

# Only the Dead Know Brooklyn

adapted from  
*Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*  
by Thomas Wolfe

by  
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## DESCRIPTION

An adaptation of the 1936 short story of the same name by Thomas Wolfe.

## CHARACTERS

- MAN 1
- MAN 2
- MAN 3
- MAN 4

*Age is not important, but older is better.*

## SETTING

- Brooklyn, mid-1930s

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Accents: As much as possible, the language of Wolfe's original is used, using Wolfe's attempt to capture a "Brooklyn" accent.
- The stage manager (or a stage hand) will be needed to bring on several items mentioned in the script.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Houselights stay up as the play begins. Stage manager brings ghost light onto the empty stage, checks it, leaves. [Sound design?]*

*As the stage manager does this, MAN 1, MAN 2, MAN 3, and MAN 4, who are in the audience, stand. They speak to each other, but they also speak to the audience: friendly, calm. After a line or two, they can move into the aisles and walk around to speak directly to the audience.*

MAN 1  
Now is the winter of our discontent—

MAN 4  
Go, brother.

MAN 1  
—made glorious by this month of—

MAN 2  
Excellent beginnin'.

MAN 3  
Shakespeare could't'na said it better.

MAN 1  
Yeah—but which month is it?

MAN 2  
You got me there—I don' know.

MAN 3  
Me neither—you?

*MAN 4 shakes his head, then asks the audience around him—and keeps asking until he gets an answer from someone—can ad lib to encourage people to respond.*

MAN 4  
You? You? It's okay to answer—I'm harmless.  
(gets an answer)  
You sure? How sure are you? Well, there you go—it's [whatever  
the month].  
(thanks whomever answered)  
Thanks ["doll," if woman; "buddy," if man]—that's a great help to  
us.  
(to the others)  
You can always depend upon the livin'.

MAN 2  
Enough said.

MAN 3  
'Cause, you see, we are the dead.

MAN 4  
Yeah, we are.

MAN 1  
I don't think they believe you.

MAN 2  
It's true—we are the dead, ain't we?

*The others acknowledge the truth of the statement.*

MAN 1  
This is how we dead look.

MAN 3  
We look like you.

MAN 4  
(to audience)  
Do you realize how many acres of the dead we got in Brooklyn?

MAN 2  
A veritable necropolis we live in the middle of.

MAN 3  
(whispering)  
I think it's necropolis.

MAN 2  
Whatever.

(to audience)  
My point is—

MAN 4  
Your point is on the top of your head.

MAN 2  
(ignoring him)  
My point is—anybody?

*During the next lines, MAN 1 improv to encourage the audience members to speak.*

MAN 1

(to an audience member)

Say this to him so we can get on with it: "Your point is—" Go on.

You can use the accent if you want. "Your point is—"

(audience member speaks)

"That—" Go on.

(audience member speaks)

"The livin' and the dead in Brooklyn"—go on.

(audience member speaks)

MAN 2

He's/she's good. Bring it home.

MAN 1

"Are just two sides of the same plug nickel."

(audience member speaks)

Thanks.

MAN 4

It's true—

MAN 3

We're among you all the time.

MAN 1

All the time.

MAN 4

And we don' look that much different than you—or you—or you  
over there.

(indicating a female audience member)

Of course, she looks a lot better than any of us.

MAN 3

(indicating male audience member)

Him, too.

MAN 1

Both of them separate look better than the four of us put together.

MAN 2

(to both audience members)

One of the blessings of bein' alive is lookin' alive. You two keep it goin', okay, for as long as you can work it, all right?

MAN 3

(to audience)

It's hard keepin' up the looks when you're dead. Trust us.

MAN 1

Hey, maybe the two of you could work it together if you ain't otherwise engaged. That'd be one way to keep yourselves alive, eh?

MAN 2

We also find that the months don't matter much to us.

MAN 1

"Much," that is—

MAN 2

True—I did say "don't matter much."

MAN 1

So you see, time's not completely nothin', you see, and we can't help it—

MAN 4

Because part of us still, you know, is made up a what made us up when we was livin' like you—

*The MEN touch audience members to indicate their still-solid connection to them—shake hands, hand on shoulders, etc.*

MAN 3

Like all of you, we're still made up of part alive, part dead—

MAN 4

Just like you—part alive, part dead.

MAN 3

Too too solid flesh—

MAN 1

And so when the winter of our discontent is made glorious by this month' of—damn!

(asks audience member)

Give a guy a hand—what's the month' again?

(gets the month)

Bless you.

MAN 2

[Echoes the name of the month]

MAN 1

Thanks.

