA is wringing a handkerchief to death.

HENRY

Mama, I have to go.

BAYLA

There's nowhere you should be going with your father here.

HENRY

Mama, we've been here all day because Dr. Timmers said we have to wait a day to make sure --

BAYLA

I know what he said.

HENRY

Then you heard, like me, that Papa is going to be all right -- not a stroke, just --

BAYLA dismisses him with a gesture. HENRY accepts it.

HENRY

I have to go -- I have to go to the station --

BAYLA glares at him.

BAYLA

That's what you've told me.

HENRY

It's my job, Mama -- a meeting of us with the chief, the kind of chief, I've talked about him, you have to meet with when he says "meet." You want me to lose the job?

BAYLA

You're telling me that if I called this "chief you have to meet," he'd tell me that you have to meet him today.

HENRY

Of course he would.

BAYLA

The truth?

HENRY

Of course he would.

BAYLA looks straight at him. HENRY cannot hold her gaze because he's not telling her the truth.

DAVID

They could give you a break because of Papa.

HENRY

Don't flap your gums.

DAVID

I'm just saying you could --

HENRY

You're saying too much for someone who shouldn't be saying anything at all. Promise, Mama -- right back, I promise. I want to be here, believe me. Watch her.

DAVID

Like a hawk -- dig it?

HENRY

You've got no class.

DAVID

I've had good teachers.

HENRY kisses BAYLA, leaves. BAYLA reaches into her pocket, pulls something out, hands it to DAVID.

BAYLA

I gave him a chance -- that's where he's going.

DAVID examines the card.

DAVID

It's an appointment card.

BAYLA

I found that in your father's wallet.

DAVID stretches out the name.

DAVID

"Farnsworthy."

BAYLA

Henoch must have given the card to him -- he would have liked handling it. A game of secrets. Now I've got two sons who can't be trusted.

DAVID pockets the card. BAYLA pulls at the handkerchief.

DAVID

Mama, you are gonna rip it --

BAYLA

Stop telling me to stop doing what I'm doing. The hospital bill will kill us.

DAVID

I'll go to work --

BAYLA

And that will put the wrong you did to right.

DAVID

I didn't say that --

BAYLA

Because you can't.

DAVID

Papa is going to be okay.

BAYLA

I love you, David, but you have done nothing but disgust me with what you did. I have turned it over and over in my mind, and still "you" make no sense, what you did makes no sense --

BAYLA rips the handkerchief in half.

BAYLA

Damn! Damn!

BAYLA throws it on the floor. DAVID picks up the pieces.

BAYLA

The act of an animal --

DAVID

There is a reason.

BAYLA

For being such a monster?

DAVID

For being such a monster.

BAYLA

Did I raise, a monster, a devil, a -- what reason could you have that wouldn't gag me?

DAVID

Because of love, Mama. Because of in love.

BAYLA stares at him.

DAVID

It's connected with a married woman.

A long silence.

DAVID

I wanted to save her.

BAYLA

From what?

DAVID

From baseball.

BAYLA

No one needs saving from baseball, David. From maybe the ten plagues or J. Edgar Hoover, but not drek like baseball.

DAVID

She's the wife of one of the guys Henry plays with --

BAYLA

And what does her baseball husband do that makes her need to steal my son --

DAVID

It's not great with her --

BAYLA

So let her talk to a lawyer.

DAVID

And he beats her.

BAYLA

How do you know she's showing you the truth?

DAVID

She wouldn't not.

BAYLA

The way you wouldn't not tell a lie?

DAVID

I never lied to you.

BAYLA

You just let me think I knew what wasn't true. How do you know anything about this?

DAVID

I feel it -- it's a knowing like that.

BAYLA

And a knowing like that brought you, brought us, to chaos --

DAVID

To make it turn out right for her, better for her -- Henry was like a stand-in for her husband, maybe -- I'm not saying it makes sense now though it made sense then -- seemed to --

BAYLA gives her son a good once-over.

BAYLA

What did you do with her?

DAVID

Talked a lot -- we listened to jazz --

BAYLA

Over at the speakeasy on --

DAVID

Exactly!

BAYLA

Outside or inside?

DAVID

Outside -- how do you know about the speak[easy] --

BAYLA

Did you have sex with her?

DAVID

No.

BAYLA

You wanted to. Well?

DAVID

I don't think I wanted to.

BAYLA

Why not? She must have offered.

DAVID

She never offered --

BAYLA

And you never --

DAVID

I never -- it made no sense to think like that -- it makes no sense right now --

BAYLA

Don't lie.

DAVID

That's not a lie.

BAYLA gives him a hard look.

BAYLA

All right. And you thought you could save this Tamar?

DAVID

I felt I could --

BAYLA

Why?

DAVID

Because thinking it made me feel like I was doing something useful in my life finally. Be useful to [someone] --

BAYLA

Useful and noble --

DAVID

Something like that --

BAYLA

Very much like that.

DAVID

Maybe even something clean -- maybe even pure -- the good son turned Jewish warrior to the rescue! Sorry.

DAVID worries a part of the handkerchief.

DAVID

Henry gets attention paid for being so good at something so stupid -- even you think it's stupid -- and, boy, stupid to me! -- and I get --

BAYLA

To be the one always expected to be good -- what a weight around the neck.

DAVID

Not like I'm such the good one now.

BAYLA

Not like you are. But the weight doesn't go away either.

BAYLA takes back the handkerchief from DAVID.

BAYLA

Your father and I met in a sort of speakeasy --

DAVID

In Lithuania?

BAYLA

I was the "good one" at home -- proper, a high-mark student -- sound familiar? -- but there was this coffee-shop in Vilnius -- sort-of like your speakeasy -- full of young people -- anarchists, criminals -- at the coffee-shop, I danced, I swore, I lived high and paid no attention to anything except my own mind. And there I met your father, the poet for the cantors -- he was escaping, too, searching. Guilt, how

could we avoid that? -- but freedom, and then America, then Henoah and you. And baseball and Shabbos and your brother lying and temptation and all comes down to this hospital waiting.

Worry the handkerchief, worry the handkerchief.

BAYLA

This Tamar or Hagar or Abigail outside the speakeasy -- you have to give her the dignity of letting her know the truth face to face. And you have to ask your brother to forgive you.

DAVID

I know the teachings --

BAYLA

So do the teachings.

DAVID

I can't wait --

BAYLA

Now you feel what I feel. Your father -- he'll give you it without a preface, but you still have to ask or else you'll still be a monster. I didn't raise a monster.

Without preamble, DAVID begins to cry. Instead of comforting him, BAYLA sits up straight, looking "down the hallway." DAVID notices, follows her gaze.

BAYLA

It's Dr. Timmers. It's Dr. Timmers, David.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 11

HENRY and MORRIE at the team's speakeasy, drinks in front of them.

In front of the drinks, their two contracts. MORRIE picks up his contract, "clinks" his glass against it as a toast, and takes a drink.

MORRIE

To ten days downtown with the Browns. You should be happy.

HENRY

I have to get back to the hospital.

MORRIE

So what if you lied -- a little -- it was for a good cause. Which is why you should instead be happy at this moment.

HENRY does not look happy.

MORRIE

This is so like you. When's the last time you sat in a baseball scout's office -- when did you ever sit in a baseball scout's office -- and hear the words, "We want to take a look at you" and -- have ten days ready money dropped in your hand if you just sign on the dotted line?

MORRIE looks at the last pages of each contract.

MORRIE

And yes we did --

HENRY

We signed -- hoo-rah.

MORRIE

You're such a killjoy --

HENRY

So sue me.

MORRIE

What's the bug up your ass now?

HENRY

You know what my dad said about you?

MORRIE

I don't care what he said [about me] --

HENRY

And I agreed with him -- that you're not very good. You're not very good.

MORRIE

I know I'm not very good.

HENRY

Farnsworthy gave you that because of me.

MORRIE

I know that. But there's nothing in it that requires you to sit there and rub it in.

HENRY

You're riding my arm.

MORRIE

We both know I'm riding your arm.

HENRY

And we know I can tear this up during my 10-day grace period -- page 2 -- I can tear it up and it's like signing it never happened. What?

MORRIE

You wouldn't do that.

HENRY

I wouldn't?

MORRIE

You wouldn't. Not to me.

HENRY

And why not to you?

MORRIE

Because I've known you forever.

HENRY

That gives you rights?

MORRIE

What the hell is wrong with you?

HENRY

Why should I be your damn meal ticket? Why should I be anybody's damn meal ticket?

HENRY finishes his drink.

MORRIE

Don't tear it up.

HENRY

Don't tell me what to do.

MORRIE

Don't tear it up.

HENRY

And I'm telling you to shut your freeloader mouth.

MORRIE

Don't --

Before MORRIE can finish his sentence, HENRY smacks him in the ear.

HENRY

What did I just tell you?

MORRIE

Goddamn it --

HENRY

You don't listen well, Morrie --

MORRIE

Damn!

HENRY

-- which is why you suck as much as you do.

MORRIE

You're outta your [mind] --

HENRY

I am as in my right mind as I have ever been.

HENRY finishes MORRIE's drink. HENRY picks up his contract, gets up to go.

MORRIE

I'm not buying this act, you know.

HENRY

Free country.

MORRIE

You're being a goddamn faker --

HENRY fishes money out of his wallet.

HENRY

Says the clown.

MORRIE

You still think you can be the "good son" if you tear that up --

HENRY throws money on the counter.

MORRIE

-- that you can just take a taste and then go home and be the good clean Jew-boy that everybody loves all over again.

HENRY turns to exit.

MORRIE

Status report: You lied to your mother. Your dad laid up, and you lied to be here rather than there. Here rather than there -- you getting that? And I'm the one who needs this contract? I may've been a lot of things in my short career as a not-so-good baseball player, but a coward? I have never been a coward.

HENRY does not leave.

MORRIE

You should also buy me another drink.

HENRY does not move.

MORRIE

You want to hear my fig leaf? To cover taking the deal?

HENRY

I have to go bring my father home from the hospital.

MORRIE

So go.

HENRY

I have to go lie to my mother again.

MORRIE

So go lie.

HENRY

And after all that -- I've got the graveyard shift at work.

MORRIE

For your twenty to thirty bucks a week -- yee-haw!

HENRY

My life is good.

MORRIE

"Fig leaf" -- you listening?

HENRY

So talk already.

MORRIE

Some days -- some days I feel like I do nothing but suffocate all day long. You ever feel like that? Like your clothes are too small? Ah, but see, you got Rosie -- maybe that makes a difference in how Henry Kaner half-Jew-boy breathes --

HENRY

Rosie's got her own trouble breathing -- just finish --

MORRIE

Here's my leaf, which could be your leaf, if you're lucky enough to borrow it. I'm going past the ten days because you're gonna go past the ten days, and I'm gonna ride your arm. And when we're full on the roster, I'm playing every Friday and Saturday they'll let me play, and I'm gonna send my folks the two-thirds half of each paycheck, and you're gonna do the same. Think of what the money will do, even if it only lasts a few years. Your dad gets a nurse so your mom doesn't have to be his nurse and she can have a life, you get the butcher's daughter and all the cuts that go with that -- We. Can. Make. This. Happen. Why is it that you shouldn't get to play while all these other putzes get their shot? Why can't you take the one shot God gave you? All you got to do is take the bite.

A silence.

MORRIE

So what does the Jew-boy say? What does the Jew-boy do? And will "say" and "do" match up?

HENRY doesn't answer right away. He lets the contract drop. He winds up, he pitches. Then again. And again, with more anger.

HENRY

I pitch because it takes me outta this life, takes me away from this life -- the crowd? never hear it -- I hear my breath, I hear my living -- it's quiet, it's clear, it's clean -- it's mine --

HENRY's finished.

MORRIE

See -- see -- I knew my best friend wasn't a coward. Now, that drink?

HENRY

I gotta go pick up Rosie.

HENRY picks up the contract and leaves.

MORRIE

Damn.

MORRIE follows HENRY. Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 12

Speakeasy. LOULA sits on the bench. DAVID sits on the bench.

LOULA

I've come to think of this --

(slaps bench)

-- as a kind of amusement park ride. Not the kiddie kind but the drop-your-guts kind.

DAVID

I was first coming here to tell you I can't come here anymore.

LOULA

What did I tell you. Swoosh!

DAVID

Swoosh!

LOULA

Sorry. About your father. Lou told me.

DAVID

What Henry didn't tell him so that he couldn't tell you was that I made it happen to my father. I tried hard to hurt Henry -- to help you -- hurt your husband, Morrie, all of them hitting on you -- baseball! --

LOULA

Cain and Abel. What'd you do?

DAVID

Tried to break his pitching hand.

LOULA

Jesus --

DAVID

Then my father got in between -- that's when it hit him.

LOULA

I didn't want you to hurt your brother -- not really -- I think -- I was hoping you'd deck Lou down a few notches -- maybe -- maybe I should've just asked for that right out -- maybe -- I'm not saying that makes sense now though it made sense then -- seemed to -- it gets fuzzy for me sometimes, David -- real wobbly, not always clear -- you hear me?

DAVID

I hear you -- "not always clear" --

LOULA

And that triggers no backing-away from me for you --

DAVID

None.

LOULA

Go -- you gotta go help your father.

DAVID

Yeah, I do.

LOULA

So go. Help him. Spare me. Spare yourself. God spare us all. You've got nothing to make up for -- nothing in you is broken. You're sweet. I'm not. Now get out of here.

But DAVID doesn't leave.

LOULA

I said --

DAVID

I heard --

LOULA

So why [don't you] --

DAVID

Because I don't want to -- that's not what I was coming here to say --

LOULA

You got a family to consider --

DAVID

And I'll be considering them for forever whether I want to or not --

LOULA

Does your mom know?

DAVID

I told her --

LOULA

And she let you out of the crib to come here --

DAVID

Diapers and all --

LOULA

I'm telling you to get away from here -- I'm not always clear to myself.

DAVID

And I'm telling you, clearly, no.

LOULA

You can't stay --

DAVID

So leave.

LOULA

You leave.

DAVID

I only leave if I can come back to ride this. That's the way a warrior works.

LOULA

I have no idea what you're talking about.

DAVID

Neither do I, mostly. But I know it feels right to talk it.

LOULA

Can't always trust your feelings, David.

DAVID

Can't always trust your head.

LOULA

So what're we gonna trust?

DAVID

What're our choices?

LOULA

Like we have choices, you and me.

DAVID

I already made my choice.

LOULA

I was going to kick you to the curb tonight.

DAVID

You don't get to kick me to anywhere.

LOULA

Which means you're staying --

DAVID

You just answered yourself.

Jazz music starts. HENRY enters with MORRIE.

LOULA

(sotto voce)

Damn.

HENRY

David, you're coming home with me now.

DAVID

Screw you -- you are not my keeper. How'd your meeting turn out? How's this for an image in your brain: while you were sitting there with "Farnsworthy," Mama and I got Papa into a taxi and brought him home. By ourselves.

HENRY

I know -- I got there late --

DAVID

And you think I'm coming home because the mighty Henoah tells me to? You've got no pull here. You are not my keeper.

HENRY

Are you coming, or aren't you?

LOULA

You should go home.

DAVID

You just asked me to stay, so don't take it back.

LOULA

There's later. It's not worth it.

HENRY

Come on.

HENRY puts his hand on DAVID. DAVID shoves HENRY back hard.

DAVID

Put that hand on me again, I swear I'll break it. Go away and make your own goddamn decision, for once in your life, and stop living off the rest of us! I already did my part for you.

LOULA

Don't look at me like I'm the problem. All of you know what Lou does to me, and not a one of you ever said a thing to stop it. Just sniff around for scraps. Am I right, or am I wrong?

Both HENRY and MORRIE keep their mouths shut. LOULA indicates DAVID.

LOULA

At least with the babe, here, I've had a taste of some respect. I like it. I think I could go for some more of it. He tried to break your hand? Maybe you should give him a cut of the contract as a thank-you.

