

Synopsis/Sample of The Happy City

(based on The Plague by Albert Camus)

by

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DESCRIPTION

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

CHARACTERS (doubling is suggested)

- Dr. Bernard Royce
- Miriam Royce, *Dr. Royce's wife* / Emma Reising, *reporter*
- John Thoreau (pronounced "thorough")
- Madeleine Rue, *Mayor's secretary*
- Dr. Lionel Castle
- General MacArthur / Herbert Hoover / Dr. Richard Freeman

- Mayor / Raster, *smuggler*
- Gerald Terrence, *head of health dept.* / Henry Clew, *new head, sanitation dept.* / Gravedigger 1
- James Parker, *head, sanitation dept.* / Leonard Johnson, *new head, health dept* / Gravedigger 2

- Mrs. Corinth / Nurse (both in the first scene and in Act II montage)
- Peter, *building superintendent* / Father Grey

- Rev. Josiah Hightower
- Dr. Galen Littlefield
- Orange Man (m'Bengue)
- Hannah Samuels

Various minor roles: As will be seen, there are a number of minor roles throughout, including children. Inhabitants of Liberty Town must be African American.

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

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

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

Note 3: Slides will be used in the Prologue and throughout the play. Slides come up for long enough to be read, then go out.

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

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Act I: Prologue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Slide: They had come to ask for relief.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10) By this time the sounds have fallen enough for the actor's words to be heard, or they could be miked if the sound is desired loud. Slides will underscore the spoken words. EISENHOWER's words are in VOICEOVER. The first slide should have on it this text: Major Dwight Eisenhower, General MacArthur's aide: "Let them retreat back to their camps." After this slide, however, do not include the name of the speaker, just the text of their speech.

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

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

Slide: Eisenhower: "And then what?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Where were you in the Argonne, buddy?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Slide: 20,000 people committed suicide.

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

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

14) Hoover speaks. Slides duplicate his words.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18) Music: something from 1932.

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

Slide: The Day Begins With A Departure

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

MIRIAM

Are you sure?

ROYCE

As always.

MIRIAM

Are you sure I look all right?

ROYCE

(gives her a strong embrace)

Yes, you do. Ready?

MIRIAM

Yes.

ROYCE

(to the NURSE)

Her medicines?

NURSE

(indicates one of the satchels)

Yes, doctor.

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

Sound: a train station in the background.

ROYCE

I wired the sanatorium again -- someone --

MIRIAM

My always thorough husband.

ROYCE

-- will meet you at the station.

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

ROYCE

Miriam --

MIRIAM
(puts a finger to his lips)
This is only for a little while. When I get back
-- a fresh start!

ROYCE
Yes.

MIRIAM
Things won't change that much until then.

ROYCE
(to the NURSE)
Be sure she rests --

MIRIAM
(laughing)
She knows what --

ROYCE
-- keep her calm.

MIRIAM
-- to do, Bernard.

ROYCE
I will miss you.

Final boarding call.

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

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

ROYCE
(to MIRIAM, as she disappears)
Take great care of yourself.

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

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

Slide: Beware A Messenger With **Any** News.

PETER
Dr. Royce! Dr. Royce!

ROYCE
What, Peter?

PETER
(indicating the bag)
Found 'em this morning --

ROYCE
What?

PETER
Three dead rats. Somethin' ain't right.

ROYCE
I'm sure --

PETER
Ain't the only ones. Other supers --
(scratches his arm)

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

ROYCE
Good.

PETER
Ain't right.

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

PETER
Why're the rats givin' up?

ROYCE
Giving up?

PETER
(scratches his arm)
You know, flat out, legs stiff up, blood all over
their faces --

ROYCE
Blood?

PETER

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

ROYCE

You're sure about the blood?

PETER

(scratches his arm)

Wanna see?

ROYCE

It's not -- No.

PETER

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

ROYCE

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

PETER exits, scratching his arm. ROYCE finishes with his bag, then turns upstage, where the lights come up on an old woman lying in bed, that is, seated in a chair. Two metal bowls are on her lap. CORINTH is 75 years old. On a table beside the bed is a small Philco radio playing music, very low. She has a quilt or afghan over her laps and knees. From one bowl she takes a handful of dried peas and drops them into the other bowl, one by one, metronomically. She continues this throughout the conversation. ROYCE prepares an injection.

Slide: The Oracle Is Not Always At Delphi.

ROYCE

And how is my strange asthmatic timekeeper today?

CORINTH

Pluckin' the fiddle.

ROYCE

Breathing well?

CORINTH

The bellows work, the brain still ticks. Noticed?

ROYCE

What?

CORINTH

The rats!

ROYCE

(gives her the injection)

Hold still.

CORINTH

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

ROYCE

Don't exaggerate.

CORINTH

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

ROYCE

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

CORINTH

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

ROYCE

In a few days, I'll see you.

Rises to leave.

CORINTH

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

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

Slide: Science Requires Verification.

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

ROYCE

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

He breaks the connection, makes another call.

ROYCE

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

He breaks the connection, makes another call.

ROYCE

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

Slide: The Brawd From New Yawk Blows Inta Town

ROYCE finishes the conversations, writes down notes.

ROYCE

Yes.

REISING

Dr. Royce --

ROYCE

(waves her in)

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

REISING

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

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

REISING

My pound of gold.

ROYCE

(indicates his own bag)

Could you get one for mine?

(finishes notes)

Yes?

REISING

(shakes his hand)

Emma Reising.

ROYCE

Miss Reising.

REISING

Emma.

ROYCE

Emma, then.

REISING

Sets the tone.

ROYCE

And you know my name.

REISING

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

ROYCE

For?

REISING

The Working Class United. Out of New York.

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

REISING

My calling card.