MAN 2

Comes from the point on my head.

MAN 1

In this month the desolation of our souls long-drowned in the green fire and radiance—

MAN 3

Of Cypress Hills—

MAN 2

And Green-Wood—

MAN 4

And Evergreen—

MAN 1

And every elsewhere in the Brooklyn acres of the Brooklyn graveyards—

MAN 2

We grope and crawl and scuttle to come back to watch you all—

MAN 3

All of you tryin' to know Brooklyn through and through—again—  
and again—

MAN 1

Like we did.

MAN 2

Still do.

MAN 4

Brooklyn standin' in for the hole world—

MAN 3

And the whole world makin' its way through Brooklyn.

MAN 4

Walt Whitman couldn'ta said it better.

MAN 3

Oh yeah he did: "Stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!"

MAN 2

"We use you...we plant you permanently within us."

MAN 4

"...we love you—there is perfection in you also..."

MAN 3

Amen, Walt.

MAN 1

And we have no way to know life but Walt's way of knowin' it.

MAN 4

Comin' back—

MAN 3

Reconnectin'—

MAN 1

Keepin' our family within your family—

*The MEN start moving towards the stage.*

MAN 2

An' neither do all of you, if you think about it—about knowin' life. What other choice you got for knowin' except to keep comin' back to us for some help with knowin' what's what and where's where? Like we come to you.

MAN 3

Especially when it comes to knowin' the-world-otherwise-known-as-this-goddam Brooklyn.

*The stage manager retrieves the ghost light, then moves on four plain wooden chairs set upstage. The MEN move on to the stage. MAN 1 takes a newspaper out of his pocket—it can simply be blank sheets of newsprint folded like a newspaper. MAN 2 stands downstage, MAN 3 approaches MAN 2. MAN 4 stands in the background; he carries something working-class, e.g., a tool belt.*

*[NOTE: In the short story, Wolfe describes MAN 3 this way: “ I sees dis big guy standin' deh—dis is duh foist I eveh see of him. Well, he's lookin' wild, y'know, and I can see dat he's had plenty, but still he's holdin' it; he talks good, and he's walkin' straight enough.”]*

*House lights out.*

*Something to indicate that this is a train platform—the stage manager could simply come out with a placard that says, “A Train Platform, Brooklyn, 1930s.”*

MAN 3  
(to MAN 2)

Hey.

MAN 2

Yeah?

MAN 3

Do you know Brooklyn?

MAN 1

There's no guy livin' that knows Brooklyn.

MAN 3

Yeah?

MAN 1

Yeah. Only the dead know Brooklyn through an' through because only the dead got the kind of lifetime it'd take to find a way around this goddam town.

MAN 3

Yeah?

MAN 1

Yeah.

*MAN 3 ponders for a bit, then turns to MAN 2.*

MAN 3

How do you get t' Eightent' Avenoo an' Sixty-sevent' Street?

MAN 2

Jesus! You got me, chief. I ain't been here long myself. Where is the place? Out in Flatbush?

MAN 3

Nah—Bensonhurst. But I was never there before. How do you get there?

MAN 2

You got me, chief. Do either of youse guys know where it is?

*MAN 4 start walking forward, but MAN 1 cuts him off. MAN 4 does not like this.*

MAN 1

Sure.

MAN 4

Hey!

MAN 3

(to MAN 1)

You sure you're sure? You weren't so sure before.

MAN 1

Maybe I'm one of the dead that knows this goddamn town.

MAN 4

Maybe the dead oughta shut up, then.

*MAN 3, rather than being annoyed at the interruption, watches the two men duel with interest and without judgment.*

MAN 1

(ignoring MAN 4)

You take the Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local there, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-toid, and then walk down four blocks. That's all you got to do.

MAN 4

G'wan! Watcha talkin' about?

(to MAN 3)

The guy is crazy!

MAN 3

Who knows?

MAN 2

Sounds okay to me.

MAN 4

I'll tell you what you do. You change to the West End line at Toity-sixt, Get off at Noo Utrechct an' Sixteent' Avenoo. Walk two blocks over, then four blocks up, an' you'll be right there.

MAN 1

Oh, yeah? Who told you so much?

MAN 2

Now, fellahs—

*MAN 3 puts a hand on MAN 2 to keep him quiet. He stares, fascinated in a dumbfounded sort of way.*

MAN 1

How long you been living' here?

MAN 4

All my life.

MAN 1

Musta been a short life if that's the best advice you can give this fellah.

MAN 4

I was born in Williamsburg—

MAN 1

My condolences.