HENRY

I have to go. It's time. It's time. I have to go.

HENRY leaves. MORRIE stays.

LOULA

You should go.

DAVID

Of course I gotta go. I just don't have to go when he says to go.

MORRIE

The outlaws --

DAVID

What did Farnsworthy say?

MORRIE

Ten-day trial run for both of us.

DAVID

My brother signed, right? Come on.

LOULA

Where?

DAVID

To my home.

LOULA

I can't go there with you.

DAVID

You're already on the drop-your-guts kind of amusement park ride, right? Gotta finish it out.

MORRIE

I assume the invitation includes me?

DAVID

If you're on the inside when the door locks.

Exit. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 13

KANER house. ROSIE sits with BAYLA, who is sitting with RAPHAEL, RAPHAEL looking dilapidated, staring. BAYLA holds his hand, looks absolutely lost.

BAYLA

Do you think he still has his mind in there --

ROSIE

Of course -- of course, Mrs. Kaner --

BAYLA

The mind your father waited to listen to --

ROSIE

All that baseball and the beautiful poems of it -- of course it's still there. It doesn't go away --

BAYLA

Is that in Henoch?

ROSIE

I believe it is --

BAYLA

And you know what he did when he left the hospital, where he went.

ROSIE's silence shows that she knows what HENRY did.

BAYLA

And what he did is all right with you, even if he lied to me,
to his father, to do it?

The silence grows.

BAYLA

Maybe it's easier for you.

ROSIE

It's easy for no one.

BAYLA speaks to RAFAEL.

BAYLA

We have no one but ourselves now.

HENRY enters, trailed by MORRIE, then DAVID and LOULA. At LOULA's entrance, RAPHAEL takes notice of her, though no one really notices it.

BAYLA looks at DAVID, indicates with her head "Is this her?" DAVID nods yes.

BAYLA

I want to see this contract. We want to see this contract.

HENRY pulls it out of his pocket, unfolds it, hands it to BAYLA.

Everyone waits while BAYLA skims the three pages of the contract. The flip of each page rings out in the silence. She comes to the last page, reads it, then sets the contract on the table.

DAVID

The 800-pound gorilla is officially in the room.

BAYLA looks at ROSIE.

BAYLA

The betrayer? He's yours. He cuts -- for money -- maybe that makes him the right one for a butcher's daughter -- just a job with him.

MORRIE

He's got a grace period, Mrs. Kaner --

BAYLA

A grace period?

MORRIE

To think it over --

BAYLA

The fact his name is on that thing at all is crime enough -- take your girl and your money and go be like your friend here.

ROSIE

His "girl"?

HENRY

Rosie --

BAYLA

I don't need to hear from you.

ROSIE

No disrespect, Mrs. Kaner -- Henry, don't -- but I think you do -- "girl" like that is like "Delilah" or "Jezebel" and I can't let that pass.

BAYLA

If the name fits --

HENRY

Mama --

ROSIE

It doesn't fit. You know it doesn't fit.

BAYLA

Don't count on that.

ROSIE

I count on you listening to what I have to say.

BAYLA

Say whatever shit you want -- I'm an invalid now, too, so I get to say anything I want --

ROSIE

When Henry --

BAYLA

The butcher --

ROSIE

-- told me he'd signed the contract -- I was glad. Am glad.

BAYLA

Sets you on easy street.

ROSIE

Listen!

BAYLA

Unfortunately, my ears still work.

ROSIE

Like Henry said to me, the money is not his but for you and for Mr. Kaner so that whatever pain comes -- the easy street is for you two, not for me --

BAYLA

The money makes him easier to marry.

ROSIE

He's easy enough to marry without it -- but I like him even more for what he wants to do --

BAYLA

He's just your best shot.

ROSIE

He is my best shot -- I'm not getting any younger -- I've been straight about that -- and don't think I'm one-hundred percent on this -- I know it means "gone" for long stretches and temptation on both sides is a fact of life -- but whenever

does anyone in this life get what he wants in the way he wants it? It's enough sometimes to just get a near-hit.

BAYLA

It means him playing on Shabbos and whenever else --

ROSIE

Is a person's soul in a script some strangers laid out thousands of years ago or in wanting to make sure the people he loves get less pain?

BAYLA

I couldn't live with it.

ROSIE

And whose problem should that be? I'm sorry if that insults but --

BAYLA

And I couldn't live with his father dying while he was gone earning his money --

(to HENRY)

Could you live with that?

(to ROSIE)

Could you live with him living with that? I can't -- I just can't.

DAVID

Mama, Rosie's right -- I think you should learn to live with it. I think you have to.

HENRY

David --

DAVID

You think I want to leave school to work just to pay medical bills and be around 18 minutes before sundown to light candles? I can think of other ways to be a virtuous son, and Henry's money means some freedom --

BAYLA

(to RAPHAEL)

Raphael, we have no sons.

DAVID reaches into his pocket and pulls out the carved-up baseball from the end of Act I. He slams it down on top of the contract.

DAVID
(to HENRY)

Make your choice! Now!

HENRY does not make a move. RAPHAEL sits up, as if waking up, which takes everyone by surprise. He looks directly at BAYLA.

BAYLA

Raphael --

RAPHAEL looks at HENRY.

HENRY

Papa --

RAPHAEL

Henoch.

HENRY

Papa, I'm sorry --

RAPHAEL

The mistake I made with you --

HENRY

You didn't make any mistake.

RAPHAEL

The mistake I made with you was teaching you to be a good man. Instead of an honest one. I hope it's not too late. Rosie, don't give up on him.

But then RAPHAEL shifts his gaze to LOULA.

RAPHAEL

Bayla.

BAYLA

She's not --

I'm not -- LOULA

My Bayla. RAPHAEL

She's not -- BAYLA

Mr. Kaner, I'm not -- LOULA

Bayla, come here -- RAPHAEL
(to LOULA)

Raphael! BAYLA

RAPHAEL motions BAYLA to go away.

Come here -- RAPHAEL

What do I do? LOULA

Do what you can -- DAVID
(whispering)

But I'm not -- LOULA

Miss Bayla Brodsky -- remember we were so formal with
each other -- RAPHAEL

Mr. Kaner -- LOULA

RAPHAEL

See, just like that! We dance, drink coffee -- then you say to me, "When we have but the will to do it, that very moment will Justice be done: that very instant the tyrants of the Earth shall bite the dust." Remember?

LOULA

Look, Mr. Kaner --

RAPHAEL

And that's when we did it!

RAPHAEL gives her the anarchist salute. LOULA gives it back to him.

LOULA

Look --

BAYLA

Tell him we had to run.

LOULA

I can't [do] --

BAYLA

Tell him.

LOULA

We had to run.

BAYLA

We ran ourselves right to here.

LOULA

We ran ourselves right to here.

RAPHAEL sings The Internationale, in Yiddish, looking straight at LOULA.

RAPHAEL

Sheit oif ir ale wer nor shklafen
Was hunger leiden mus in noit

To everyone's amazement, LOULA takes up the words with RAPHAEL.

RAPHAEL AND LOULA

Der geist er kocht unrufft teu wafen
In shlacht uns firen is er greit --

RAPHAEL

Gut, eh?

LOULA

Yeah, gut.

LOULA gives him the anarchist salute. RAPHAEL gives it back.

RAPHAEL

Like the kibinai we ate.

BAYLA

In the coffee house --

LOULA

Like in the coffee house.

RAPHAEL touches LOULA's cheek, takes her hand.

RAPHAEL
(to LOULA)

It all changed. Forever.

LOULA

It always changes.

RAPHAEL

We used to think the violent ending would bring the new
improved beginning -- The Great Joker. What now, Bayla?

LOULA touches RAPHAEL's cheek.

LOULA

A-do-nai s'fa-tai tif-tach, u-fi ya-gid t'hi-la-te-cha.

Ba-ruch a-tah A-do-nai, E-lo-hei-nu, Vei-lo-hei a-vo-tei-un
--

[Adonai, my lips You will open and my mouth will tell Your glory. Blessed (are) You, Adonai, our God and God of our fathers --]

The shift in the room is palpable.

RAPHAEL

Ba-ruch a-tah A-do-nai, ma-gein Av-ra-ham. A-tah gi-bur l'o-lam, A-do-nai m'chai-yei mei-tim a-ta rav l'ho-shi-a --

[Blessed are You, Adonai, Shield of Abraham
You are mighty to eternity, Adonai, enlivening dead (are)
You, great to save.]

LOULA looks at everyone looking at her. She speaks to BAYLA.

LOULA

So I'm a member of a lost tribe. Who among you doesn't have a secret or three?

RAPHAEL

Can I get him to tell the joke?

LOULA

(confused)

Sure, I guess.

RAPHAEL indicates for HENRY to step to him.

RAPHAEL

Tell the joke, Yakov.

HENRY

I'm not Yakov --

RAPHAEL

You are Yakov Davis -- c'mon --

ROSIE

He means my father.

RAPHAEL

(pointing at HENRY)

Of course he is! Let's tell them all the joke together.

HENRY

You tell the joke -- you tell it a lot better.

RAPHAEL

You're right! Two buddies Yitzchok and Shmul were two of the biggest baseball fans in America -- you want in?

HENRY

It's all yours.

ROSIE

They agreed that whoever died first would try to come back and tell the other if there was baseball in heaven.

RAPHAEL

Yes! One summer night, Yitzchok passed away in his sleep after watching the Yankee victory earlier in the evening. He died happy. A few nights later, Shmul awoke to the sound of his voice from beyond.

"Yitzchok, is that you?"

ROSIE

"Of course it's me."

RAPHEL

"This is unbelievable! So tell me, is there baseball in heaven?"

ROSIE

"Well I have some good news and some bad news for you. Which do you want to hear first?"

RAPHAEL

"Tell me the good news first."

ROSIE

"Well, the good news is that yes there is baseball in heaven."

RAPHAEL

"Oh, that is wonderful! So what could possibly be the bad news?"

ROSIE

You tell it.

RAPHAEL

"You're pitching tomorrow night." Shpil Ball!

RAPHAEL laughs, everyone laughs. RAPHAEL goes silent.

LOULA moves to BAYLA. She smoothes BAYLA's forehead. She takes her hand and RAPHAEL's hand, looks into their faces.

LOULA

Everything is going to be all right no matter how it turns out.

LOULA twines BAYLA's and RAPHAEL's hands together. She gets up, goes to HENRY.

LOULA

Who is going to make sure that what I just said turns out true? Your brother's too young. Your mother's too old. Your father's got nothing left in his tank. It's not Rosie's responsibility. Who's left to make all of this turn out all right?

HENRY picks up the contract. He waits. MORRIE makes a move toward HENRY. HENRY shoots MORRIE a look, which stops MORRIE's movement but not the look of anger and disappointment in his face.

MORRIE

(to HENRY)

Gonna screw me over, aren't you?

LOULA

Doesn't matter --

MORRIE

It doesn't matter?

LOULA

It does not matter because not everybody gets one in the win column at the end of the day.

MORRIE

Don't listen to her -- Hank -- Henoch --

HENRY stares at the contract. Stage goes to dark. At the same moment, a light appears downstage on BARNEY PELTY.

HENRY takes up the ruined baseball. He moves downstage into the light.

BARNEY indicates for HENRY to toss him the ball. He checks it over.

BARNEY

Know what I did when it was all over?

HENRY

You were done by the time I was twelve.

BARNEY

I was done by the time I was thirty-one.

BARNEY takes out some masking tape and wraps it around the ball to repair it.

BARNEY

Not shot -- nor broken -- just -- done. I did it -- didn't need to do it anymore.

HENRY

And your life after being done?

BARNEY

I went back home. Back to Farmington, Missouri. I was raised there.

HENRY

Missouri?

BARNEY

Yeah -- enormous Jewish community there! Enormous! The Jews out among the corn!

HENRY

Challah in the heartland!

BARNEY

That's good! I like that! Ran a bookstore. Was a food inspector. Had several terms as an alderman. That is what I did, Henry: I melted back into the ordinary.

HENRY

What about --

BARNEY

The spirit, the eternal --

HENRY

The "something" like that, yeah.

BARNEY

You mean, did I Shabbos? Yes, I Shabbos'd. Go on, Henry, you gotta -- they gotta -- you all gotta move on to what's next -- shpil ball.

BARNEY tosses HENRY the ball, exits. HENRY lets out his characteristic OUTBREATH.

DAVID enters, bearing a candle, followed by RAPHAEL, BAYLA, LOULA, and ROSIE. ROSIE hands HENRY a box of matches.

HENRY takes out a match, strikes, and lights the candles.

HENRY

Barukh atah Adonai, Elohaynu, melekh ha-olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvosav, v'tzivanu l'had lik neir shel shabbos (Amein).

Then they all sing.

ALL

Nem mikh mit tsu der ball geym
(Take me out to the ballgame)

Tsum oylem lomir dokh geyn
(Take me out to the park)

Koyf mir di nislekh un krekerjek
Buy me some peanuts and crackerjack)

Vil ikh keyn molfun dort nit avek
(I don't care if I never get back)

HENRY launches into the lesser-known second verse of the song.

HENRY

All I need is just one chance
I could hit a home run
There isn't anyone else like me
Maybe I'll go down in history
And it's root, root, root
For the home team
Here comes fortune and fame
'Cause I know
That I'll be the star
At the old
Ball
Game

HENRY takes up his pitching stance.

HENRY

Shpil ball.

HENRY winds up, throws -- at the moment of the throw, candles blown out,
lights to black.

OUTBREATH.

End of play.

Homeward Bound

Maria Beatriz Alvarez and Michael Bettencourt

DESCRIPTION

Homeward Bound distills the stories of many women who have experienced abuse in their lives. The play begins in Mexico at the "quinceañera" of Juanita, a rite of passage into adulthood, where her father spells out her proper place as a woman in the world. She then meets a charming man from the United States, Hank Armstrong, who promises to marry her and sponsor her to become a citizen after bringing her back to his home in the mid-West. But when they arrive, he states his expectations for a wife, isolates her from her family and friends, and prevents her from learning the language that will allow her to make new connections with the outside world.

As Juanita begins to confront Hank's actions, he becomes more abusive, exercising his power over her life by threatening to have her deported and to hurt her family if she does not do what he says. Finally, Juanita escapes, and with help from Asistencia, Inc., run by Cristina Lefcadia, she is able to find the support to change her life.

Homeward Bound examines how domestic violence is not simply a problem of dangerous relationships between individuals but is also an expression of larger conflicts about power, gender, and politics. The play uses elements like the "quinceañera," the tango (a dance in which seduction and aggression have blurred boundaries), vacuously dangerous speeches by politicians, dreams, and symbols of Mexican culture to dramatize Juanita's journey of self-discovery and healing.

CHARACTERS

- JUANITA -- An undocumented immigrant -- she represents all women in this condition, regardless of national origin; she speaks in a delicate Mexican accent, though a specific nationality is not the main issue. She will wear a blue shawl.
- MAN 1 -- This actor performs two roles: JUANITA's FATHER at the Quinceañera celebration and REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM BARTLETT. He must be able to speak in a Mexican and an American Mid-Western accent. If needed, this role can be split into two, but for symbolic purposes one actor should play both roles.
- MAN 2 -- This actor will play several roles: PETER SCHIST, a journalist; a spokesperson for WILLIAM BARTLETT; the talk show host IÑIGO QUIROGA. Must be able to speak in a Spanish and American accent.
- HANK ARMSTRONG -- He will play JUANITA's "Dream Man," then

- boyfriend, and her eventual husband. "American-looking," charming.
- MOTHER -- JUANITA's mother, who wears a white shawl. Must be able to speak in a Spanish accent.
- CRISTINA LEFCADIA -- Executive director of Asistencia, Inc., an organization helping battered immigrant women. Must be able to pronounce Spanish well. She will wear a red shawl.
- (TOTAL: 3 women, 3 men)

SETTING

- Mexico; mid-West; dream time

NOTES

Note 1: All the actors must have some dance/movement experience.