ROYCE

New York.

REISING

(with a smile)

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

ROYCE

The city?

REISING

The paper.

ROYCE

Sorry, no.

REISING

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

ROYCE

Sorry again.

REISING

You're apologizing --

ROYCE

Call it courtesy.

REISING

Mr. Karl said about bourgeois etiquette --

ROYCE

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

REISING

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

ROYCE

I have rounds to make --

REISING

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

(points at the paper)

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

ROYCE

What's left of it.

REISING

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

ROYCE

You wanted to talk to me.

REISING

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

(looks at her pad)
Medical care -- that's where your name came up --
let's see --

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

REISING
Your name popped out more than any other --

ROYCE
Who did you talk to --

REISING
-- especially over in Liberty Town.

ROYCE
So you've been there.

REISING
My contact took me.

ROYCE
Your contact.

REISING
Rather not say.

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

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

ROYCE
No, I imagine it wouldn't be.

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

ROYCE
I have to be at the hospital --

REISING
The doctor must doctor.

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

REISING

If you want to give it.

ROYCE

Will you be able to print the truth?

REISING

I always write the truth. Just read.

ROYCE

Not what I asked.

REISING

Then what?

ROYCE

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

REISING

Liberty Town.

ROYCE

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

REISING

Owner, boss.

ROYCE

Capitalist to the bone.

REISING

So?

ROYCE

Has a nurse full-time for his workers --

REISING

How nice.

ROYCE

Doctors visit workers in their homes --

REISING

Sickness he's probably caused.

ROYCE

Paid for funerals --

REISING

Probably caused --

ROYCE

Even runs the tannery now to give workers some income.

REISING

Lord of the estate.

ROYCE

But his workers benefit.

REISING

What he giveth --

ROYCE

Would you include --

REISING

The workers deserve his "gifts" as a right.

ROYCE

Would you include favorable --

REISING

No.

ROYCE

So you can't print the full truth.

REISING

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

ROYCE

Irrelevant.

REISING

(overlapping)

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

ROYCE

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

REISING

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

REISING

So --

ROYCE

Not without Alston Hargrove.

REISING

I can't. I won't.

ROYCE

Then, no.

REISING

Well.

ROYCE

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

REISING

(picking up bag)

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

ROYCE

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

REISING

Keep it -- it may work its charms yet.

ROYCE

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

REISING

Rats.

ROYCE

Dying rats. This is not how you thought --

REISING

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

ROYCE

Sorry.

REISING

Apologizing -- seems to suit you.

Slide: The Messenger Arrives Again.

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

PETER

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

PETER staggers a bit against THOREAU.

ROYCE

Peter?

THOREAU

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

ROYCE

Bloody.

(goes to PETER)

You are --

THOREAU

John Thoreau. I just moved in.

ROYCE

Let me feel.

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

ROYCE

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

PETER

Got 'em under my arms.

ROYCE

When?

PETER
Musta strained myself.

ROYCE
Straight to bed.
(to THOREAU and REISING)
Can you two give him a hand? He lives alone.

THOREAU
A step ahead of you.

PETER wrenches himself out of THOREAU's grasp.

PETER
Ain't a cripple!

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

ROYCE
(to THOREAU)
I hate to impose --

THOREAU
Don't think about it.

REISING
I'll give you a hand.

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

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

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

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

THOREAU
He's already worse.

ROYCE begins his examination.

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

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

ROYCE
Accelerated, erratic. Raspy. Feel these.

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

ROYCE
They're going to get bigger and harder, more painful.
(takes out the thermometer)
103. Give him water. There isn't anything else
--

REISING
Well?

ROYCE hesitates.

THOREAU
What?

PETER
Damn rats! Hooligans d -- Damn!

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

THOREAU
(as ROYCE rises)
You didn't answer her question.

REISING
What do you think?

ROYCE
(to THOREAU)
Stay with him?

THOREAU
To be sure.

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

REISING

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

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

PETER

Get 'em off me! They're eatin' away at me!
(falls back, arms outspread)
Everything hurts. So damn thirsty!
(tries to get out of the bed)
Have work to do. Can't let the damn rats--

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

ROYCE makes his phone calls.

ROYCE

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

(hangs up, makes another call)

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

(another call)

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

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

ROYCE

Tell me how.

THOREAU

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

REISING

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

ROYCE

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

THOREAU

You still never answered her.

ROYCE

Are you always this strict with strangers?

THOREAU

(indicating PETER)

Strangers? You know -- don't you.

ROYCE

I -- suspect --

THOREAU

(to both of them)

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

REISING

Plague.

ROYCE

Now --

THOREAU

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

REISING

Plague.

ROYCE

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

THOREAU

You don't really think that.

ROYCE

I was in Los Angeles as well.

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

ROYCE

It's possible.

THOREAU

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

REISING

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

ROYCE

That word doesn't leave this room.

REISING

(to ROYCE)

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

THOREAU

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

REISING

Why are you smiling?

THOREAU

The beginning of the great adventure.

ROYCE

(to REISING)

Where are you staying?

REISING

With some people.

ROYCE

Your contact.

REISING

Should I not?

ROYCE

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

THOREAU

The dice are ever-rolling.

The ambulance tocsin gets louder.

ROYCE

India -- You'll have to tell me --

THOREAU and REISING sit. The ambulance tocsin is as loud as it will get and flashing lights come up as the lights dim to black. ROYCE stands bathed in the light; then everything bumps to black and silence. Some period music comes up as ROYCE goes to his desk; Doctors FREEMAN and CASTLE enter. PETER's apartment is struck and the MAYOR's office is set stage left.

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**Act I, Scene 2: The next day --
Royce's apartment; the Mayor's office**

Slide: Science Finds Its Skepticism Inadequate.