MAN 2

—and I can tell you things about this town you never heard of.

MAN 1

Which you probably make up all by yourself at night while you're cuttin' out you paper dolls.

MAN 4

You think you're pretty wise, ain't you?

MAN 1

The birds ain't usin' my head for Lincoln's statue yet, which means I'm wise enough to know a phony when I see one.

MAN 2

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

And you're so wise that someone's goin' t'bust your wise nose some day—

MAN 2

(to MAN 3)

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

That's how wise you are.

MAN 1

Someone musta busted your nose all the way back to your brain—

MAN 2

Train's here.

MAN 1

'Cause ya got snot for smarts.

*MAN 1 and MAN 4 square off, ready to explode.*

MAN 3

(to MAN 2)

Does this go in the right general direction?

MAN 2

I think so.

*MAN 3 takes MAN 1 gently by the arm and onto the train. Lights change to just downstage center. MAN 2 and MAN 4 bring down two chairs, then move back to their own chairs in the shadows upstage.*

*As the scene progresses, the lights become tighter and tighter on MAN 1 and MAN 3.*

MAN 1

(thinks he's talking to MAN 4)

All right, mugg! I'm sorry I can't stay to take care of you, but I'll be seein' you sometime, I hope, out in the cemetery.

*Suddenly, MAN 1 looks around him and sees that he is on the train with MAN 3—surprised, confused. He checks—this is his train.*

MAN 1

This is my train, all right. How'd you know that?

*They sit. MAN 1 folds his newspaper, puts it in his pocket. He blusters a little to regain himself.*

MAN 1

Yeah, well I'm sorry I couldn't stay to take care of that mugg for you—maybe I'll be seein' him sometime, like out in the cemetery.

(regains composure)

What number are you looking for in Bensonhurst, pal? If know the address—

MAN 3

Oh, I'm not lookin' for no one. I don't know no one out there.

MAN 1

Then why?

MAN 3

I'm just goin' out to see the place. I like the sound of the name.

MAN 1

Bensonhurst? Watcha tryin' to hand me?

MAN 3

I'm tellin' you the truth. I like to go look at places with nice names like that.

MAN 1

Bensonhurst?

MAN 3

I like to go look at all kinds of places.

MAN 1

How'd you know there was such a place if you never been there before?

MAN 3

I got the map.

MAN 1

A map?

MAN 3

No, the map.

*MAN 3 pulls out a map, which can be a blank sheet of newsprint—but make it large. MAN 1 looks at it, fascinated. He traces his finger on the map.*

MAN 1

You got the map. Look at that—the whole goddam place all marked out—Canarsie an' East New York and Flatbush, Bensonhurst, South' Brooklyn, the Heights, Bay Ridge, Greenpoint—the whole goddam layout, you got it right there on the map.

MAN 3

Like I said, the map.

MAN 1

Like a map of the world. You been to any of dose places?

MAN 3

I been to most of' em. I was down in Red Hook just last night.

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook!

MAN 3

I was just walked aroun'.

MAN 1

Just walked aroun'?

MAN 3

Lookin' at things.

MAN 1

Nothing happened?

MAN 3

A coupla drunks in one of the places started a fight—

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook! You gotta keep out of there. It's a good place to keep out of.

MAN 3

Why?

MAN 1

Jesus! What'm I gonna do with a guy as—as—You just might get lost down there, that's all.

MAN 3  
(smiling)

I got a map.

MAN 1  
A map! In Red Hook? Jesus!

MAN 3  
You say “Jesus” a lot.

MAN 1  
Do I?

MAN 3  
Yeah.

MAN 1  
Yeah, well, I don’t know why—he’s no friend of mine.

MAN 3  
(pointing to map)  
How long you figure would it take Jesus to know Brooklyn?

MAN 1  
You get that idea out right now. Not Jesus or you or nobody ain’t eveh gonna get to know Brooklyn. I been livin’ here all my life an’ don’t know all, so how do you expect—

MAN 3  
The map.

MAN 1  
You ain’t gonna get to know Brooklyn with no map.

MAN 3  
If you got the map, you got the map.

MAN 1  
Don’t try ta sell me no loaves and fishes, all right? Sheesh! “If Jesus knew—” Sheesh!

*MAN 3 folds the map but doesn’t put it away.*

MAN 3  
Can you swim?

MAN 1

What?

MAN 3

Can you swim? Can you swim good?

MAN 1

Like a fish. I'm a regular fish in the water. What stop are we comin' to?

MAN 3

What would you do if you saw a man drownin'?