Note 2: There are no scene changes, per se. All action is continuous and without intermission. Props, clothing, etc. must be placed on stage for easy access, and the actors will make all changes in sight of the audience. In addition, the actors never leave the stage -- when not in a scene, they will sit upstage.

Note 3: A color scheme runs throughout the play of pink, purple, and white (lilac is also used as an intermediate color between pink and purple). This scheme follows the dominant colors in the *Los Dias de Los Muertos*: pink = celebration; purple = pain; white = hope. The colors are used in this way:

Scene 1 -- HANK, as the "Dream Man," should wear a pink scarf around his throat, tied as a cravat, and the chambergo, the classic hat for male tango dancers (like a fedora, with a soft, broad brim). JUANITA should wear a triangle of pink material wrapped around her waist to match.

Scene 2 -- A pink tablecloth should drape JUANITA's "vanity."

Scene 3 -- HANK, as the "Dream Man," should now wear a lilac scarf and the chambergo; JUANITA wears a lilac triangle wrapped around her waist.

Scene 4 -- A purple tablecloth should drape the table where JUANITA and MOTHER sit to talk about HANK.

Scene 5 -- HANK now wears simple street clothes; JUANITA wears a purple triangle wrapped around her waist.

Scene 9 -- Where possible, purple should be used in this scene. One suggestion is to consider each sub-scene as a different place in the house:

if a scene takes place in the bedroom, then JUANITA could be wearing a purple bathrobe (or with a dominant color of purple).

Note 4: There are eight tango sequences, five with music: Scene 1, Scene 3, Scene 4 (as JUANITA speaks about HANK, they do a duplicate of the tango done in Scene 1 but without the music), Scene 5, Scene 7 (two: the "proposition" and "elopement" tangos), and Scene 9 (the "abuse" tango, done without music). Each tango (except for the brief reprise in Scene 4) should shift the balance from seduction to aggression, documenting, in movement, the arc of the abuse.

Suggested music:

- "La Cumparsita" (a traditional tango tune) -- for Scene 1
- Selections from Astor Piazzolla's *Libertango*: "Verano Porteño" (for Scene 3); "Milonga de Angel" (for Scene 9, the "marriage" tango).
- "Mi Buenos Aires Querido" by Carlos Gardel (for Scene 5).
- Anything by Piazzolla (for Scene 7).

The dances last as long as needed (though 1 to 2 minutes should suffice).

Note 5: Each scene change will need either music or a sound effect. This especially needs to be done in Scene 9, between each of the sub-scenes.

COSTUME LIST

- It is suggested that there be on stage a clothes rack for hanging clothes as well as a clothes tree for hanging the tango scarves for HANK and the colored triangles for JUANITA.
- It is suggested that JUANITA wear a black dress over which she can put her other costumes and materials. She will also need to change shoes between the tango sequences and her scenes as JUANITA.
- HANK and MAN 2 will need to make slight changes as they move through the play.
- MOTHER will add an apron in Scene 4.

Scene 1

- HANK: As "Dream Man," a pink neck scarf and a chambergo; a basic white shirt; basic black pants and shoes.
- JUANITA: A pink triangle wrapped around her waist; basic black dress; shoes with heels for tango.

Scene 2

- JUANITA: Quinceañera dress.

Scene 3

- HANK: As "Dream Man," a lilac neck scarf and a chambergo; same pants, shirt, and shoes.
- JUANITA: A lilac triangle wrapped around her waist; basic black dress; shoes with heels for tango.

Scene 4

- JUANITA: A long skirt over the basic black dress; flat shoes.
- MOTHER: An apron.

Scene 5

- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.
- JUANITA: A purple triangle wrapped around her waist; basic black dress; shoes with heels for tango.

Scene 6

- MAN 2: White shirt, tie, jacket -- looks like an aide.
- BARTLETT: Simple suit, white shirt, red tie.

Scene 7

- HANK: Same as Scene 5.
- JUANITA: Same as Scene 4, but without the shoes.

Scene 8

- MAN 2 (Peter Schist): No tie; can wear a suit coat, but rumpled.
- CRISTINA: Business suit; red shawl.

Scene 9a: "Marriage" tango

- JUANITA: White triangle wrapped around her waist; black dress; shoes with heels for tango.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9b - in the living room

- JUANITA: Same as Scene 4.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9c - in the dining room

- JUANITA: Basic black dress without skirt, apron.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9d - in the bedroom

- JUANITA: Purple bathrobe; no shoes.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 9e - somewhere in the house

- JUANITA: Same as 9d.
- HANK: White shirt, black pants and shoes.

Scene 10

- JUANITA: Continues wearing the purple bathrobe.
- MOTHER: Basic clothing and JUANITA's blue shawl.

Scene 11

- JUANITA: Same as Scene 4 and her blue shawl.
- CRISTINA: Same as Scene 8.

Scene 12

- BARTLETT: Same as Scene 6.
- IÑIGO: Same white shirt and pants, some kind of colorful or embroidered vest.
- CRISTINA: Same as Scene 8.
- JUANITA: Same as Scene 11.
- MOTHER: Basic clothing and her own white shawl.

PROP LIST

Scene 2

- Table (also used in Scenes 4, 8, 11, & 12)
- Pink tablecloth (see Note 3)
- Hairbrush
- Something to gather up JUANITA's hair
- Chair

Scene 4

- Table
- Lilac tablecloth (see Note 3)
- Coffee set: 2 cups, saucers, spoons, coffee pot
- 2 chairs

Scene 6

- Folder for MAN 2 with press releases, papers, etc. in it.
- Copy of prepared statement that MAN 2 hands to BARTLETT.

Scene 8

- Table
- Blotter with pens, papers, etc. on it (should be easy to pick up as one piece)

- Briefcase for CRISTINA
- Bound manuscript in briefcase
- Phone
- 2 chairs
- Steno pad, pen for MAN 2

Scene 9a

- Wedding ring

Scene 9b

- Chair

Scene 9c

- Two chairs (add one to the chair in 9b)
- Apron for JUANITA, with a purple napkin in it

Scene 9d

- Second hairbrush in bathrobe pocket (pre-set)

Scene 9e

- Letter with picture for HANK

Scene 10

- Four marigolds

Scene 11

- Same as Scene 8
- Manila file folder for CRISTINA
- Waist-high white table for the "visual monologue" -- this is the only scene in which the table is used
- Stainless steel bowl
- Cleaver
- Paring knife
- Cutting board (preferably wood)
- Large ripe tomato
- White kitchen towel

Scene 12

- Table draped with black cloth
- Copy of CRISTINA's report and BARTLETT's press release.

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Scene 1: The Tango

As the lights rise, we see JUANITA and HANK, as the "Dream Man," dance the first tango, a dance of initial contact and mutual attraction. It ends in a final pose. Lights out, then to ghost for scene change, with music to cover it.

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Scene 2: The Quinceañera (Sweet Fifteen)

JUANITA's quinceañera, the celebration of her fifteenth birthday and the ritual that announces her change from a child into a woman. During the scene transition, JUANITA will change into the quinceañera dress with the help of MOTHER. JUANITA sits at the table, which is draped with a pink tablecloth, as if in front of a mirror. MOTHER will help brush her hair and pull it back. The banter is playful.

NOTE: It is very important in this scene that the FATHER play the scene with a mix of tenderness and firmness in his voice, the iron fist in the velvet glove. Do not overplay the sternness. There is no need for him to be overly authoritarian because he knows he has complete power in the situation; however, when challenged, he is swift to remind those around him who holds the power and the consequences of challenging it. He is not without his charm, and it should be clear why MOTHER would have fallen for him as a young man.

MOTHER

You look so beautiful, Juanita.

JUANITA

Do you really think so?

MOTHER

Claro, claro! A beautiful child --

JUANITA

I think so, too!

MOTHER

-- and a beautiful woman.

FATHER

This is an important day for you, niña.

MOTHER

M'hijita, so, so happy for you.

FATHER

This day is very important.

JUANITA

Yes, Papá.

FATHER

Your quinceañera is an important day for all of us. You are getting older --

JUANITA

(aside to MOTHER)

Fifteen is sooo old!

FATHER

-- and you must now think --

MOTHER

Listen to your father.

FATHER

-- seriously of your future --

JUANITA

(makes a long face, a funny face)

Like this, Papá? Serious?

MOTHER

(to JUANITA)

Juanita!

JUANITA

Oh, I understand -- an important day. Today I am -- a woman! See?

(vamps playfully)

So mature? Heh?

(slumps)

But I am fifteen just this once, Papá --

FATHER

You are supposed to think seriously --

JUANITA

Seriously, yes, Papá --

FATHER

-- about what you are going to do with your life.

JUANITA

(flippantly, but not too much)

My life, yes. Yes, my life --

FATHER

That is what today is for --

JUANITA

Sí, sí, Papá.

FATHER

It is not about your enjoyment, your fun.

JUANITA

Yes, Papá, my life -

MOTHER

(softly)

Papá -- Papá --

FATHER

But from today on, you must remember that people will look at you differently --

JUANITA

Men will, you mean.

MOTHER

(mock shock)

Nena!

JUANITA

They already do.

FATHER

People will look at you differently --

MOTHER

(conspiratorial)

Los ojos, eh?

FATHER

-- people will treat you differently --

MOTHER

(making a grabbing motion)

Los manos --

FATHER

-- after today -- Don't distract her!

MOTHER

Yes, Papá.

FATHER

And you must learn how to behave so that you bring no shame on yourself or on us. No shame.

MOTHER

Let her enjoy her quince, Papá --

JUANITA

I agree!

MOTHER

-- without all the lessons. There will be plenty of time later
-- plenty of time -- for the lessons.

JUANITA

(laughs)

I can barely wait to dance the vals with padrino Pedro -- all that hair curling around in his old ears! The high point of the day!

Pulls MOTHER to her feet and uses her to mimic "Pedro." JUANITA "leads" MOTHER, as a man would.

JUANITA

He will tell me his stories -- again -- of the old times, when he was a gran bailarín, dancing with the famous so-and-so and so-and-so until dawn. (He never uses the same name twice) Then he'll do one-two-three once on top of my feet, give me over to somebody else, and go back to his whiskey.

MOTHER and JUANITA dance a parody of Pedro.

FATHER

(claps his hands)

Vamos! Vamos!

They stop dancing.

FATHER

(to JUANITA)

If you are to dance the vals, as you must, then you must do it correctly.

JUANITA

I already know, Papá.

FATHER

I doubt it. Come here. Your first lesson -- a woman should never lead.

JUANITA

And the second, Papá?

FATHER

Let me.

FATHER faces JUANITA.

FATHER

Mamá, show her.

MOTHER, with some reluctance, comes up behind JUANITA and makes physical adjustments as FATHER speaks.

FATHER

Your hand, like this.

(MOTHER adjusts)

Receptive. Open. Pliable. Your hand in my hand.

(MOTHER joins their hands)

Feel which way it moves -- feel how it steers you, like the wind in a sail.

Places his other hand against the small of her back. MOTHER presses it firmly against JUANITA.

FATHER

This hand -- like a rudder -- let it escort you. Arms like so -- the ribs of the boat that keep it strong yet supple. Then we move out.

(in rhythm)

One-two-three, follow me --

(they take their first steps; FATHER stops)

Looser -- let the captain guide you. Mamá, tell her.

They continue dancing.

MOTHER

(with mixed feelings)

Feel how he slips you this way, then that. Sense him. Anticipate him. Look into his face -- go ahead -- read it so that he can tell you, "Move here," "go there," "turn now," "pause." You are the boat in the hands of the captain.

FATHER

And not only dancing with your padrino. There will be others --

MOTHER

(mischievously)

And if they let their hands wander --

FATHER

Cállate, mujer!

MOTHER

Or hold you too close --

FATHER

This can be discussed in private.

MOTHER

Just push them gently away -- they'll understand.

JUANITA stops the dance and, playfully looking at MOTHER, then at FATHER, pushes him gently away.

JUANITA

Like this, Mamá?

Beat.

FATHER

(indicating JUANITA's face)

Mamá, what is this?

MOTHER

It is not much.

JUANITA

Papá!

FATHER

It makes you look provocativa!

MOTHER

It's not that much.

FATHER

(ignoring MOTHER)

That's not a word a señorita should have said of her.

JUANITA

But, Papá --

FATHER

(to MOTHER)

Why did you allow this?

JUANITA

It's not her fault. All my friends are using some -- I just wanted a little --

NOTE: The following speech should be said with affection for JUANITA -- go against the impulse to make a lecture.

FATHER

(takes JUANITA's chin in his hands)

Do you understand what I am saying?

(looking at MOTHER as he says the word)

Provocativa -- do you understand?

(JUANITA shakes her head no)

I did not think so. Because you do not yet understand your true calling in life. Do you know what your true calling is?

(JUANITA shakes her head no; to MOTHER)

Someone has not been teaching you well. Listen closely, niña. Today you will give a prayer to Our Blessed Mother Mary -- do you know why? Because your true life is a holy one -- holy, Juanita, holy. You must follow Mary's example in keeping the home sacred. That is your true calling in life. You see, Juanita, there are two kinds of women in the world: those a man will "visit" because of certain needs in life -- but they are not women he will ever take into his home.

(touching her face)

Not what a man wants in his home. No, men desire a woman who will keep a home as Blessed Mary kept herself: clean and modest, quiet and chaste. That is why you offer up the prayer, so that you can find the humility to bring peace to your husband and command obedience from your children. A man honor such a woman all the days of his life. It is -- It is as if you are a lighthouse, niña, your goodness guiding us. If you paint over the light with this, if you lose your place, then we lose ours. You provoke chaos -- and then the world becomes full of beasts.

MOTHER

Is that what the rouge on my lips and cheeks did to you?
Is it?

FATHER

Not to me. Not in my house.

MOTHER

You didn't listen to my first "no," then --

FATHER

Cheep, cheep, cheep --

MOTHER

-- did you?

FATHER

-- like a little hen.

MOTHER

And I did not say the second "no" to myself --

FATHER
(mockingly)

Yo confieso ante Dios --

MOTHER

-- that I should have. That I should have!

FATHER

You made your choice.

(to JUANITA)

She made her choice.

JUANITA

Don't.

MOTHER

I made your choice.

FATHER

You said yes all on your own.

MOTHER

And it has not bothered you --

FATHER

No one moved your lips for you.

MOTHER

-- not bothered you one bit --

FATHER

Lower your voice.

MOTHER

-- to give me "no" -- no! -- all the rest of your life.

FATHER

Para ti -- No. You don't know your own luck here. I have made you honorable. I have done the duty I was taught to do.

MOTHER

And made everyone pay.

JUANITA

Don't.

MOTHER

My life is my life --

FATHER

Such a horrible life for you--

MOTHER

No reason to make it hers.

FATHER

(to JUANITA)

Save yourself trouble and do not listen --

JUANITA

(to them both, but looking straight ahead)

Don't.

MOTHER

Don't spoil her day.

JUANITA

(with no emotion, straight ahead)

I am only fifteen.

FATHER

Your mother had you at seventeen.

MOTHER

Things are different now.

FATHER

They may be. But they shouldn't be.

MOTHER

Que Dios nos libre. God save us all, then.

FATHER

Enough.

MOTHER

Never enough for you.

FATHER

Enough!

MOTHER

I have things to do.

JUANITA

Mamá, you don't have to leave.

MOTHER walks upstage and sits. FATHER stands behind JUANITA for a moment, looking at her.

FATHER

(tenderly but firmly)

You have grown up so fast, niña -- but still so much to learn.

FATHER puts his hands on JUANITA's shoulders, near her throat, in a gesture that is both affectionate and threatening. She involuntarily flinches. He either does not notice or does not care because he does not remove his hands.

FATHER

(again, affectionately, but with power)

You carry a powerful name, Juanita, the name of my grandmother, Juana Maria. She had ten children -- all lived, drawing life from her strength, from her grace. She kept a firm and peaceful house where my grandfather could come away from the world. After today, the spirit of her name

will become your spirit. And I will be here mi pequeña, and teach you how to honor her name by living your life in the proper ways. It is a very special day. And you are very special to me.