MAN 1

I'd jump in an' pull him out. What stop—

MAN 3

Ever saved anyone out here?

MAN 1

In Brooklyn? You can't drown in Brooklyn.

MAN 3

Never?

MAN 1

You gotta drown somewhere else—

MAN 3

That's not what the map says.

*MAN 1 keeps looking around.*

MAN 1

What frickin' station are we at? What's the goddam station?

MAN 3

You gotta get off?

MAN 1

I gotta get off.

MAN 3

You don't wanta travel with me.

MAN 1

Can't—my station's comin' up. You'll get there—just stay on this line.

MAN 3

So—you kinda like been my map, haven't'cha?

MAN 1

Yeah—your map—great—glad to be of service. I never been a map before. Yeah, here it comes.

MAN 3

This your station?

MAN 1

Yeah.

MAN 3

This your real station?

MAN 1

It's the one I'm gettin' off at, wise guy.

MAN 3

Sure you don't wanta travel with me?

MAN 1

Can't—gotta go—

*MAN 1 prepares to get off. MAN 2 and MAN 4 come downstage. MAN 3 slaps the map against his hand.*

MAN 3

Remember this—

MAN 1

(hoarse whisper)

C'mon, c'mon—

MAN 3  
I'll travel with you anyway—

MAN 1  
Come on!

MAN 3  
Savin' and drownin'—

*The stop comes.*

MAN 3  
That's the map I'm gonna give to you.

*As MAN 1 steps through the door, MAN 2 and MAN 4 lift him so that it appears that he floats out of the train.*

MAN 3  
That's the map you're gonna need—that's the map they all need.

*They circle MAN 1 upstage back to downstage, touching him down and then lifting him up again until they reach the edge of the stage, which is where they leave him. MAN 2 and MAN 4 go into the house.*

*MAN 3 picks up the chairs and hands them to the stage manager, who has come back on with the ghost light. The stage manager lines up the chairs upstage, backs to the audience, as if they were headstones, then puts something on them to show that they are, in fact, headstones. Then the stage manager stands behind the ghost light.*

*MAN 3 comes into the audience.*

*MAN 1 is alone on stage, afraid, with the ghost light and the headstones. He looks at the headstones, the light, the audience in darkness. As he names places, he points to different sections of the audience.*

MAN 1  
Jesus! Red. Hook. Christ! Flat. Bush. Jesus! Canar. Sie. Christ!  
The. Heights. East. Noo Yawk. Bay. Ridge.

*MAN 1 teeters on the stage edge.*

MAN 1

(in a rush)

You take the Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local there, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-toid, and then walk down four blocks. That's all anyone's got to do.

*The house lights come up slowly as MAN 1 speaks his next lines, and as he speaks, he casts furtive glances at the headstones and ghost light.*

MAN 1

(to audience)

Can any of you swim? I lied to the guy—I can't swim. Not a lick. Any of you swim good enough? Can any of you give me some help here? A hand, maybe? Coupla hands? I ain't got the map, and I can't swim so good.

*MAN 2, 3, and 4 each select someone from the audience close to MAN 2's position. They can each ad lib something along the lines of "Would you give us a hand?" They should feel free to joke with the audience members.*

*They get each audience member to give MAN 2 a hand as he is led back to his original seat in the audience, and then they are escorted back to their seats with an ad libbed "Thank you." Again, humor is good.*

*Now all the MEN are back to their original positions.*

MAN 1

Thanks. Thanks. I made it.

(to MAN 3)

Okay. I made it. Okay.

MAN 3

Now is the winter—

MAN 2

—of our discontent—

MAN 4

—made glorious by—

(to MAN 1)

C'mon.

MAN 1  
By this month of [name the month]—

MAN 3  
“And you that shall cross—”

MAN 1  
Go, Walt.

MAN 2  
“—from shore to shore years hence—”

MAN 4  
“—are more to me, and more in my meditations—”

MAN 1  
“—than you might suppose.”

MAN 3  
Go Walt Whitman.

MAN 2  
Go Brooklyn.

MAN 4  
Thanks to the livin’.

MAN 3  
And thanks to the dead.

MAN 1  
And thanks to us all.

*The stage manager switches off the ghost light. The house lights go out. End of play.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **VERSION USING WOLFE’S LANGUAGE**

*Houselights stay up as the play begins. Stage manager brings ghost light onto the empty stage, checks it, leaves. [Sound design?]*

*As the stage manager does this, MAN 1, MAN 2, MAN 3, and MAN 4, who are in the audience, stand. They speak to each other, but they also speak to the audience: friendly, calm. After a line or two, they can move into the aisles and walk around to speak directly to the audience.*

MAN 1

Now is the winter of our discontent—

MAN 4

Go, bruddeh.

MAN 1

—made glorious by dis mont' of—

MAN 2

Excellent beginnin'.

MAN 3

Shakespeare could't'na said it bettah.

MAN 1

Yeah—but which mont' is it?

MAN 2

Yuh got me dere—I don' know.

MAN 3

Me neider—you?

*MAN 4 shakes his head, then asks the audience around him—and keeps asking until he gets an answer from someone—can ad lib to encourage people to respond.*

MAN 4

You? You? It's okay to answer—I'm hahmless.

(gets an answer)

Yuh sure? How sure are yuh? Well, dere you go—it's [whatever the month].

(thanks whomever answered)

T'anks ["doll," if woman; "buddy," if man]—dat's a great help to us.

(to the others)

Yuh can always depend upon duh livin'.

MAN 2

'Nuff said.

MAN 3  
'Cause, yuh see, we are duh dead.

MAN 4  
Yeah, we are.

MAN 1  
I don't t'ink they believe yuh.

MAN 2  
It's true—we are duh dead, ain't we?

*The others acknowledge the truth of the statement.*

MAN 1  
Dis is how we dead look.

MAN 3  
We look like you.

MAN 4  
(to audience)  
Do you realize how many acres of duh dead we got in Brooklyn?

MAN 2  
A veritable necropolis we live in duh middle of.

MAN 3  
(whispering)  
I t'ink it's necropolis.

MAN 2  
Whateveh.  
(to audience)  
My pernt is—

MAN 4  
Youeh pernt is on duh top of youeh head.

MAN 2  
(ignoring him)  
My pernt is—anybody?

*During the next lines, MAN 1 improvise to encourage the audience members to speak.*

MAN 1

(to an audience member)

Say dis to him so we can get on wit it: "Youeh pernt is—" Go on.

You can use duh accent if you want. "Youeh pernt is—"

(audience member speaks)

"Dat—" Go on.

(audience member speaks)

"Duh livin' and duh dead in Brooklyn"—go on.

(audience member speaks)

MAN 2

He's/she's good. Bring it home.

MAN 1

"Are just two sides of duh same plug nickel."

(audience member speaks)

T'anks.

MAN 4

It's true—

MAN 3

We're among yuh all duh time.

MAN 1

All duh time.

MAN 4

And we don' look dat much different than you—or you—or you  
oveh dere.

(indicating a female audience member)

Of course, she looks a lot bettah than any of us.

MAN 3

(indicating male audience member)

Him, too.

MAN 1

Both of them separate look bettah than duh four of us put  
together.

MAN 2

(to both audience members)

One of duh blessings of bein' alive is lookin' alive. You two keep it goin', okay, for as long as you can work it, all right?

MAN 3

(to audience)

It's hard keepin' up the looks when youeh dead. Trust us.

MAN 1

Hey, maybe duh two of yuh could work it together if youeh ain't otherwise engaged. Dat'd be one way to keep youehselves alive, eh?

MAN 2

We also find dat duh mont's don't mattah much to us.

MAN 1

"Much," dat is—

MAN 2

True—I did say "don't mattah much."

MAN 1

So yuh see, time's not completely nothin', yuh see, and we can't help it—

MAN 4

Because part of us still, yuh know, is made up a what made us up when we was livin' like you—

*The MEN touch audience members to indicate their still-solid connection to them—shake hands, hand on shoulders, etc.*

MAN 3

Like all of yuh, we're still made up of paht alive, paht dead—

MAN 4

Just like you—paht alive, paht dead.

MAN 3

Too too solid flesh—

MAN 1

And so when the winter of our discontent is made glorious by dis  
mont' of—damn!

(asks audience member)

Give a guy a hand—what's duh mont' again?

(gets the month)

Bless yuh.

MAN 2

[Echoes the name of the month]

MAN 1

T'anks.

MAN 2

Comes from the duh pernt on my head.

MAN 1

In dis mont' the desolation of our souls long-drowned in the green  
fire and radiance—

MAN 3

Of Cypress Hills—

MAN 2

And Green-Wood—

MAN 4

And Evergreen—

MAN 1

And every elsewhere in duh Brooklyn acres of duh Brooklyn  
graveyards—

MAN 2

We grope and crawl and scuttle to come back to watch you all—

MAN 3

All of yuh tryin' to know Brooklyn t'roo and t'roo—again—and  
again—

MAN 1

Like we did.

MAN 2

Still do.