Lights to ghost for scene change, with music.

* * * * *

Scene 3: The Tango

The next segment of the dance between JUANITA and HANK as the "Dream Man": forceful but not dangerous -- still a seduction. At the end, lights down, then to ghost for scene change with music.

* * * * *

Scene 4: The Instruction

JUANITA and MOTHER are at the table, draped in a lilac tablecloth. Coffee cups, saucers, spoons, coffee pot. JUANITA is now 17.

JUANITA

Mamá, I think I've met him. I really think I have.

MOTHER

I can tell by your voice that you have found something.

JUANITA

Do you want me to tell you about him?

MOTHER

Tell me, niña, tell me everything.

JUANITA

All right.

JUANITA

Well, come on.

MOTHER

Qué?

JUANITA

Ask me questions!

MOTHER
(tenderly)

Just tell me the tale, chiquilla tonta.

JUANITA

No, you have to ask me questions.

MOTHER

I'm very tired.

JUANITA

Come on.

MOTHER

Por donde do I start?

JUANITA

Where did I meet him.

MOTHER

Where did you meet him?

Now just HANK and no longer the "Dream Man," HANK rises and walks towards JUANITA, and as she speaks, they do a reprise of the tango movements in Scene 1. It is all MOTHER can do to stay in her place because she can see what is unfolding.

JUANITA

In the park. After school. A week ago. I was sitting, reading, like I like to do. And he just sat next to me. I acted as if I didn't notice him -- but I noticed him. I noticed him. He was feeding the pigeons, and he speaks to me in this Spanish that had an accent I couldn't catch --

MAN 1

(in a Mid-Western drawl)

Comó está usted? Qué libro está leyendo?

JUANITA

The Mid-West, he said. Breadbasket, he called it. Family values. Hogs. Chanchos, Mamá. Illinois and Nebraska and Missouri -- such strange-sounding words! He seemed nice.

They stop dancing, and JUANITA sits down. HANK moves his chair to listen to the conversation.

JUANITA

But you know me -- not giving away too much --

MOTHER

What is too much these days?

JUANITA

Very discreet. I say this, I say that -- but I like him. Gringo, yes, but nice, not pushy -- good Spanish. We've met every day -- the pigeons are getting to know us. He's so gentle that they even eat out of his hands.

MOTHER is staring out.

JUANITA

Mamá, pay attention!

MOTHER

So he wants to catch pigeons.

JUANITA

No! Just feed them.

MOTHER

It amounts to the same thing.

JUANITA

You can be so oblique, Mamá. Next question.

MOTHER

So he's American?

JUANITA

Yes.

MOTHER

What is his name?

JUANITA

Hank.

JUANITA pronounces the "a" as an "ah": Hahnk.

MOTHER

Hank?

MOTHER pronounces the word with a heavy emphasis on the "h" and an open "a."

MOTHER

What sort of name is Hank?

JUANITA

Es un sobrenombre for Henry. [the "r" would be strong]

MOTHER

Henry?

JUANITA

Enrique.

MOTHER

So why doesn't he use Henry?

JUANITA

Gringos like things short and quick.

MOTHER

A syllable is all that important? Caramba. Y su apellido?

JUANITA

Armstrong. Hank Armstrong.

The last name is a real mouthful.

MOTHER

You can barely get it out of your mouth. Why is he in Mexico?

JUANITA

Working here -- "NAFTA'd", he called it. Something about -- oh, I don't remember. Something technical. I didn't pay attention -- how could I with that Mid-West Spanish accent! (trying to imitate)

Vaya con Dios. The way he would spread the crumbs, the way his gentle hands --

MOTHER

Did he touch you?

JUANITA

(playfully)

Mamá, no! I was just looking at him -- the way you taught me to inspect the vegetables at the market! I wouldn't want to bring anything rotten home. He wants to see me, again.

MOTHER

Cuantos años tiene?

JUANITA

He's twenty-six.

MOTHER

Is it a stable job he has?

JUANITA

I didn't ask him that!

MOTHER

What do you know about his family?

JUANITA

Both his parents are alive and still married to each other.

MOTHER

Is he married?

JUANITA

(holding up her fingers)

When I inspected his "carrots," I didn't notice a ring.

MOTHER

(dismissive gesture)

Many men don't wear a wedding ring; your abuelo didn't wear a ring. What does that tell you about them?

JUANITA

(tenderly)

You are always seeing the worst, viejita.

MOTHER

Because I have seen so much, jovencita.

JUANITA

Isn't it true that we see what we want to see?

MOTHER

It is not always a matter of what we want. So you want to see him again?

JUANITA

He wants to see me as well.

MOTHER

Ah!

JUANITA

This does not make you happy?

MOTHER

Happy -- eh. You meet a stranger, you feed some pigeons, they fly up and away like visions, there is this cloud of love -- and you're going to live in -- Nebraska.

JUANITA

I'm not going to Nebraska!

MOTHER

How do you know? Palomita, how can you know anything at your age?

JUANITA

At my age, you had me. Isn't this a little better than that?

MOTHER

What do you mean?

JUANITA

We sit. We talk. He doesn't push -- he hasn't touched me --

MOTHER

You cannot trust --

JUANITA

We talk books --

MOTHER

Do not trust--

JUANITA

He buys me ices --

MOTHER

Stop it!

JUANITA

Why? Just because you --

MOTHER

Because I what?

JUANITA

Nothing, Mamá.

MOTHER

Because I what?

JUANITA

Lo siento, Mamá, perdóname.

MOTHER

Say it -- because I what? Because I -- was with your father
and had to go to my wedding day swelled up like a melon?
So I am what?

JUANITA

I'm sorry.

MOTHER

Say it!

JUANITA

There is nothing to say.

MOTHER

He made me do that. Your father.

JUANITA

You have told me this.

MOTHER

No, listen to me. He waited, he made the day wait until I was como un globo, and then he marched me into the church with that look on his face, to say to all, "Mine." Others, they changed the date on the birth certificates, saved face -- not your father. "Mine." Save face? Not him. His face right out there, in everyone's! He did his duty, all right -- he has always done his duty.

They look at one another, unsure how to proceed.

JUANITA

(tenderly)

I'm not going to marry him, Mamá.

MOTHER

Well, that is a comfort --

JUANITA

He hasn't even asked me! Not even a whisper! I just want to -- see him again. You know -- just a little --

(makes a gesture of flirtation)

Mamá?

MOTHER

Your abuela used to say --

JUANITA

You always do this!

MOTHER

What?

JUANITA

When you don't want to say something directly, out comes
mi abuelita.

MOTHER

Your abuela used to say --

JUANITA

Yes, yes, abuela --

MOTHER

Remember that the serpent is always trying to get the
woman to bite his apple.

JUANITA

I am not going to "bite" his apple, Mamá.

MOTHER

You say --

JUANITA

Just -- look over the fruit. And I am going to show you that it
is possible to have a happy time, Mamá. With a man.

MOTHER

Anything is possible.

JUANITA

We're not stuck the way you were.

MOTHER

Too many telenovelas.

JUANITA

I don't watch them.

MOTHER

But they watch you. They're in the air.

MOTHER begins collecting cups, plates, etc.

MOTHER

If you see him, you see him. You must tell your father.

JUANITA

El Señor Toro.

MOTHER

Respect.

JUANITA

For him, I will probably have to count Hank's teeth.

MOTHER

Your father has the heart of an accountant.

They exchange a look, the MOTHER brings the props upstage and sits. JUANITA looks out at the audience.

JUANITA

(in the Mid-West accent)

Vaya con Díos!

Lights come down, then up to ghost for scene change. NOTE: If you use Gardel's "Mi Buenos Aires Querido," the first thirty seconds or so can be used for scene change music. JUANITA joins HANK, and they dance.

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Scene 5: The Tango Lesson

A little more seduction, a little more edge and danger. In this scene, MOTHER will interact with the dance of JUANITA and HANK in an effort to break them apart, but as she does, she is either displaced or put aside until it is clear she has no more control over the situation. Lights go to black.

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Scene 6: The Politician

In the darkness, a crowd murmur, as if at a press conference. Lights up. MAN 2, dressed as WILLIAM BARTLETT's spokesperson, steps forward with a folder. He shades his eyes, as if looking into a glaring light, points as

if he is pointing at people he knows, gives a thumbs up, etc. Then begins to speak. The crowd sounds fade out.

MAN 2

Good afternoon. Excuse me. Excuse me. Your attention, please? Good, good. Great. Thank you all for coming. Thanks. You all look so prepared! That's great. We'll have a Q & A after the Representative gives you a short prepared statement, which you all have in your press packets and which I am sure you will all find very interesting.

MAN 2 looks for BARTLETT, then continues.

MAN 2

Seems the Representative is a little late coming from his important committee work, but I know he's on his way -- yes, he surely is. Um, well, just to give you a little background to start with. As you know, among the issues nearest to the Representative's heart is his concern that all American citizens get a fair deal. But just as -- just as important to the Representative is determining who really is an American citizen, and thus deserving of the country's protection and appreciation --

BARTLETT enters, flusters MAN 2 momentarily.

MAN 2

(to the crowd)

Representative Bartlett.

As BARTLETT begins speaking, MAN 2 changes into the reporter PETER SCHIST. He moves two of the chairs stage right and sits -- this is where he will interview BARTLETT. He holds one of the press releases as well as the folder; also, a pad of paper and pen.

BARTLETT

Thank you. Over the past few weeks I have been putting the finishing edges on what one columnist has mis-named "a massive gutting of the Immigration and Naturalization Service." He was not entirely accurate. I don't want to dissolve just the INS -- penny-ante stuff, only "half-vast," as my grandson might say. No, I want to dissolve it and then the whole immigration regime based on it. That is the

real focus of my initiative, what I am calling "The America for Americans/Americans for America Campaign," or, as we call it around the office, the "4-A Campaign." Over the next five years, I want to end all unwanted immigration into the United States. I want to nullify any immigration services that use direct grants, loans, matching funds, or any other combination of federal money. In other words, no more handouts. It is time for all illegal immigrants either to become full citizens and pay their dues or be deported. No "green card," no amnesty. Either here or there, but not both. And, as some of the more -- emphatic immigrant rights organizations have been endlessly pointing out, "4-A" would eliminate certain sections of the Violence Against Women Act. Some -- maybe even some of you -- might consider all of this harsh, but we consider it a matter of simple justice. We will always continue to welcome those who want to contribute. But illegal aliens cost taxpayers billion of dollars a year while our own citizens go wanting. It is time for this to stop, and I am going to stop it because the federal government and the state governments have failed to control our borders. America must be made safe for Americans. Thank you.

BARTLETT moves seamlessly from the press conference to the interview with SCHIST.

BARTLETT

Peter Schist?

They shake hands.

SCHIST

I appreciate your taking --

BARTLETT

Schist, Schist --

SCHIST

-- the time to meet with me.

BARTLETT

-- isn't that a geological term?

SCHIST

Yes.

(as if he has said this before)

"Any of various medium- to coarse-grained metamorphic rocks -- "

BARTLETT

Fissile --

SCHIST

What?

BARTLETT

Fissile -- that's the term, right?

SCHIST

Easily split, yes -- fissile.

BARTLETT

I suppose "fissile" 'snot a bad quality for a journalist.

SCHIST

I prefer to think I have a rock's more -- enduring qualities.

BARTLETT

And so should we all. And so we shall. Like your newspaper -- it's been very -- important to have your paper's "unfissiled" support in my efforts.

SCHIST

But what you're proposing here --

(indicating the press release)

-- is pretty -- steep.

BARTLETT

(indicating the press release)

You mean that? That's for them out there -- for those "media outlets" who think cutting and pasting press releases into column inches equals journalism. For them, it's got to be flat -- middle of the strike zone. In here -- between us -- we can go through the complexities.

SCHIST

To be honest, Representative -- and I don't mean to be impolite here -- but I don't see many of what you call "complexities" --

BARTLETT

In effect -- but in reasons why, in philosophy, very rich.

SCHIST

Detentions, deportations, denial of appeals -- and deleting the Violence Against Woman Act --

BARTLETT

I'm going to hear your litany spoken in a tone of -- what? -- scholarly inquisition, probing the roots of my philosophy. Should I go ahead and assume that?

SCHIST

Yes, of course.

BARTLETT

I think assuming that will make this interview flow much more smoothly. Now, where would you like to begin?

SCHIST

How would you like to begin, Representative?

BARTLETT

I would never encroach on the freedom of the press to ask its own questions in its own way.

SCHIST

In a sentence or two, how would you summarize your "4-A Campaign"?

BARTLETT

Good pitch -- inside the strike zone --

BARTLETT chuckles.

SCHIST

What?

BARTLETT

Fissile -- doesn't that word just roll off the tongue?

Beat -- then lights out.

* * * * *

Scene 7: The Proposition

JUANITA uses her shawl as a cape to play the bullfighter with him.

NOTE 1: Throughout the scene, HANK should be played as charming and engaging; we should see why JUANITA would risk so much for him. But there is a disconnect between what he says and the way he says it.

NOTE 2: The use of the shawl as a connective device in this scene is very important. At all times it should be a "character" in the scene.

JUANITA

Olé, olé, toro!

HANK goes after the shawl. JUANITA spins and sets up for another pass.

JUANITA

Olé, torito, olé! I am not afraid of you.

HANK makes another pass, and as he does so, he grabs one end of the shawl.

JUANITA

Oh, now like a fish on the line. Hooked.

HANK

A willing fish.

She pulls him close.

JUANITA

Landed.

HANK

Breathless.

They kiss. He takes the shawl and puts it around her to hold her to him.

HANK

Have you thought about it?

JUANITA

Thought and thought.

HANK

And?

JUANITA tries to move away, but HANK has her in the shawl, and he pulls her against him.

HANK

And?

JUANITA

It's not that simple.

HANK

What's not that simple?

JUANITA

What you ask.

HANK

And what am I asking, querida? I am only asking for you.

JUANITA

That is what is not so simple.

HANK

Sure it is.

JUANITA

That American breeze --

HANK

I ask -- you smile at my asking -- go ahead, smile!

JUANITA makes a funny face.

HANK

I will take that as a smile -- you answer "yes" --

HANK playfully tries to get her to answer "yes," but JUANITA, equally playful, refuses, just like a little child.

HANK

(in JUANITA's "voice.")

"Yes, Hank."

JUANITA

Is that how I sound?

HANK

And when you say "yes," we go to -- let's see -- Nebraska! -- simple! -- and we become married. Which is what I really want to become with you. Now, isn't that the simplest, the sweetest thing you have ever heard in your life?

JUANITA

We cannot just do it that way.

JUANITA slips out of the shawl.

HANK

That way -- or any way it seems.

JUANITA

Don't be angry.

HANK

But the idea of marriage -- with me -- a life -- yes, no? -- or should I just fold up my tent now?

JUANITA hesitates.

HANK

(folds the shawl)

I can start folding.

JUANITA shakes her head "no."

HANK
(relieved)

It's a bear to get that tent back in the bag.

JUANITA

I have these -- doors --

HANK

You've said that --

JUANITA

-- that must be opened and walked through.

HANK

And I've said that if you trust this --

JUANITA

I do trust you!

HANK

Then you don't need to worry about all those doors. We just -- go around.

(makes a funny gesture to indicate "go around.")
Outflank 'em.

HANK takes the shawl and wraps it around her hands.

HANK

I will take care of you, linda. You will be safe with me.
(child-like voice)

I love you, you know. Yes? Huh? That has to count for something, yes?

She walks away from him, unwrapping her hands.

JUANITA

For me, yes, of course, you count, but for my family --

HANK

Come back, palomita.

JUANITA

Different loves, Enrique -- divided --

HANK

Come, come --

JUANITA

(drawing a line down her body)

This is the border where I am split. Do you see? What passport do you have for me?

HANK

Your poetry -- Let's pretend -- for the moment -- that we don't tell them.

JUANITA

That's not possible.

HANK

Just wait -- I can arrange all the paperwork --

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

Imagine --

JUANITA

Listen to me.

HANK

Listen to me.

JUANITA

(she puts the shawl around her shoulders)

You are asking me to deny my family. No, no, wait -- please. You are asking me to change my heart completely.

HANK

I am not asking you to change your heart.

JUANITA

You are.

HANK

I wouldn't want that heart because that would not be the heart I love. I want something very different: I want you to see that there is so much new to be known -- our own life -- that's your passport --

JUANITA

The rules are strong --

HANK

We can be stronger.

JUANITA

They are carved into my bones --

HANK takes her hand into his and "carves" his next lines.

HANK

Then let me carve one more, like we used to do on a tree back home to declare to the world: "Hank loves Juanita."

It tickles JUANITA delightfully.

JUANITA

I can feel that in my bones --

HANK

Good bones. Haven't you ever -- naw --

JUANITA

What?

HANK

Haven't you ever just once -- just one little once -- wanted to -- break free?

JUANITA

Claro.

HANK
(soft mimic)

Claro.

JUANITA

But "wanting" is not the same as "doing" in my life.

HANK

But why should the pleasure be guilty -- to just let go?

He comes up behind her and, taking the shawl, slides it down to her waist and pulls her to him. It also pins her arms to her side.

HANK

Let go of all the rules? To have them let go of you? Finally free. Think how -- good -- how -- right -- that would feel. With me.

JUANITA melts but does not give in -- she will not show him that yet. She slides through the shawl to sit on the floor.

JUANITA

No.

HANK

No?

JUANITA

No.

HANK

Oh?

JUANITA

You are so American --

HANK sits on the floor as well.

HANK

Is that not part of my charm?

JUANITA

My exotic blossom del norte --

HANK

Can't resist the bouquet --

JUANITA

My hothouse bloom --

HANK

You cannot resist the power of the exotic --

JUANITA

It's true -- that mid-West Spanish accent!

HANK

Qué libro está leyendo?

JUANITA

Vengan, palomitas!

(trying to say it in English)

Come here, my pee-jons [pigeons].

HANK

Eating out of my hand --

JUANITA

And that -- that! The eating out of your hands! As if,
American, you can have whatever you want.

HANK

And why not, mi pequeño Mejico?

JUANITA

(mimicking)

And why not?

HANK

That's how we acquired Texas to California.

JUANITA

Stole.

HANK

Liberated.

JUANITA

And I am to be one more conquered territory?

He tosses her one end of the shawl.

HANK
(speaking playfully)

Yield, woman, to the superior force of Yankee imperialism.

He pulls on the shawl.

JUANITA
(also playfully)
Only as "superior" as you think so.

She pulls back on the shawl. It becomes a gentle but determined tug of war.

HANK
Oh, but it is. I don't see a whole lot of Mexican businesses
going north --

JUANITA
To Grindgolandia --

HANK
-- but I sure do see a lot of American businesses coming
south of the Rio.

JUANITA
But we have siestas.

HANK
And that's your crucial geopolitical mistake -- we get all our
conquering done in the afternoon.

JUANITA
But siestas can be very -- collaborative.

HANK
Is that an invitation?

She stands up, holding onto one end of the shawl.

JUANITA
As mi abuelita said -- never invite the charming leopard
inside the house for dinner.

HANK

Then come outside -- ven, palomita.

He pulls on the shawl, and she falls forward and rests her hands on his shoulders. They kiss, and then she sits on him, forcing him to lean back.

HANK

When you come to my home, you'll see how the American values of hard work and fair play --

JUANITA

And the woman under the thumb of the man --

HANK

Well, under the man, at least!

JUANITA

Stop it! I read about that. About your churches.

HANK

Not always -- though not a bad scheme.

JUANITA

Do you believe that?

HANK

I'm not much of a church-goer.

JUANITA

But do you believe that?

JUANITA stands; HANK continues to sit.

HANK

Makes sense of a kind -- someone to take care of the kids, someone to win the bread. Made sense to my parents. Makes sense to me. A natural division of labor.

JUANITA

You make it sound like a factory.

HANK

Come down my assembly line!

JUANITA

Enrique, my heart does not do well in a factory.

HANK holds out the shawl like a toreador's cape.

HANK

Then we won't even crack the spine of a Bible.

JUANITA and HANK start the "proposition tango" here -- simple, without music; this tango will be echoed at the end of Scene 9. HANK speaks as they dance.

HANK

If you agree to marry me -- if -- you will have someone who will protect you always. My father brought me up right: be strong in the sight of your woman, provide well for her, honor her all the days of your life. Imagine the future, Juanita; don't just look at what you know. The future will be good. It will be good for us.

Tango ends. HANK slips his hands to her shoulders, reminiscent of FATHER's hands in Scene 2.

HANK

A new kind of life, a new start, in a new place. It will just be you and I, sailing off for our brave new world.

HANK, JUANITA, MOTHER, and FATHER move into the "elopement tango," which has the core story of HANK taking JUANITA away from FATHER and MOTHER and all the "rules." The tango has all possible combinations of the four characters dancing.

* * * * *

Scene 8: Asistencia, Inc.

The offices of Asistencia, Inc.: desk, with blotter and other articles; two chairs, one behind the desk. In the office, seated, is PETER SCHIST, with his pad of paper and pen.

The phone rings -- 6 times altogether. SCHIST is undecided about whether to pick it up, but just as he decides, it stops ringing. He sits -- there is a

ten-second delay, then another round of rings. As they begin, CRISTINA enters, carrying a briefcase.

CRISTINA

I'll get it. Don't get up.

CRISTINA answers the phone, but no one is on the other end.

CRISTINA

(very softly)

Damn!

(to SCHIST)

Sorry. We hope and pray for the new phone system. Care to add a prayer?

SCHIST

I can take one out of my deep freeze.

CRISTINA

Spare two while you're down there?

SCHIST

Done.

CRISTINA

Then we're that much farther along.

CRISTINA shakes SCHIST's hand.

CRISTINA

Peter Schist?

SCHIST

Like the rock. Cristina Lefcadia?

CRISTINA

When I woke up this morning. Thank you for waiting for me
-- an hour behind! -- did my secretary give you the message
--

SCHIST

Yes, she did.

CRISTINA

-- about being late?

SCHIST

Yes, she did. Thank you for calling.

CRISTINA

I'm tempted to apologize --

SCHIST

No need --

CRISTINA

-- I hate to be kept waiting --

SCHIST

It's okay --

CRISTINA

-- but I'm sure you can imagine --

SCHIST

I can imagine. This Luisa Ortiz story must be running you ragged --

CRISTINA

(makes a pulling motion with her hands)

Four horses in five directions at once.

SCHIST

Painful --

CRISTINA

But unavoidable.

SCHIST

I'm sure.

CRISTINA

Every time -- we'll -- interview in a minute, Mr. Schist, but before we slip on our roles -- reporter, executive director -- I want to share something with you. Every time a Luisa Ortiz

-- what? happens? bursts? -- whatever the word -- those of us out here get cut three ways.

SCHIST asks by holding up his pad and pen if he should write.

CRISTINA

No, don't write yet -- just listen. A -- prelude, of sorts. Luisa Ortiz loses her life to a batterer: a bad cut. Especially at the hands of someone who brought her here and made her believe she'd be safe. But then lots of people suddenly discover this "hidden" problem of battered immigrant women, and that's a good cut. That's good. And that's why you've come.

SCHIST

Take a "good cut" at the story.

CRISTINA

And I appreciate that -- it's an important story.

SCHIST

Yes, it is.

CRISTINA

And I'm glad you agree. But in here --

(tapping her breastbone)

-- in here -- the cut that cuts the deepest, Mr. Schist, and this is the title it carries: We lost another one. And that sticks. Right. Here.

SCHIST

I can understand.

Beat.

CRISTINA

I confess sometimes I still can't. But life marches on, which is what has made me late getting to you -- two other interviews and a phone-in show already this morning -- that's three horses, I think --

SCHIST

Lost count already --

CRISTINA

-- squeezed in between a meeting with some of our funders,
and this afternoon's calendar -- well, enough horses.

SCHIST

A whole stable.

CRISTINA

But I'm glad you waited because you are someone I wanted
to talk to.

SCHIST

Me.

CRISTINA

Yes, because you are a person who does important stories
-- I read your interview with Representative Bartlett.

SCHIST

Ah.

CRISTINA

I thought it was good --

SCHIST

You did.

CRISTINA

I thought you treated him squarely enough, gave him room
for his world-view to spread out.

SCHIST

Even though you dis[agree] --

CRISTINA

Even though Asistencia, Inc. disagrees pretty completely
with him, yes -- I still thought you did a good job.

SCHIST

We all like such good reviews.

CRISTINA

Now, Mr. Schist -- and this, I think, is the moment where we put the roles on -- you need something from me about Luisa Ortiz because Luisa had been working with Asistencia before what -- happened -- to her. And I could do that very easily for both of us -- something like this: "Cristina Lefcadia, Executive Director of Asistencia, Inc., an organization dedicated to helping battered women, especially immigrants, deeply regrets that Luisa Ortiz lost her life at the hands of a U.S. citizen." There -- complete, contained --

SCHIST

Not to mention dry --

CRISTINA

Yes.

SCHIST

Not to mention short --

CRISTINA

Not to mention not useful to someone who writes important stories. Something longer, then.

SCHIST

Of course.

CRISTINA

Because important stories need more room -- good, we are agreed there. But "the story" -- the story -- the story is not going to be what you think it is: the story is not going to be Luisa Ortiz.

SCHIST

No.

CRISTINA

No.

SCHIST

Not Luisa Ortiz.

CRISTINA

No.

SCHIST

I don't understand.

CRISTINA

She is not the important story.

SCHIST

She's not.

CRISTINA

No.

Beat.

SCHIST

Then what is?

CRISTINA

Then what, indeed? Have you ever covered anything like this?

SCHIST shakes his head no.

CRISTINA

There's an importance to this "important story" you may have missed --

SCHIST

Really --

CRISTINA

-- because of your industry's insistence -- mind, I'm not blaming you personally -- but there's a pressure that "if it bleeds, it leads" -- you've heard of that?

SCHIST

"If it dies, it flies."

CRISTINA

And if a story like Luisa Ortiz leads, there usually isn't much that follows up the bleeding. Yes? No post-funeral interviews, no six-month re-visit, not even covering the trial -- you see my point?

SCHIST

Not all "importance" is equal to an editor -- that's true.

CRISTINA

And your editor, to you -- I'll guess, but something like this? "You talk to Lefcadia since Bartlett said the Violence Against Women Act stuff, so there's a hook -- get a good pull quote -- mix the police reports with some boilerplate about Asistencia, spice it if you can get some of the, uh, backstory about Luisa's life, but don't push that -- chop, puree, bake -- and then let's move to the next." Is that far off?

SCHIST

Mostly on.

CRISTINA

Representative Bartlett, on the other hand --

SCHIST

On the other hand.

CRISTINA

He gets --

SCHIST

Headline --

CRISTINA

By-line for you --

SCHIST

Above the fold --

CRISTINA

Jump-head to full page inside. Luisa Ortiz -- a brush-stroke.

SCHIST

Representative Bartlett --

CRISTINA

A landscape. Wall-wide.

SCHIST

And you want --

CRISTINA

Don't jump ahead of me, Mr. Schist. This is not about Lefcadia or Asistencia -- Luisa needs something more than another churned-out communique about "those people" and what they do to each other.

CRISTINA takes a manuscript out of her briefcase.

SCHIST

I have a deadline.

CRISTINA

We all have a deadline, Mr. Schist.

CRISTINA hands him the report.

CRISTINA

Here's the best way to meet yours.

SCHIST

Which would be how?

CRISTINA

As always.

SCHIST

Which is?

CRISTINA

The truth.

SCHIST

This --

CRISTINA

Our latest --

SCHIST

A report.

CRISTINA

Your real story -- analyzing the text of the new bill from Representative Bartlett that would, with what sounds like the soundest of reasons, de-activate the Violence Against Women Act. You have all the background from your interview -- here's the "hook."

SCHIST

I know, I know -- but possibly shorter?

CRISTINA

You wanted longer.

SCHIST

Deadline mercy?

CRISTINA

Aren't you fellows supposed to have grace under pressure?

SCHIST

Should the through-line be, "There will be more Luisa Ortizes if -- "

CRISTINA

No. I told you, Luisa is not the story. She got murdered because someone's dark heart exploded. The law couldn't have prevented that.

SCHIST

The point, then --

CRISTINA

Mr. Schist, you should have understood by now -- our exchange -- our dance is not going to be about my giving you a point to carry away. A point, a single point, is so small, almost weightless -- put my ten-second single point

in ten-point newspaper type, and it will evaporate. Yes?
Become point-less.

(does not wait for him to respond)

What I want you, the writer -- no, what Luisa needs you,
the writer, to do -- is connect points, multiples with multiple
lines, like those "connect the dot" games for children. Dot
to dot to dot to dot until you've created -- Created what,
Mr. Schist? What did you and your newspaper create for
Representative Bartlett?

SCHIST

An atmosphere.

CRISTINA

An atmosphere -- yes -- good word -- a bigger picture, right?

SCHIST

Right --

CRISTINA

With its own gravity and air supply. You've done that before
-- you did it well with Representative Bartlett, so I know you
can do it.

SCHIST

An atmosphere.

CRISTINA

(pointing to the report)

That -- that -- having the Act in place that Representative
Bartlett wants to take away couldn't have saved Luisa -- but
if he takes it away -- for no better logic that I can see except
meanness -- I'm sorry, I don't want to be harsh, but that's
what it sounds like to us -- it creates an atmosphere that,
around here at least, reeks of -- well, I might as well say it
-- of "open season."

SCHIST

That's a little strong --

CRISTINA

One of the dots, Mr. Schist -- if that goes, then the Luisas
will have no barricades if they can get away. If they can

-- one more point. Eliminate it -- another point -- and the batterers have one more tool to cut the Luisas down.

SCHIST

So where am I with all these points?

CRISTINA considers him.

SCHIST

Deadline mercy?

CRISTINA

I am going to take a risk with you, Mr. Schist. Perhaps I shouldn't do this, but I am going to trust you with some inside thoughts -- as part of the atmosphere -- and I hope you won't dishonor them. Can I trust you?

SCHIST

I can be trusted, but --

Schist holds out his watch.

CRISTINA

When you run Representative Bartlett down Column A and me down Column B -- the story looks equal, doesn't it -- two sides. But all the power is here, and then there's us -- we are allowed to politely and rationally propose while he -- and it's not even him, really, but the atmosphere -- disposes. And when power disposes of something -- another point, Mr. Schist -- someone will have a disposal problem -- and that's us -- that's our job -- emptying the -- well, I might as well say it because it's true -- emptying the piss pot. Waste management. That's our atmosphere. Yes, there is the Act --

SCHIST

And it does say --

CRISTINA

For now --

SCHIST

Yes, for now, but it does say that --

(checking his notes)

-- battered immigrant women married to U.S. citizens or permanent residents or "qualified aliens" can apply on their own for protection.

CRISTINA

Yes, but, again -- the atmosphere, Mr. Schist. To apply is not benign, like registering to vote. A hint, a whiff to their "politicians" at home and -- power disposeth -- they are "deported" -- a lá Luisa Ortiz. What's in the Act is just a beginning, minimal -- take it away -- well, I don't know what words you would use for "less than minimal," but I would use "Luisa Ortiz" and in the plural. In the atmosphere of the "4-A Campaign," Luisa Ortiz becomes just the latest unfortunate "waste" -- p[issed] -- placed -- in the pot to keep our borders pure.

(tapping her watch)

Deadline mercy is now in effect. I trust you have enough points. Read that -- and connect, connect, connect.

SCHIST

I do need to check something.

CRISTINA

I like a person who does his job. The spelling of Luisa's name is --

SCHIST

No, not that.