MAN 4

Brooklyn standin' in for duh hole world—

MAN 3

And duh hole world makin' its way t'roo Brooklyn.

MAN 4

Walt Whitman couldn'ta said it better.

MAN 3

Oh yeah he did: "Stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!"

MAN 2

"We use you...we plant you permanently within us."

MAN 4

"...we love you—there is perfection in you also..."

MAN 3

Amen, Walt.

MAN 1

And we have no way to know life but Walt's way of knowin' it.

MAN 4

Comin' back—

MAN 3

Reconnectin'—

MAN 1

Keepin' our family within youeh family—

*The MEN start moving towards the stage.*

MAN 2

An' neider do all of you, if yuh t'ink about it—about knowin' life. What other choice yuh got for knowin' except to keep comin' back to us for some help wit knowin' what's what and where's where? Like we come to you.

MAN 3

Especially when it comes to knowin' duh-world-otherwise-known-as-dis-goddam Brooklyn.

*The stage manager retrieves the ghost light, then moves on four plain wooden chairs set upstage. The MEN move on to the stage. MAN 1 takes a newspaper out of his pocket—it can simply be blank sheets of newsprint folded like a newspaper. MAN 2 stands downstage, MAN 3 approaches MAN 2. MAN 4 stands in the background; he carries something working-class, e.g., a tool belt.*

*[NOTE: In the short story, Wolfe describes MAN 3 this way: “ I sees dis big guy standin’ deh—dis is duh foist I eveh see of him. Well, he’s lookin’ wild, y’know, and I can see dat he’s had plenty, but still he’s holdin’ it; he talks good, and he’s walkin’ straight enough.”]*

*House lights out.*

*Something to indicate that this is a train platform—the stage manager could simply come out with a placard that says, “A Train Platform, Brooklyn, 1930s.”*

MAN 3  
(to MAN 2)

Hey.

MAN 2

Yeah?

MAN 3

Do you know Brooklyn?

MAN 1

Dere's no guy livin' dat knows Brooklyn.

MAN 3

Yeah?

MAN 1

Yeah. Only the dead know Brooklyn t'roo an' t'roo because only the dead got the kind of lifetime it'd take to find a way aroun' dis goddam town.

MAN 3

Yeah?

MAN 1

Yeah.

*MAN 3 ponders for a bit, then turns to MAN 2.*

MAN 3

How d'yuh get t' Eighteent' Avenoo an' Sixty-sevent' Street?

MAN 2

Jesus! Yuh got me, chief. I ain't been heah long myself. Where is duh place? Out in Flatbush?

MAN 3

Nah—Bensonhoist. But I was neveh deh befoeh. How d'yuh get deh?

MAN 2

Yuh got me, chief. Do eider of youse guys know where it is?

*MAN 4 start walking forward, but MAN 1 cuts him off. MAN 4 does not like this.*

MAN 1

Sure.

MAN 4

Hey!

MAN 3

(to MAN 1)

Yuh sure youeh sure? Yuh weren't so sure befoeh.

MAN 1

Maybe I'm one of duh dead dat knows dis goddam town.

MAN 4

Maybe duh dead oughta shut up, den.

*MAN 3, rather than being annoyed at the interruption, watches the two men duel with interest and without judgment.*

MAN 1

(ignoring MAN 4)

Yuh take duh Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local deh, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-toid, and den walk down foeh blocks. Dat's all yuh got to do.

MAN 4

G'wan! Watcha talkin' about?

(to MAN 3)

Duh guy is crazy!

MAN 3

Who knows?

MAN 2

Sounds okay to me.

MAN 4

I'll tell yuh what yuh do. Yuh change to duh West End line at Toity-sixt, Get off at Noo Utrecht an' Sixteent' Avenoo. Walk two blocks oveh, then foeh blocks up, an' you'll be right deh.

MAN 1

Oh, yeah? Who told you so much?

MAN 2

Now, fellahs—

*MAN 3 puts a hand on MAN 2 to keep him quiet. He stares, fascinated in a dumbfounded sort of way.*

MAN 1

How long you been living' heah?

MAN 4

All my life.

MAN 1

Musta been a short life if dat's duh best advice you can give dis fellah.

MAN 4

I was bawn in Williamsboig—

MAN 1

My condolences.

MAN 2

—and I can tell you t'ings about dis town you neveh hoid of.

MAN 1

Which yuh probably make up all by yoehself at night while you're cuttin' out yuh papeh dolls.

MAN 4

You t'ink you're pretty wise, ain't yuh?

MAN 1

Duh boids ain't usin' my head for Lincoln's statue yet, which means I'm wise enough to know a phony when I see one.

MAN 2

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

And you're so wise dat someone's goin' t'bust youeh wise nose some day—

MAN 2

(to MAN 3)

Train's comin'.

MAN 4

Dat's how wise you are.

MAN 1

Someone musta busted your nose all duh way back to youeh brain—

MAN 2

Train's here.

MAN 1

'Cause ya got snot for smarts.

*MAN 1 and MAN 4 square off, ready to explode.*

MAN 3

(to MAN 2)

Does dis go in duh right general direction?

MAN 2

I t'ink so.

*MAN 3 takes MAN 1 gently by the arm and onto the train. Lights change to just downstage center. MAN 2 and MAN 4 bring down two chairs, then move back to their own chairs in the shadows upstage.*

*As the scene progresses, the lights become tighter and tighter on MAN 1 and MAN 3.*

MAN 1

(thinks he's talking to MAN 4)

All right, mugg! I'm sorry I can't stay to take keh of yuh, but I'll be seein' yuh sometime, I hope, out in duh cemetery.

*Suddenly, MAN 1 looks around him and sees that he is on the train with MAN 3—surprised, confused. He checks—this is his train.*

MAN 1

Dis is my train, all right. How'd you know dat?

*They sit. MAN 1 folds his newspaper, puts it in his pocket. He blusters a little to regain himself.*

MAN 1

Yeah, well I'm sorry I couldn't stay to take keh of dat mugg for yuh—maybe I'll be seein' him sometime, like out in duh cemetery.

(regains composure)

What numbeh are yuh looking for in Bensonhoist, pal? If I know duh address—

MAN 3

Oh, I'm not lookin' for no one. I don't know no one out deh.

MAN 1

Den why?

MAN 3

I'm just goin' out to see duh place. I like duh sound of duh name.

MAN 1

Bensonhoist? Watcha tryin' to hand me?

MAN 3

I'm tellin' yuh duh troot. I like to go look at places wit nice names like dat.

MAN 1

Bensonhoist?

MAN 3

I like to go look at all kinds of places.

MAN 1

How'd yuh know deh was such a place if yuh neveh been deh befoeh?

MAN 3

I got duh map.

MAN 1

A map?

MAN 3

No, the map.

*MAN 3 pulls out a map, which can be a blank sheet of newsprint—but make it large. MAN 1 looks at it, fascinated. He traces his finger on the map.*

MAN 1

Yuh got the map. Look at dat—duh whole goddam place all mahked out—Canarsie an' East Noo Yawk and Flatbush, Bensonhoist, Sout' Brooklyn, duh Heights, Bay Ridge, Greenpernt—duh whole goddam layout, yuh got it right deh on duh map.

MAN 3

Like I said, the map.

MAN 1

Like a map of duh world. You been to any of dose places?

MAN 3

I been to most of' em. I was down in Red Hook just last night.

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook!

MAN 3

I was just walked aroun'.

MAN 1

Just walked aroun'?

MAN 3

Lookin' at t'ings.

MAN 1

Nuttin' happened?

MAN 3

A coupla drunks in one of duh places started a fight—

MAN 1

Jesus! Red Hook! You gotta keep outa deh. It's a good place to keep out of.

MAN 3

Why?

MAN 1

Jesus! What'm I gonna do wit a guy as—as—Yuh just might get lost down deh, dat's all.

MAN 3  
(smiling)

I got a map.

MAN 1  
A map! In Red Hook? Jesus!

MAN 3  
You say “Jesus” a lot.

MAN 1  
Do I?

MAN 3  
Yeah.

MAN 1  
Yeah, well, I don’t know why—he’s no friend of mine.

MAN 3  
(pointing to map)  
How long you figure would it take Jesus to know Brooklyn?

MAN 1  
You get dat idea out right now. Not Jesus or you or nobody ain’t eveh gonna get to know Brooklyn. I been livin’ heah all my life an’ don’t know all, so how do you expect—

MAN 3  
The map.

MAN 1  
Yuh ain’t gonna get to know Brooklyn wit no map.

MAN 3  
If yuh got duh map, yuh got duh map.

MAN 1  
Don’t try ta sell me no loaves and fishes, awright? Sheesh! “If Jesus knew—” Sheesh!

*MAN 3 folds the map but doesn’t put it away.*

MAN 3  
Can yuh swim?

MAN 1

What?

MAN 3

Can yuh swim? Can yuh swim good?

MAN 1

Like a fish. I'm a regleh fish in duh wateh. What stop are we comin' to?

MAN 3

What would yuh do if yuh saw a man drownin'?