CRISTINA

Then what?

SCHIST

She was --

CRISTINA

What?

SCHIST

Well --

CRISTINA
What, Mr. Schist?

SCHIST
She was illegal, right?

CRISTINA
Illegal.

SCHIST
Yes.

CRISTINA
Was I wrong to trust you?

SCHIST
It's not my personal --

CRISTINA
But it's your newspaper's angle, so you have to ask, don't you?

SCHIST
She was --

CRISTINA
So?

SCHIST
So --

CRISTINA
So that made her deserve it?

SCHIST
No --

CRISTINA
Your point, then?

SCHIST
I'm just checking --

CRISTINA

And if you had bothered to check other facts, you'd know that she didn't wetback it here through the Rio Grande. She came as a wife. A wife. She had every right to expect safety.

SCHIST

But she was still --

CRISTINA makes some sort of physical gesture and/or movement that shows SCHIST that she wants to curse him but disciplines herself to hold it back -- it is the first time CRISTINA looks as if she is going to lose her control. SCHIST looks at her, a little abashed, and then looks at his watch again and stands.

SCHIST

Look, I do have to get going --

CRISTINA

Wait.

SCHIST

Do you want me to go with what -- little -- I have?

CRISTINA

Wait.

SCHIST

What?

CRISTINA

I don't want to think my trust was misplaced.

SCHIST

It wasn't.

CRISTINA

And, remember, four horses in five directions --

SCHIST

I said I can understand that.

CRISTINA

So, please, just sit, a few moments more -- just a few. I do want to show you something.

SCHIST

Another report?

CRISTINA

In a way, yes. It's not my first choice, but -- yes.

SCHIST sits down reluctantly.

CRISTINA

(holding out her scarf)

You wanted it short -- for deadline mercy.

CRISTINA puts her shawl around his shoulders. He is not sure how to respond.

CRISTINA

Relax -- don't worry about your objectivity -- you're in a safe place. Stare out there -- the middle distance, okay? Go blurry. Breathe. And listen.

She moves behind him and speaks to him; she can move from ear to ear, hover, etc. NOTE: If anything, these lines should be underplayed -- let the tension come out by restraint.

CRISTINA

Querida, querida, if only you hadn't shown me disrespect, I wouldn't have hit you. I didn't hit you hard, anyway -- but that disrespect -- no, no, no. If you tell anyone, I won't file the papers. I'll report you, and you'll have to go home in shame -- they can't do anything to me. It is your duty, palomita, to stay here and make a home for me -- feed me, make sure I'm happy -- and by law you have to have sex with me. Yes, it's the law. You can only talk to the people I tell you to talk to -- and I don't want you talking to anyone. No more magazines or newspapers. And if I hear beep, boop, boop -- nueve uno uno -- well, I will just have to teach you more respect. If you leave me and go back home -- I will find you there. I will find your whole family there. I will

even go after your dogs. Someone, some thing, will pay for your disrespect. There's more if you want to hear it --

SCHIST

No. No.

CRISTINA

(takes back her shawl)

That fear every day, that atmosphere? Prisoned by the hand, the fist, the foot, the belt, the knife. All while the power over there --

SCHIST

It must have been terrible.

CRISTINA

That's your starting point, Mr. Schist.

SCHIST

That's the story.

CRISTINA

What?

SCHIST

That's the story.

CRISTINA

I have told you -- that's not the story. That's --

SCHIST

You just gave it to me, so now it's out here to be used. A good story -- in the mind of -- how she feared -- photographs -- What? Wouldn't you want people to know that? to feel that? Isn't that why you gave me that "report"?

CRISTINA

I want people to know the whole story -- I want you --

SCHIST

I don't mean to be impolite, Ms. Lefcadia -- but you were an hour late for the interview, and my chops feel pretty well busted by now, so let me just say this before I get the quote

you need to give me. You truly know your business -- and I truly know mine. I will read the report, believe me -- all of them -- I do my homework. And I do argue with my editor about atmosphere and "big picture" up to where I don't lose my job. You weren't wrong to trust me -- but, trust me, I can't change the way the business makes nice with the Bartletts of the world.

CRISTINA

And makes lessons out of Luisa.

SCHIST

A good cut, you said wanted -- then you put Bartlett here and Luisa Ortiz here -- not you, not this --

(indicating the report)

-- but that --

(indicating the shawl)

Luisa Ortiz dead can be very much alive in this business --

(again, indicating the report)

-- but this? just "dead" dead, talking head dead -- That is how "the common folks" make news that gets past page 29 to page 1. People will remember if it wears Luisa Ortiz's face, not a title page --

CRISTINA

And forget everything with tomorrow's lottery winner --

SCHIST

You could have sent me home with my toys -- you know why we come around. You tried your best, but the leopard's spots won't change.

CRISTINA

You will not get Luisa's story.

SCHIST

Then what do I get sent home with?

CRISTINA

You will not feed --

SCHIST

Then what?

CRISTINA

Waste management.

(in a "quoting" voice; SCHIST writes)

"The staff at Asistencia, Inc. works with all private and public groups to prevent violence against women, whether they are immigrants or not. The government, through ill-framed laws, should not put people like Luisa Ortiz in jeopardy. The batterer here was not just her husband but a system that could not, and would not, hear her cries for help." Make the pull quote large.

SCHIST

I'll try to bump it up.

The phone rings.

CRISTINA

The fourth horse, the fifth direction. Excuse me.

(into the phone)

Hello? Can you hold for a moment, please?

(to SCHIST)

I have to take this. Above the fold at least?

SCHIST shrugs.

SCHIST

There is much that is out of my hands.

CRISTINA

We share that much at least.

(pointing to the report)

At least don't let it leave without a good thumbing. The dullest parts poison the hardest. I have to take this.

(into the phone)

Yes, yes, how are you?

CRISTINA motions goodbye; SCHIST exits.

CRISTINA

Yes, he's gone -- thanks for the buzz -- I have never learned well how to dance with the hyenas. Gracias.

She hangs up the phone.

CRISTINA

Luisa, Luisa. He never, never, never did bother to double-check your name.

Lights come down, then up to ghost for scene change.

* * * * *

Scene 9: The Abuse

NOTE: The scene will be composed of several smaller scenes, each indicated by a change in light, music/sound, and place.

Scene 9a: The "marriage" tango

Tango music comes up: the "marriage" tango; in the dance, HANK will give JUANITA a ring. The Tango ends, and they are somewhere in the Mid-West, HANK's territory.

Scene 9b: In the living room

NOTE: The assumption here is that they are speaking together in Spanish. At times it will be indicated that JUANITA is saying words in English, and her accent should change to indicate this.

HANK

Well, here you are -- home sweet home.

JUANITA

(in English)

Home sweet home. Where am I exactly again?

HANK

In the great American mid-West.

JUANITA

And where in that greatness am I?

HANK

In the "mid" of the mid-West.

JUANITA

Between?

HANK

Between the east coast and the left coast.

JUANITA

Don't make jokes with me -- just tell me where.

HANK

(lightly)

In the heartland. In the breadbasket.

JUANITA

Why won't you tell me?

HANK

Because you're here -- "mid" --

(takes her in his arms)

-- feel this east coast and then this left coast around you? --

(gives her a playful squeeze)

-- the "mid" -- and that's all that matters.

JUANITA

"All that matters" has been so -- unusual. It's been such a
-- hard journey for me, Enrique.

HANK

Coming to Nebraska -- that's where we are, palomita,
Nebraska -- can you say it?

JUANITA

(in English)

Nebraska.

HANK

You'll get that mid-West accent yet!

(with emphasis)

Nebraska.

(holding her closer)

Settle in my "mid" here -- let me tell you something true.
Coming to Nebraska has always been about making a hard
journey. That's how my people built this place -- one hard
journey after another. And it is good to be back home to
that.

JUANITA

So you don't like Mexico as much as you said you did?

HANK

Honey, it certainly produced you, and for that I am as grateful as dry corn for wet rain -- but it doesn't have the -- kick. You know? It's old. Old! Here you are going to find the new. The dynamic. The solid. Out here, Juanita, you'll see we have the best; out here the important values haven't died off.

JUANITA

The important values --

HANK

Yes --

JUANITA

Help me understand them, Enrique.

HANK

Okay -- here's one, maybe the most important one -- this is what my father taught me, and his father taught him, going all the way back to all the fathers: In this land, if a man works hard and keeps himself independent, that man can stand tall and feel respect for himself.

JUANITA

(repeating it, slight emphasis on "man.")

If a "man" works hard --

HANK

(slight mockery of her emphasis)

If a "man" works hard --

JUANITA

What did I say wrong?

HANK

See --

JUANITA

See what?

HANK

You're already making fun --

(sees her confusion)

"Man" -- you're thinking that "man" doesn't include women

--

JUANITA

No, no, no, no -- I was t[rying] --

HANK

Don't worry, Juanita, our women work hard -- they wear their share of the pants.

JUANITA

(confused by the phrase)

Pants?

HANK

Wear the pants in the family -- it means you can't get any serious work done in a dress.

JUANITA

That's -- well, that's just silly. My mother --

HANK

(lightly but without humor)

Now we're silly in --

(using her accent)

-- Nebraska?

JUANITA

Enrique, wait --

(waves her hands around her head)

-- too many words buzzing. Let's let them go. Shussh -- gone. Gone. Aire dulce -- now sweet air -- each of us a breath, deep -- go ahead.

JUANITA takes a deep breath; HANK does not.

JUANITA

It is not in me to make fun of what I do not understand. All of it slowly to me -- slow-ly.

HANK

Are you sure it's not too silly for you?

JUANITA

Remember me -- Juanita, new immigrant? Tin ears --

(taps her ears)

-- chin-chin. You have to help me make them ring. You tell me to understand this "man" and this "hard" that you say he works, and I am trying to do that because this "man" is you, no?

HANK

This man is me, yes.

JUANITA

You see --

HANK

But not just me --

JUANITA

Yes, your father, your abuelo, your bisabuelo, your antepasados --

HANK

And not just them --

JUANITA

And Nebraska --

HANK

Nebraska, yes, but --

JUANITA

But what?

HANK

This --

JUANITA
(lost again)

This what?

HANK

This, the world -- the men I came from, these men -- they made this land! They made it produce! The muscle -- vision -- man, the thrust forward, right into the ocean and beyond. Emptiness into gold, Juanita -- emptiness into gold, a whole line of them --

JUANITA

Enrique, do not confuse --

HANK

And there are things, people, every day --

JUANITA

I am not trying to make you angry --

HANK

-- every day in this country that try to tear us down -- that we did something wrong --

JUANITA

I know they're w[rong] --

HANK

-- turn everything upside down --

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

Why, even my job -- my job! -- making sure American jobs get sent --

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

NAFTA'd!

JUANITA

Look at me!

HANK calms a bit.

JUANITA

Enrique --

HANK

I'm not angry --

JUANITA

No, no --

HANK

I'm not angry! I'm not. It's just that the way -- the way you said it -- I heard it -- I may work in an office, Juanita --

JUANITA

That does not matter to me --

HANK

-- I'm not working the land like my father and his --

JUANITA

That does not matter.

HANK

-- but the blood still runs --

JUANITA

Enrique -- Enrique -- slowly, please.
(emphasizing as before)
Slow-ly. Please.

JUANITA faces HANK; she takes one of his hands and places it on her hip. In English.

JUANITA

Left coast -- right?
(takes the other one, does the same. In English)
East coast -- eh?
(pats her stomach. In English)
Breadbasket.
(pats his stomach)
La canasta de pan. Oooh!
(puts her hand on his heart. In English)
Heartland. La tierra del corazon. Say it, Enrique. Say it.

HANK

La tierra del corazon.

JUANITA

Again -- in that mid-West Spanish accent!

HANK
(laughing)

La tierra del corazon.

JUANITA

The land of the heart. In that honey Spanish you once used, with pigeons flying all around us, the language you said had poetry for its bones. Do you remember those soft words?

HANK

I do.

JUANITA

Do you?

HANK

Yes.

JUANITA

Those sweet moments in the park?

HANK

I do.

JUANITA
(as if at the wedding ceremony)

I do.

JUANITIA holds his left hand, puts her hand on his wedding ring.

JUANITA

Amándote y respétandote --

HANK
(takes her ring finger as well)

Amándote y respétandote durante toda mi vida.

JUANITA

Durante toda mi vida. Amen.

HANK

Amen.

JUANITA

You seem very proud, Enrique. Very proud.

HANK

Because I am.

JUANITA

You have made me see that.

HANK

I'm proud to be a man in this country.

JUANITA

And that makes me proud of you.

HANK

Come here, my palomita from old Mejico.

JUANITA

Old picante Mejico!

HANKS takes her in his arms.

HANK

Say it.

JUANITA

What, Enrique?

HANK

Nope, nope -- from now on it is Hank --

JUANITA

To me you are --

HANK

"Hank" -- say it --

JUANITA

You know how it sounds.

HANK

(laughingly)

I love how it sounds! Say it.

JUANITA

(pause, self-consciously, in English)

Hank --

HANK

"Honk" -- I love it. "Honk, honk" -- it's so funny --

JUANITA

Why can't I call you Enrique?

HANK

Because in the great American mid-West my name is Hank Armstrong -- go on, say it --

JUANITA

(as before, a mouthful for her)

Hank Armstrong --

HANK

And you are Mrs. -- Miss-us --

JUANITA

Miss-us. Enrique, at least señora --

HANK

Not señora Armstrong but "miss-us" Hank Armstrong --

JUANITA

(again, a mouthful for her)

Miss-us Hank Armstrong --

HANK

(laughingly)

Mrs. Hank Armstrong --

JUANITA

Mrs. Hank Armstrong.

HANK

On your way to full American!

JUANITA
(bravely)

Yes, full-time American.

Beat.

HANK

What?

(softer)

What? What?

JUANITA

Don't forget --

JUANITA makes a gesture to indicate herself.

JUANITA

Don't forget --

HANK

You?

JUANITA

Some -- already.

HANK

You don't need to --

JUANITA

Already, Enrique -- already. Remember everything -- everything!

HANK

I do --

JUANITA

Then remember to give me time.

HANK

How does a whole life sound?

JUANITA

(facing him, with a brave smile)

Well, Señor Toda Mi Vida --

HANK

Well, Missus All My Life --

JUANITA

(as she pronounces it, HANK says it along with her)

Well, Mister -- Mister Hank --

HANK

Excellent, Miss-us Juanita -- see, you aren't forgotten --

JUANITA

What do I do now in my new world?

HANK

Not a thing, my pioneer -- this man Hank knows his duty, learned from his daddy: P.H.P. Provide. Honor. Protect.

JUANITA

And what will I do while you are doing all these wonderful things for me?

HANK

You have the house --

JUANITA

Start my English classes --

HANK

I know.

JUANITA

Like you promised.

HANK

I agreed.

JUANITA

And the papers.

HANK

I will fill them out -- scout's honor.

JUANITA

Whatever that means.

HANK

It means -- Come here. It means all in good time, honey. All in good time. Breathe -- deep -- deep, all the way down from your canasta de pan! Here, lean against my tierra del corazon and look out there, the big Nebraska sky: you have your whole life in front of you. And you have me right behind you.

Lights down, with music for change, then up for the next small scene.

Scene 9c: The dining room

Lights up. JUANITA, wearing an apron, takes a second chair and slams it down angrily. HANK is sitting, as if for dinner. Through all of this, HANK never raises his voice much -- he is completely in command.

JUANITA

(throwing a purple napkin on his lap)

Why can't I start the class? Why?

HANK

(picking up the handkerchief)

That is not necessary.

JUANITA

Why?

HANK

Is dinner ready?

Beat.

HANK

Is it?

JUANITA

I called the school today --

HANK

I guess it's not.

Beat.

HANK

You called the school?

JUANITA

Yes.

HANK

You did?

JUANITA

Yes. A class starts tomorrow.

HANK

You used the phone?

JUANITA

Yes. I did. I know what you said -- but I did.

Beat.

HANK

You shouldn't put yourself in danger.

JUANITA

I wouldn't be in "danger" if you would file the papers, as you promised! Scout's honor!

HANK

There is no need to shout. I filed them.

JUANITA

You did?

HANK

Yes.

JUANITA

Then why did I find them thrown away? In the garage?

HANK

The garage.

JUANITA

Yes.

HANK

And what were you doing in there?

JUANITA

How much do you think --

HANK

Your voice --

JUANITA

How clean can this house be before there's no smell of anyone living here?

HANK

You were cleaning the garage.

JUANITA

Why are you shaking your head -- my father used to do that --

HANK

You are making things difficult --

JUANITA

It is difficult to clean this house until it has no soul --

HANK

So you decided to clean the garage.

JUANITA

I decided to "strike out" on my own --

HANK

On your own --

JUANITA

-- like your pioneers

(gives it an Spanish pronunciation: "peeoneers")

-- why are you laughing?

HANK

Pee-oneers --

JUANITA

Why were the papers there? Why were the papers there?

Beat.

HANK

They weren't filled out right.

JUANITA

What was wrong with them?

HANK

You missed some information.

JUANITA

You could have brought them back to me.

HANK

I got busy.

JUANITA

So, you have new ones, then, right?

HANK

I've been trying to get them.

JUANITA

It's been a month!

HANK

And what a month it has been.

Beat.

JUANITA

What do you want me to do?

HANK

Stop making things complicated and be my wife.

JUANITA

I am already your wife. What is so complicated about what I am d[oing]--

HANK

What is so complicated is -- I'm surprised that I even have to explain this to you. You have your space -- I have mine.
(indicating the garage)

That is my place.

JUANITA

I thought this was our home.

HANK

It is -- but that is my place in our home. If you want me to honor you, palomita, you have to act in an honorable way.

JUANITA

Honorable?

HANK

And there are things --

JUANITA

Honorable?

HANK

-- you have to understand --

JUANITA

It dishonors you to ask you to keep your promises?

Beat.

HANK

You see, you see -- look at me --

JUANITA

What is in your face?

HANK

Look at me. Good.

JUANITA

Your face --

HANK

This is what I am talking about. You are pushing, Juanita, my little "pee-oneer," just like a little boat against the wind -- pushing and pushing and just being selfish --

JUANITA

You said you'd fill out the papers --

HANK

-- just wanting what you want whenever you want it --

JUANITA

My English classes!

HANK

Listen carefully -- listen: The wind will beat you back. Don't make things complicated, Juanita -- they are not very complicated at all, I'm not a complicated man: in here, your place, and, out there, my place. Very simple. I want to honor you, Juanita -- you me want me to do that too, don't you?

JUANITA

(more to herself)

I want you to love me --

HANK

Don't you want that? Look at me.

JUANITA

Yes, of course -- honor me --

HANK

Of course you do.

JUANITA

But --

HANK

No, no -- come here: a lesson about that word.

JUANITA
(unclear)

Which word?

HANK

This word: "But."

JUANITA

I cannot say "but"?

HANK
(imitating the converstaion)

I go, "Of course you do" -- referring to honoring you, which I assume you would want me to do. And instead of supporting me on that point -- instead, you go, "But" -- "But" -- "But" changes the conversation, querida, it changes the point I was making for your own good. "But" is a word that crosses lines, crosses them out -- don't answer me with "but."

JUANITA

But Enrique -- sorry --

HANK

Why do you insist --

JUANITA

Sorry --

HANK

-- on making it hard for me? "But" just comes rolling out naturally for you, doesn't it -- you can't resist going your own way. You can't resist crossing those lines. Don't cross the lines.

JUANITA
(faintly)

You promised --

HANK

Yes, I promised -- but -- see, I can use the word -- "but," palomita, you have to earn back your right to the papers -- you crossed the lines by going into the garage --

JUANITA

I didn't know --

HANK

It's up to you.

JUANITA

Are there other borders I shouldn't cross?

Beat.

HANK

You can cross into that kitchen and get my dinner.

JUANITA

And are there other words I cannot have?

HANK

"Dinner" is one you can own completely.

They look at each other as the lights come down. Music for scene change.

Scene 9d -- in the bedroom

JUANITA puts on the purple bathrobe and stands in front of a "mirror," brushing her hair with the comb in her bathrobe pocket.

NOTE: At no point in the scene does HANK ever touch JUANITA; all power and violence is implied.

JUANITA

Teach me to drive.

HANK

I take the car each day.

JUANITA

Let's buy another. We have the money.

HANK

How do you know that?

JUANITA

I looked at the check book.

(noticing his look)

I can't read English, but I can read numbers. I know that much about American money! We can afford a car. I see them on television all the time. You could teach me.

HANK

And you would do what?

JUANITA

What would I do? What wouldn't I do? We need milk, toilet paper -- I could go to the store instead of waiting for you to go to the store. I could get a newspaper in Spanish, for God's sake!

HANK

They don't sell those around here.

JUANITA

Yes, they do. Yes, they do.

HANK

Where?

JUANITA

I know where.

HANK

Where?

JUANITA

I looked in the Yellow Pages until I recognized something in Spanish, and I called it. I found a bodega -- I call it every day -- just to hear --

HANK

So you want a car to go out and do things on your own --

JUANITA

It gets lonely here!

HANK

I don't provide enough, is that it? You call up strange men to talk with them --

JUANITA

It is a woman!

HANK

How do I know that's true?

JUANITA

Why would you doubt me?

HANK

Your family would be ashamed of you, you know.

JUANITA

For what?

HANK

For betraying me --

JUANITA

Betraying you --

HANK

Yes --

JUANITA

-- with a toothless campesina who chews her words --

HANK

I should write to them --

JUANITA

(clearly distressed but angry)

About what?

HANK

This and that.

JUANITA

That you keep me like a prisoner?

(HANK laughs)

That you won't fill out the papers?

HANK

Your father would understand.

JUANITA moves toward him, trying to calm the situation.

JUANITA

I am not asking for so very much --

HANK

Stay away from me. You betray me. I work hard, I give you a house, I give you food, I do what I am supposed to do -- all I ask is that you do what a wife is supposed to do -- and you don't even do that, lately.

JUANITA

If you would touch me rather than run over me, I would open like a flower. But no -- in, out -- thrusting!

HANK

Don't. Don't.

JUANITA

I'm sorry.

HANK

Don't insult me again.

JUANITA

I won't.

HANK

Don't ever talk like that again.

JUANITA

I won't -- I won't.

HANK

You will not take over this house.

JUANITA

All I want --

HANK

Sshhh. Sshhh.

HANK gestures for her to move away.

HANK

Why are you doing this?

JUANITA

I am just trying --

HANK

You have a lot to learn.

Beat.

HANK

I don't even know who you are.

Lights down and almost up immediately.

Scene 9e: Somewhere in the house

HANK

No more phone. And I keep the cellular. I've already told your little Guatemalan bruja at the store never to call you again.

JUANITA

You're not going to fill out the papers, are you?

HANK

Not until you behave. Not until you are proper.

JUANITA

Oh, Mamá.

HANK

Speaking of -- I hear your mother is sick.

JUANITA

You hear --

Takes a letter out of his pocket.

JUANITA

When did that come?

HANK

It came.

JUANITA tries to grab it, but HANK easily keeps it out of her reach. As she tries to get it, their struggles become a parody of the Tango steps they had done earlier. Finally, he lets her have the letter.

JUANITA

A month ago? Why didn't you --

HANK

You haven't earned it.

JUANITA

It's my mother!

(reads)

This is not good. This is not good. I have to go.

HANK

She could be dead.

Beat.

HANK

She could be.

JUANITA

I have to go.

HANK

And how will you do that? I have all of your life.

HANK takes a photograph out of his shirt pocket.

HANK

This was in the letter.

JUANITA goes to grab it, but HANK plays with her by keeping it out of her reach; it is as if JUANITA is a puppet.

HANK

Ah, ah -- don't do that. You are very grabby tonight.

HANK finally gestures for her to stop and he shows her the photo.

HANK

Take a long last look at your family.

HANK very deliberately tears the photograph in half, and then in half again until it is confetti. HANK drizzles it over JUANITA. JUANITA falls to her knees to gather the pieces.

HANK

Like the snows of yesteryear.

HANK kneels down to talk with JUANITA.

HANK

Querida, querida. You have no place to go.

JUANITA

Yo no entiendo.

HANK

Is it my English?

JUANITA

Habla español.

HANK

You have no place to go.

JUANITA

Habla español!

HANK

You are here to stay. You have shown great disrespect.

JUANITA

Yo no entiendo.

HANK

You're still a little girl. You need to be led very carefully.
You will learn.

HANK stands and pulls JUANITA to her feet, and they begin the "abuse tango," done without music, very physical, with grunts and out-breaths for punctuation -- it should include and parody steps from the previous tangos. When they finish, HANK goes upstage to sit. JUANITA kneels until the next scene starts.

* * * * *

Scene 10: The Decision

Music begins, something meditative. Tight bright light on JUANITA. She collects the torn pieces of photograph and tries to piece them back together. MOTHER stands just outside the light, watching. She is carrying JUANITA's blue shawl. JUANITA senses that she is there.

JUANITA

Mamá?

MOTHER enters and stands behind JUANITA.

JUANITA

Are you there?

MOTHER

Yes.

JUANITA

(startled but happy)

Oh, Mamá!

MOTHER

I have never left you, querida.

JUANITA lets the pieces of the photo cascade from one hand into the other.

JUANITA

So true. It is I who left you -- piece by piece by piece --

MOTHER comes and takes them out of her hands, places them in the pocket of her dress.

MOTHER

You never fell from my heart.

MOTHER helps her rise.

MOTHER

But this heart -- piece by piece by piece -- until only pieces, little one. No shelter from the storm.

JUANITA

Mamá --

MOTHER

I left you at the mercy of your father, and all his fathers -- I left you with no shelter. But now --

MOTHER gestures expansively, and there is a change of lights, something meditative.

MOTHER

Shelter --

JUANITA

Why do I know this?

MOTHER

It is time.

JUANITA begins to move around, as if she is touching particular objects, trying to recall a memory. As JUANITA moves, MOTHER "echoes" her movements.

JUANITA

Candles, papel picado, candy skulls -- sí, sí, Los Dias de Los Muertos! I remember -- I can remember all of it!

MOTHER

Such a happy time for you.

JUANITA

Cempazuchil, the marigolds -- the flower of four hundred lives! Rosquete. La ofrenda. Of course, of course! Look, look, look, look, Mamá -- pan de muerto!

(takes a bite)

Such sweetness -- right to the roof of my brain that sweetness would go.

(crows like a rooster)

Look, look, look at it all --

MOTHER

Look at it all very hard --

JUANITA

-- oh, it all floods back into me --

They both take a deep breath.

JUANITA

The incense, the copal, in the sahumerio.

JUANITA makes the motions of placing things; MOTHER does the same gestures.

JUANITA

The singing, the decorating -- almost too painful, Mamá -- but, let me carry it, more and more of it --

Beat. JUANITA turns to MOTHER.

JUANITA

Why so painful?

MOTHER

Because it is time. We will travel this together.

(indicating)

La ofrenda -- the altar. I place three candles. Purple --

JUANITA

-- for pain. White --

MOTHER

-- for hope. Pink --

JUANITA

-- for celebration.

MOTHER

Their shivering flames --

JUANITA

-- las llamas titilantes --

MOTHER

-- lighting the dark night of tired souls.

JUANITA

I see flowers --

MOTHER

Food, liquor --

JUANITA

Water for the ghosts to wash their hands --

MOTHER

Crosses of wood, of ash --

JUANITA

(making the sign of the Cross)

Of air --

MOTHER

Four compass points --

JUANITA

Four voices of prayer --

Beat.

JUANITA

But one thing -- missing.

MOTHER

You noticed.

JUANITA

The most important -- missing.

MOTHER

Tell me.

JUANITA

Whose picture --

MOTHER

Yes.

JUANITA

Whose picture is here?

MOTHER

For whom have we done all this -- yes.

JUANITA
(gesturing)

Only an empty frame.

MOTHER

It could be yours.

JUANITA

Could be mine?

MOTHER

Could be.

JUANITA

Am I dead?

MOTHER

What do you feel?

JUANITA

Have you come to tell me that?

MOTHER

I only echo you.

JUANITA

Then you echo me what I feel already --

MOTHER

And you feel --

JUANITA

I feel so -- I have felt so --

MOTHER

Dead, yes?

JUANITA

Yes.

MOTHER

Say it.

JUANITA

Dead.

MOTHER

Spirit crushed --

JUANITA

Yes.

MOTHER

Soul scarred --

JUANITA

Yes.

MOTHER

There are more deaths you have not yet died.

JUANITA

More?

MOTHER

Cells in your body -- that is how many more. And that is just the beginning.

MOTHER takes her by the face, as FATHER did in Scene 2.

MOTHER

Yes, that could be your picture.

JUANITA

What am I to do? What should I do?

MOTHER stands. She reaches into her pocket and takes out four marigolds. MOTHER hands them to JUANITA.

MOTHER

Compass. Cross. The four directions of your life.

MOTHER takes two flowers from JUANITA, shows one.

MOTHER

You can stay and be killed.

(shows the other)

Or you can stay and be dead in life. By degrees or explosion, it doesn't matter.

MOTHER crushes the heads of the marigolds and puts them in her pocket.

MOTHER

The anger --

JUANITA

The anger --

MOTHER

-- will wither your heart completely.

JUANITA

Is that what happened to you?

MOTHER takes a third flower from JUANITA.

MOTHER

You can kill. Vengeance.

JUANITA

Kill --

MOTHER

(presses the marigold into the palm of her hand)

A hot iron -- ssssss! -- that scars the wound closed. Sssss!
And done.

JUANITA

More death.

MOTHER

Possibly justice.

JUANITA

I couldn't. I have one more left.

MOTHER

Las mariposas. Las mariposas -- do you remember the one time we went for Los Dias to El Rosario, the sanctuary for the monarchs from the north? Delicate, fragile. Millions, orange and black -- the trees flaming with their restless wings.

JUANITA

I remember.

MOTHER

On their wings return the souls of our dead --

JUANITA

Every soul --

MOTHER

In that air burning with monarchs, in the land of our ancient blood, nuestras raices, we discovered that death can give us wings.

(indicating the remaining flower)

There is one more choice.

JUANITA

What?

MOTHER takes the blue shawl and wraps around JUANITA.

MOTHER

You can fly --

JUANITA

I am so tired.

MOTHER

-- even with your legs like ice, your feet like iron --

JUANITA

So tired --

MOTHER

-- your skin strangling every breath -- you can fly.
(taking the last flower)

Cempazuchil.

JUANITA

The flower with four hundred lives.

MOTHER

One of them will lead you to the sanctuary.

There is a pause as MOTHER embraces JUANITA tenderly from behind, as if to say, "I cannot make this choice for you -- but I am here." MOTHER exits.

* * * * *

Scene 11: Towards Resolution

Lights go to black, then up to ghost as music from Scene 10 plays through for the scene change. The office of Asistencia, Inc. is set. JUANITA takes off the robe, puts on her shirt and shawl, and sits in one of the chairs. As the music fades out and the phone rings, lights come up, and at the same moment, CRISTINA enters carrying her bag and a manila file folder. She sees JUANITA and she pauses. The phone rings two times more, then stops, for a total of four rings.

CRISTINA

The peaceful wonders of the new voice mail system.

JUANITA turns slightly away from her, so that when CRISTINA sits, she will not be able to see JUANITA's face directly. CRISTINA opens the folder. She reads through it as she speaks. She will also change out of her suit jacket and put on her red shawl.

CRISTINA

Bienvenida a Asistencia, Juanita. Me llamo Cristina. Usted está a salvo aquí. Qué puedo servirle? Agua? Jugo? Comida?