MAN 1

I'd jump in an' pull him out. What stop—

MAN 3

Ever saved anyone out heah?

MAN 1

In Brooklyn? Yuh can't drown in Brooklyn.

MAN 3

Neveh?

MAN 1

Yuh gotta drown somewhere else—

MAN 3

Dat's not what duh map says.

*MAN 1 keeps looking around.*

MAN 1

What frickin' station are we at? What's the goddam station?

MAN 3

You gotta get off?

MAN 1

I gotta get off.

MAN 3

Yuh don't wanta travel with me.

MAN 1

Can't—my station's comin' up. You'll get dere—just stay on dis line.

MAN 3

So—you kinda like been my map, haven't'cha?

MAN 1

Yeah—youeh map—great—glad to be of service. I neveh been a map befoeh. Yeah, here it comes.

MAN 3

Dis youeh station?

MAN 1

Yeah.

MAN 3

Dis youeh real station?

MAN 1

It's the duh one I'm gettin' off at, wise guy.

MAN 3

Sure you don't wanta travel wit me?

MAN 1

Can't—gotta go—

*MAN 1 prepares to get off. MAN 2 and MAN 4 come downstage. MAN 3 slaps the map against his hand.*

MAN 3

Remember dis—

MAN 1

(hoarse whisper)

C'mon, c'mon—

MAN 3  
I'll travel wit you anyway—

MAN 1  
Come on!

MAN 3  
Savin' and drownin'—

*The stop comes.*

MAN 3  
Dat's duh map I'm gonna give to you.

*As MAN 1 steps through the door, MAN 2 and MAN 4 lift him so that it appears that he floats out of the train.*

MAN 3  
Dat's duh map youeh gonna need—dat's duh map dey all need.

*They circle MAN 1 upstage back to downstage, touching him down and then lifting him up again until they reach the edge of the stage, which is where they leave him. MAN 2 and MAN 4 go into the house.*

*MAN 3 picks up the chairs and hands them to the stage manager, who has come back on with the ghost light. The stage manager lines up the chairs upstage, backs to the audience, as if they were headstones, then puts something on them to show that they are, in fact, headstones. Then the stage manager stands behind the ghost light.*

*MAN 3 comes into the audience.*

*MAN 1 is alone on stage, afraid, with the ghost light and the headstones. He looks at the headstones, the light, the audience in darkness. As he names places, he points to different sections of the audience.*

MAN 1  
Jesus! Red. Hook. Christ! Flat. Bush. Jesus! Canar. Sie. Christ!  
Duh. Heights. East. Noo Yawk. Bay. Ridge.

*MAN 1 teeters on the stage edge.*

MAN 1

(in a rush)

Yuh take duh Fourt' Avenoo express, get off at Fifty-nint' Street, change to a Sea Beach local deh, get off at Eighteen!' Avenoo an' Sixty-toid, and den walk down foeh blocks. Dat's all anyone's got to do.

*The house lights come up slowly as MAN 1 speaks his next lines, and as he speaks, he casts furtive glances at the headstones and ghost light.*

MAN 1

(to audience)

Can any of yuh swim? I lied to duh guy—I can't swim. Not a lick. Any of yuh swim good enough? Can any of yuh give me some help heah? A hand, maybe? Coupla hands? I ain't got duh map, and I can't swim so good.

*MAN 2, 3, and 4 each select someone from the audience close to MAN 2's position. They can each ad lib something along the lines of "Would you give us a hand?" They should feel free to joke with the audience members.*

*They get each audience member to give MAN 2 a hand as he is led back to his original seat in the audience, and then they are escorted back to their seats with an ad libbed "Thank you." Again, humor is good.*

*Now all the MEN are back to their original positions.*

MAN 1

T'anks. T'anks. I made it.

(to MAN 3)

Okay. I made it. Okay.

MAN 3

Now is the winter—

MAN 2

—of our discontent—

MAN 4

—made glorious by—

(to MAN 1)

C'mon.

MAN 1  
By this month of [name the month]—

MAN 3  
“And you that shall cross—”

MAN 1  
Go, Walt.

MAN 2  
“—from shore to shore years hence—”

MAN 4  
“—are more to me, and more in my meditations—”

MAN 1  
“—than you might suppose.”

MAN 3  
Go Walt Whitman.

MAN 2  
Go Brooklyn.

MAN 4  
T’anks to duh livin’.

MAN 3  
And t’anks to duh dead.

MAN 1  
And t’anks to us all.

*The stage manager switches off the ghost light. The house lights go out. End of play.*