(JUANITA shakes her head no)

If there is anything you need, don't hesitate to ask.

JUANITA turns even more slightly away from CRISTINA.

CRISTINA

It says here on the intake form that you wanted to talk only to me, that I was the only name you had. How did you get my name?

(JUANITA does not respond)

That's all right -- we'll get to that. I know you're feeling many confusing things right now -- I understand. I just want to tell you again, Juanita, that you are welcome, and you are safe. You are not alone here.

JUANITA remains silent.

CRISTINA

I know what you are feeling. Not all of it, but some. The worry. The self-doubt. The shame -- the shame. How you think your family will hate you. How everything you thought was correct has become dangerous, how your "protectors" now hunt you down. Juanita -- you are safe to feel that here. That is a lovely shawl -- I noticed it when I came in. Mexican, eh?

(JUANITA nods)

Do you come from Mexico?

(JUANITA nods again)

Ah! A gift?

(JUANITA nods)

From your mother, sí?

(JUANITA nods again)

Yes, a gift a mother would give a daughter she loves. Part of my own background is Mexican -- can't be born in the American Southwest -- in old Mejico, eh? -- without a little sangre Meicana turning up. My people went far back. The stories they all tell, eh? I'm sure you have heard all of them. But sometimes too many stories, no? Too many. A person can get bribed by those stories, misled, fooled; they can make you forget too much.

CRISTINA uses her own shawl. JUANITA has now turned enough to see CRISTINA and can respond to her movements as feels natural.

CRISTINA

My mother gave me a shawl, when I was eleven. Blue, with a white thread pattern. A blue like yours. A shawl is an amazing thing, no? I never wanted to lose its warm sheltering weight off my shoulders. The way it draped over my arms, tapped my young spine as I walked. So many things in a shawl, no? It made me feel wise. I remember a long line of women, hair pulled into tight knots, all firm in their shawls, tough women, survivors. You are in that line, Juanita. What would your blue and patient shawl tell me if I were to ask it politely and con respeto to speak to me?

The lights change, creating a very bright pool of light for JUANITA. CRISTINA sits. This is a "visual monologue" by JUANITA. JUANITA stands in the pool of light. MOTHER brings out a white table, on which rest a stainless steel bowl, a cleaver, a paring knife, a cutting board (preferably wood), and one large, very ripe tomato. A clean white kitchen towel is draped over MOTHER's arm, and she hands JUANITA the towel. MOTHER then stands behind CRISTINA, her hands on CRISTINA's shoulders. HANK comes into the scene and stands behind and to the left of MOTHER, dimly seen.

Very slowly and precisely, and without words, JUANITA dissects the tomato, slicing it neatly, gouging it out, and squeezing the contents into the bowl. It must look and feel like surgery on the human heart.

When she's done, she wipes her hands, the cleaver, and the knife on the towel. MOTHER returns to get the table, then moves back upstage, as does HANK. JUANITA moves her chair back to its original position.

CRISTINA

The old stories never die, do they? Do they? We need to set some things right away, Juanita, and give you choices. Will you answer some questions for me?

(JUANITA nods)

Bueno. How did you find us?

JUANITA

An old campesina at a bodega.

CRISTINA

A little louder.

JUANITA

An old campesina at a bodega.

(with only slight irony)

I found her through the Yellow Pages. I would read until I came across something in Spanish, and then I would call.

CRISTINA

He never let you learn English.

JUANITA

(JUANITA shakes her head "no.")

I kept calling until I found a voice I could trust. She had friends who sent me here and told me to look specifically for you. Asistencia -- the name is known among las olvidadas.

CRISTINA

The forgotten ones.

JUANITA

There are so many.

CRISTINA

Does Hank know how to find you?

JUANITA

I walked out. After he left for work. I had the phone number and the address of the campesina and some coins I found in the couch. A few dollars I had stolen from his wallet.

CRISTINA

When was this?

JUANITA

Yesterday.

CRISTINA

Where did you sleep last night?

JUANITA

I couldn't sleep at her house because he knew about her.
She moved me in with some cousins.

CRISTINA

Are you there now?

JUANITA

I didn't want to put anyone into danger.

CRISTINA

So you have no place to go?

JUANITA

I have no place to go. I am here.

CRISTINA

We have many more things we need to do, Juanita. Doing these things means talking with strangers about what is most private in your life. It means setting a machine in motion that has as much pain as kindness built into it. Is this what you want to do?

JUANITA

I have no place to go. I am here.

CRISTINA

Then "here" is where it starts.

CRISTINA gently touches JUANITA's shawl. JUANITA and CRISTINA look at each other. Lights out., then up to ghost for scene change, with music for the talk show.

* * * * *

Scene 12: The Court of Public Opinion

SCHIST, now as IÑIGO QUIROGA, a talk show host. CRISTINA's desk contents are struck and the black table cloth used to cover the table. Three chairs. CRISTINA sits stage left of the table, BARTLETT stage right. Lights and music come up as if in a TV studio. A copy of CRISTINA's report and BARTLETT's press conference statement are on the table.

QUIROGA

Hello and welcome to La Vida, Hoy. I'm Iñigo Quiroga, your host, your coyote, and tonight, we continue with La Migración: Whose Frontera Is It?, our on-going look at the border issues America has with the Latino world. As you know, Latinos are the "greyhound" in American society -- moving up fast on the outside. And this "hot dog" worries some people because now it's not should we have some influence but of how much and when. And this fear often triggers calls for tighter and tighter limits on who gets in. But I'm here, not going anywhere, and we're going to have ourselves a lively exchange tonight because our two guests are, to put it politely, on opposite sides of the fence on this one. On my left --

The lights change slightly to indicate a camera shift to CRISTINA.

QUIROGA

-- is Cristina Lefcadia, Executive Director of Asistencia, Inc., an organization that helps immigrant women suffering domestic abuse, especially married to or involved with U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Welcome, Cristina.

CRISTINA

Gracias. Just a quick correction, Iñigo: we help all women involved in domestic abuse.

QUIROGA

Duly noted, and my apologies. On my right is Congressman William Bartlett, who represents this district. He just introduced legislation to cut back sharply on all aspects of immigration -- which will have the effect -- and here's an important point -- of also eliminating protections for the very women you want to protect. Welcome, Representative Bartlett.

BARTLETT

Glad to be here.

QUIROGA

Now, some ground rules, because I will bet there will be no eye-to-eye on any of this. Let the person finish speaking before jumping in with a response. And, for the benefit of the Congressman, everything in English. Congressman, let me start with you. Summarize for us why you want to restrict immigration as drastically as you do, especially when it will hurt people in your district? Aren't you supposed to protect your constituents?

BARTLETT

Of course I am -- and I'd like to think I've represented them well over the years. But "represent" is a delicate issue, Mr. Quiroga -- it really means, to whom do I owe my allegiance as a public servant? And I think that the answer is fairly clear: I owe it to those people who play by the rules of being an American citizen. I have to protect their interests -- they pay me to protect their interests -- that's my work -- wouldn't you agree?

QUIROGA

But there are many who play by the rules even if they aren't citizens --

BARTLETT

I know that.

QUIROGA

So why not include them?

BARTLETT

I see them every day in my district, and my heart is touched by their stories -- how could it not? But my oath -- my oath of office -- requires of me a harder duty: to protect the values that keep us free, which I try to do as best -- as best -- I can every day. America will always welcome those who want to work and produce and contribute. But we should discourage those who come here without, let us say, the best of intentions, even if they work hard --

QUIROGA

The "best of intentions" being citizenship --

BARTLETT

The "best of intentions" being to be an American.

QUIROGA

But as I understand it, if I have a million dollars to invest in an American business --

BARTLETT

Mr. Quiroga, that's a little crass --

QUIROGA

But it's true, isn't it?

BARTLETT

You make it sound like citizenship for sale. If you have resources to contribute, resources that we need, then I don't see any problem looking favorably on that.

QUIROGA

Technical skills --

BARTLETT

Same consideration, if we can use them.

QUIROGA

Guest worker programs, farm labor --

BARTLETT

Resources we need for the moment --

QUIROGA

But when the crops are in --

BARTLETT

When the need passes --

QUIROGA

No more huddled masses --

BARTLETT

Not if we want to preserve what makes us unique and strong.

QUIROGA

Let me shift the focus a little off the economics: if I'm a woman married to a U.S. citizen, brought here and abused --

BARTLETT

Is that a segue, Mr. Quiroga?

QUIROGA

I think it's a natural progression --

BARLETT

You're sure it's not an ambush?

QUIROGA

(picking up release)

I am sure it's one of the objects of your "4-A" campaign -- revoking the parts of the Violence Against Women Act that would help abused women, undocumented -- abused by American citizens --

BARLETT

Or resident aliens --

QUIROGA

Well, yes --

BARTLETT

Important to get the terms straight.

QUIROGA

Even if that means putting -- I'm looking at Ms. Lefcadia's report --

BARTLETT

I've read that, yes.

QUIROGA

Then you know that these are not low numbers.

BARTLETT

If they're true -- counting people who don't want to be counted can be tricky.

QUIROGA

But even if it's only one, the "4-A" campaign would jeopardize --

BARTLETT

Yes -- unfortunate, but yes.

QUIROGA

How do you justify that?

CRISTINA
(to QUIROGA)

May I?

QUIROGA

Of course.

CRISTINA

Representative, you mentioned "heart" --

BARTLETT

Yes, I did.

CRISTINA

Wouldn't you say that heart also makes us unique and strong as a people? Not just duty, or principle, or logic.

BARTLETT

Many things make Americans strong -- certainly their "heart" is one. Certainly a desire for simple justice is another.

CRISTINA

Simple --

BARTLETT

Yes, a very simple contract: the law protects you if you agree to live your life in a certain way. That agreement is called "citizenship," and simple justice draws a simple line: on this side, yes; this side, no.

CRISTINA

Luisa Ortiz hardly had that choice --

BARTLETT

My heart feels for her death, just as yours does -- what that man did to her was brutal, and he should be punished. But we can't base policy on the heart -- our own actions, yes, we can move ourselves however we want -- but not policy -- otherwise, that simple line goes. My duty has to move me in a different direction, towards a greater good, even while my heart grieves for one single person.

CRISTINA

There was no greater good for Luisa Ortiz.

BARTLETT

But not as a matter of policy.

Beat.

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia?

Beat.

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia?

Beat.

CRISTINA

I have to say, Representative, I'm a little thrown by your -- style of compassion. Heartfelt for certain people, not for others, based on -- what is, after all -- an accident of landscape, really.

BARTLETT

Citizenship is not accidental.

CRISTINA

In your world, no, no, of course not -- it's a policy matter -- but in mine, in ours -- well, we just can't tally things up your way, abstractly -- dutifully. People's lives, textures,

densities -- it's all too messy, all too rich for policy. Your life included, Representative -- you have a classic background.

BARTLETT

My background.

CRISTINA

Irish, isn't it?

BARTLETT

Is this where you want to take the discussion?

CRISTINA

Representative, it's in all your press materials --

BARTLETT

All right. Irish, yes. By way of the potato famine.

CRISTINA

Through the port of --

BARTLETT

Boston.

CRISTINA

Third generation?

BARTLETT

Fifth, actually.

CRISTINA

Four prior generations made their way to Nebraska?

BARTLETT

Yes.

CRISTINA

And is five generations the tipping point, Representative?

BARTLETT

I don't understand the term.

CRISTINA

The point where an immigrant "tips" into being a native -- certified -- a constituent?

BARTLETT

I don't think it's about math.

CRISTINA

But I'm looking at your life trying to grasp your calculus, Representative -- because you do have a math, an obvious one.

BARTLETT

I do?

CRISTINA

Time, generations -- say, five of them -- and a person acquires some kind of -- protection. Shelter. Acquires your representation.

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia, we have to move on --

CRISTINA

But if a protected one -- say, a young American man -- betrays a young non-American woman -- no protection for her because she is "non."

BARTLETT

As I said --

CRISTINA

Heartfelt regret, yes, you've said that -- but then comes policy and duty -- and constituents -- so many calculations about three small letters --

(spells it out)

-- "n-o-n." I am just trying to figure out how that adds up.

They overlap on the next lines.

BARTLETT

You make it sound --

CRISTINA

For instance -- pardon me for interrupting --

BARTLETT

That's all right -- go ahead --

CRISTINA

I just had this thought about the math of it all -- my blood has been in this country since Spain arrived -- actually, before -- mestiza -- more than five -- so should that give me even more protection? Or to try to figure it out another way: why do the sheltered people have problems with unsheltered people wanting to do what all our families did, yours and mine and --

(indicating QUIROGA)

-- yours? I have to confess, Representative, one more time, that all this calculating confuses me very, very much.

BARTLETT

Then let me explain once again --

CRISTINA

I wish you would clear it up, Representative because --

QUIROGA

Let him get his word in --

CRISTINA

(ignoring him)

-- because we could never seem to get the calculations right to see you to talk about it. We were in your office day after day trying to get an interview with you before you introduced the legislation. You were out, you were in a meeting, you were --

BARTLETT

I was out doing the work --

CRISTINA

Which meant that we had to be out preparing for the next Luisa Ortiz.

BARTLETT

(softly, condescendingly)

Then we were both doing our jobs, weren't we?

QUIROGA

Ms. Lefcadia -- Ms. Lefcadia -- why don't you talk a little about your organization?

CRISTINA

What?

QUIROGA

Why don't you talk about the work you do?

CRISTINA

The work?

QUIROGA

Yes.

BARTLETT

Yes, I would like to hear about your work.

CRISTINA

Waste m[anage] --

Cristina stops herself.

QUIROGA

The work?

CRISTINA

Yes. Yes. Ah -- Asistencia, Inc. is an organization which --

Lights change to downstage center; CRISTINA continues to talk as she steps into the light. MOTHER and MAN 2 take the desk. BARTLETT takes the chairs. They then sit upstage.

CRISTINA

-- which helps battered women, whether citizens, documented, or illegal, find the resources to get themselves out of -- Juanita, I talked. I got my mouth around the official language and spit it out. Bile at first, but I did it.

I talked and the passion spilled back into my words, the passion that keeps me in this fight. Played the game out to the end so that the barbarians -- that barbarian -- would not win again. I did it for you. For Luisa Ortiz. For the campesina. For all of us.

CRISTINA puts her shawl over head, as if in mourning. As she speaks, MOTHER joins her, also wearing her shawl as if in mourning.

CRISTINA

As I spoke, I saw him lift his smiling face up to the light, and it struck me that death wears such a fashionable smile as it grinds all our souls -- all our souls, all of us -- into an obedient dust.

As MOTHER begins to talk, JUANITA joins them, also wearing her shawl as if in mourning.

MOTHER

Because the barbarian is not a man even if it wears a man's face.

JUANITA

The barbarian is the anger and shame woven through all our hearts.

CRISTINA

From doubt and violation --

JUANITA

From unhappiness and vast oppression --

MOTHER

From dreams denied and truth dismembered --

JUANITA

From our mortal flesh as brief and cheap as morning dew.

CRISTINA

(she brings her shawl to her shoulders)
No more must any of us --

MOTHER

(she brings her shawl to her shoulders)
Man, woman, or child --

JUANITA

(she brings her shawl to her shoulders)
Walk the dry road of fear with a voiceless heart.

ALL

Because only we can turn the burden into song.

JUANITA

It can be now.

CRISTINA

It can be here.

MOTHER

It can be us.

ALL

Yes.

As each says her line, she will take off her shawl and hold it out in front of her. They will link hands while holding the shawls.

MOTHER

Because love --

JUANITA

Because love --

CRISTINA

Rises to life --

MOTHER

Rises to life --

JUANITA

Over the dry bones of death.

MOTHER

Over the dry bones of death.

ALL

El amor sube a la vida sobre los huesos secos de la muerte.

In one coördinated movement, they wrap the shawls around their shoulders and present a line of strong women. The light remains on the three of them, then bumps to black.

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also looks to collaborate with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) -- Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) -- Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

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www.blockandtackleproductions.com

